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Touch Screen in a Table Is the Latest Wrinkle in Computers

By [MICHEL MARRIOTT](#)

Having just tried its hand at developing a digital music player, [Microsoft](#) is working on something new: digital furniture.

The company plans to unveil a computing device today called Microsoft Surface, featuring a 30-inch screen embedded in an acrylic tabletop. The device's electronic guts are hidden in the low-slung table's thick pedestal.

At first glance, Surface is reminiscent of an old-fashioned arcade game table around which patrons played Pac-Man. But there is no joystick here, and no mouse or keyboard either. The device is controlled by touching the tabletop display.

Microsoft says this touch screen will allow people to "interact with digital content the same way they have interacted with everyday items such as photos, paintbrushes and music their entire life: with hands, with gestures and by putting real-world objects on the surface."

For example, when a digital camera with [Wi-Fi](#) capabilities is placed on the display, the table recognizes the camera and, at a touch of the screen, downloads its photos and video clips. The digital pictures can be sorted and sized by "handling" them as if they were physical prints.

The device uses cameras under the display to detect touches, and unlike traditional touch screens it can handle multiple touches at the same time, said Jeff Gattis, the director of product management for Surface.

Similarly, Surface can read bar codes and identification tags embedded in objects like hotel chain membership cards.

Microsoft hopes this technology will someday be common in homes, but its first uses will be commercial. By the end of this year, Surface will appear in hotels, restaurants, retail stores and public entertainment sites, where it will serve as an information kiosk and handle things like basic customer service. [Steven A. Ballmer](#), Microsoft's chief executive, was scheduled to unveil the product today at The Wall Street Journal's "D: All Things Digital" conference in Carlsbad, Calif.

"With Surface, we are creating more intuitive ways for people to interact with technology," Mr. Ballmer said in a statement. "We see this as a multibillion-dollar category, and we envision a time when surface computing technologies will be pervasive, from tabletops and counters to the hallway mirror."

Microsoft also named several partners that will be among the first companies to use Surface, including [Harrah's Entertainment](#), [Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide](#) and T-Mobile USA. The device's cost was not disclosed.

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