

# Smart mitt talks back

The Talking Trivet *measures the temperature of the pot it's touching.*



By Andrea Lillo

NEW YORK — At first glance, it seems the everyday, innocuous kitchen item.

But when it touches something hot, it will tell you exactly how it feels.

The Talking Trivet, a combination oven mitt and pot holder with built-in speaker and computer, could be coming to a kitchen near you, thanks to the brains at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"The kitchen has so many gadgets," said Ted Selker, an M.I.T. visiting professor and an IBM fellow at the Almaden Research Institute in San Jose, CA. "I hate all of them — yet I also love them. But I only want a couple of very useful tools."

The man behind the mitt, Selker is an inventor seeking to make our lives easier through computers. Known for inventing the track point — as well as many other easy-to-use features — on IBM notebook computers, Selker spent a fruitful year at M.I.T. from 1998 to 1999 working at Counter Intelligence, a five-year research program to invent future kitchen and domestic technologies.

"Computers can enable us to get rid of things, become more informed, rid the need for travel and give more choices on why we're doing something," he said.

Equipped with a microprocessor, a 9-volt battery, sensors and a speaker, the Talking Trivet measures the temperature of the pot it's touching — if it's more than 400 degrees, then the dish is on fire, for example, or if it's below 200 degrees, it's not cooked yet. When the dish dips below 90 degrees,

it needs to be reheated.

Selker added that the costs for the Trivet's computer equipment are "easily absorbed into the costs of the product. The prices are not prohibitive to the prices people pay for oven mitts anyway." He figured that a regular mitt would retail between \$5 to \$10.

Currently the Trivet says, "Ready to take out," "Hot and ready to eat," "Needs rewarming" and "Fire!" (hopefully heard less often than the others). He also might add, "Done in 15 minutes. Check oven."

Selker thinks it's neat, but what about kitchen textiles vendors? David Beyda, chairman of Town & Country, Lakewood, NJ, questioned the logistics — i.e., if the temperature was less than 200 degrees, would the Trivet still proclaim the dish was not ready yet, even if it was in the oven for 12 hours? "But it's a clever idea. The consumer would be the ultimate judge," he said.

"It sounds like a fun gimmick," said Howard Steidle Jr., vice president of sales and marketing at John Ritzenthaler, West Conshohocken, PA.

Besides the Talking Trivet, Selker has also brought forth a mug that notifies someone if the liquid will burn his or her lips, an electronic knife that detects bacteria when cutting meat and a spatula that can measure whether a sauce is too salty or acidic.

But Selker is not limited to the kitchen. A bout with tennis elbow led him to invent a mattress pad that tells you where on the bed you're sleeping and on what body parts. Other possible functions include saying, "Wake up!" if someone stops breathing and then calling 911 if the person doesn't respond by pressing a button.

And for people who suffer next to snorers? "We have worked on that," he said. "It's one of the mattress pad's functions."