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IBM shows off new peripheral technology to improve life for ThinkPad users

By Niall McKay
InfoWorld Electric

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SAN JOSE, Calif. -- IBM will demonstrate this week at the ACM 97 Conference here some new technologies that are designed to make computers easier to use. These include a screen that can be viewed in sunlight, a mouse that gives the user the sensation of feeling, and a mouse that can point and scroll at the same time.

All are the creations of Ted Selker, inventor of IBM's TrackPoint Mouse.

"I have about a 5 percent hit rate with my ideas," Selker said. "Most of what I invent never makes it past the prototype stage."

Selker came upon the idea for his outdoor computer when he invented a similar display for presenting slides to overhead projectors.

"It's very simple," Selker said. "It's basically an IBM 760 ThinkPad with a detachable backlight."

Another of Selker's inventions is a multistream input mouse, a standard mouse with an IBM TrackPoint mouse positioned between its left and right mouse buttons.

"The mouse lets you point and scroll at the same time," Selker explained.

Selker's other new TrackPoint mouse uses haptic technology, which provides the user with sensations when using equipment. For instance, when the user moves the mouse different sensations can be felt for different surfaces.

Selker has achieved this by fixing a Piezo electronic vibrator underneath the TrackPoint that can be programmed to vibrate as it passes over different

images on the screen.

"There are many possibilities for this technology," said Selker. "It could be programmed to denote danger for blind or disabled people."

IBM's Almaden Research Center is based in San Jose, Calif., and can be contacted (408) 927-1080 or http://www.almaden.ibm.com/.

Niall McKay is a San Francisco-based correspondent for the IDG News Service, an InfoWorld affiliate.

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