

A touch of magic

Craig Anslow's PhD involved building "an iPad on steroids".

The multi-touch table with a 48-inch screen that he built from scratch allows a host of people to interact with the touch screen at any one time, unlike its smaller cousin. Two people could play air hockey, a family could complete a jigsaw puzzle together or it could be used by a team of software developers.

Beneath the screen, an infrared camera detects when someone is touching the screen and sends the information to the computer that drives the technology.

While there are many visual effects such as seemingly making water ripple on a table's surface or displaying a giant globe you can zoom in on, it's the business use of the technology that Craig is excited about.

"I'm interested in how software developers can use something like this to analyse and understand software," says Craig who researches human-computer interaction (HCI), a field within computer science.

He says that the ability of the touch table to support multiple users makes it ideal for software developers who typically work in teams.

"The software I am building allows people to interact with visualisations of how existing software is structured and has evolved over time. If, for example, you identify in the visualisations that one part of the software is considerably bigger than others, perhaps you could design that part better."

"The sheer size of most modern software makes this sort of analysis a challenge but that's where I think touch table technology comes in."

Craig is planning to test his software with groups of Computer Science students, recording on video how they interact with the touch table and work together on a timed project.

"The user studies will give us an insight into how effective this technology could be and how it can help software developers create even better touch table software."

Craig built his table from low cost materials with assistance from the workshop team in the School of Chemical and Physical Sciences, technical assistance from Owen Vallis and Jordan Hochenbaum within the New Zealand School of Music, financial assistance from TelstraClear and the Ministry of Science and Innovation, and a strategic research grant from the School of Engineering and Computer Science, where he's based.

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Craig Anslow says his multi-touch table can be used to analyse and understand software.

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From the Vice-Chancellor

The devastating earthquake in Canterbury earlier this year served as a humbling reminder that in time of need, New Zealand stands as one community. We all shared a sense of hopelessness and grief as we watched the events unfold in Christchurch and all felt the pull that we need to do something—anything—to help.

A number of our academic staff have been working to provide the public with accurate and factual analysis and information about the earthquakes. This public engagement is as important as the research that underpins it, as everyone struggles to understand how this happened to a city twice in just six months. Many other staff and students have also contributed, including a team from Vic Rescue who were deployed to the area, and Victoria Deaf Studies student Evelyn Pateman who provided sign language interpretation for the television coverage.

Another project I would like to mention is one set up by Professor Sir Paul Callaghan, 2011 New Zealander of the Year. He has appealed to the 85,000 Kiwis overseas who collectively owe \$2 billion in student loans, asking that they try to make payments to help New Zealand reduce its debt burden in this time of need.

It is projects like this which tap in to a spirit of community that show what a difference we can make if we work together. Professor Callaghan is asking that people spread the word. I hope you can help.

To our alumni and partners in Japan, we offer our support and best wishes as clean-up work continues following your own catastrophic earthquake and resulting tsunami.

In April, Victoria held its Distinguished Alumni Award Dinner to celebrate the best and brightest of our alumni. This year 400 alumni and guests gathered at the Wellington Town Hall to honour the impressive achievements of Rod Drury, Sir Thomas Gault, Piera McArthur, Kerry Prendergast, John Shewan and Taika Waititi.

This year's distinguished alumni winners all share the common attributes of a Victoria graduate: communication, critical and creative thinking and leadership. This was an excellent opportunity to reconnect with former graduates and to ensure our aim of instilling a lifelong sense of community is alive and well.

As we move into this new academic year I look forward to watching the progress of our newest undergraduates to see who will make an unexpected discovery, show outstanding leadership or bring a fresh perspective to an old problem and be part of our next generation of distinguished alumni.

Pat Walsh

Professor Pat Walsh, Vice-Chancellor

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