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Bill Gates
Microsoft

Bill Gates: 'Vision and Touch and Speech and Ink, All of those I Call Natural User Interface'

Natural UI will make computing pervasive

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates is ready to bet big on how the evolution of the way users interact with technology will make computing increasingly pervasive in the future. During his speech at the Government Leaders Forum Europe 2008, Berlin, Germany on January 23rd, 2008, Gates emphasized the impact that natural user interfaces would deliver on the adoption of technology. Having already seen a great deal of his vision with Microsoft come true, a computer on every desk in every home, Gates will step down from his day-to-day role with the Redmond company as of mid 2008. He leaves behind him a legacy of over 1 billion Windows personal computers in usage around the world, but it is forecast that the growth of technology will cover a range of aspects, from a boost in quality with high-definition screen and enhancements in regard to connectivity, to user interaction. "The way we interact with these devices will change. To date it's been overwhelmingly the keyboard and the mouse, and those will continue to be important, but those will be added to as we have the ability to touch, to touch the surface of a table or a display to give a command. We'll have the ability to use a pen so that we can take notes and annotate things. We'll have the ability to use speech, so we can just say to our mobile phone, you know, where is the nearest gas station, where are my family right now, what are they doing, and it will understand our voice and be able to respond to that," Gates explained. Microsoft already has such a solution in place with Surface. Microsoft Surface is the first example of a commercially available surface computing product. Based on Windows Vista, Surface allows for advanced user interaction complete with touch, gestures and object recognition. Microsoft is preparing to go mainstream with the technology, but in this context costs are perhaps the most relevant factor. So far, price tags ranging between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for a single Microsoft Surface ensure that the tabletop computer will not be making it into home environments anytime in the immediate future. "So, vision and touch and speech and ink, all of those I call natural user interface. And along with the lower cost computers, this natural interface will make computing far more pervasive. Something that today you would think of as very difficult, like organizing all of the photos and things you have about your child growing up, this type of new interface will make that very, very natural. And you won't think of a boundary as you move from your phone to your PC to the TV in the living room to your car; you'll think of all your information being with you wherever you go," Gates stated.