

Samsung unveils gesture-control TVs at gadget show

RYAN NAKASHIMA - Associated Press - Associated Press

New TVs from Samsung will recognize an expanded range of gestures so people can swipe through on-screen menus in a way that revolutionizes the old remote control.

Samsung Electronics Co., the Korean electronics maker that is successfully challenging Apple in smartphones, touts the new user interface as faster and more intuitive than before.

Samsung said Monday that the new interface will be a feature of upcoming smart TVs. In addition, certain high-end Samsung smart TVs sold since last year can be upgraded with an add-on kit — complete with the required quad-core processor — that will be sold separately for a few hundred dollars.

At the International CES gadget show, Samsung also introduced an 85-inch (2.1-meter) "ultrahigh definition" set, in line with rivals that are all rolling out screens with four times the pixels as the current HD. The higher resolution will let TV screens get larger and people to sit closer without a decline in picture quality, though initially the price tag will limit those sets to technology's early adopters.

The new lineup of smart TVs respond to more natural speech and motion, similar to the way the Kinect controller on an Xbox 360 game console allows users to swipe through menus by gesturing in the air. The camera is mounted on top of the screen and can be folded back for people concerned about privacy.

Earlier Monday, LG Electronics Inc. unveiled a new Magic Remote, which acts like a wand that is sensitive to motion and is used to navigate on-screen menus. LG said the new model responds better to natural speech and can be controlled with a single finger. It also lets you change the channels by writing numbers in the air.

Samsung's new handheld remote control comes with a touch-sensitive clickable track pad, which is another way to navigate through viewing options.

Because it is integrated with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the new interface accepts text input. You have a range of options for typing — through a synced smartphone, a Bluetooth-enabled wireless keyboard accessory, using hand gestures for an on-screen keyboard, or using its voice-to-type software.

Search functions also span Web video apps and live TV, meaning that searches of a show will inform viewers if and when an episode is available on live TV, or if it's available through an app such as Netflix.

Nintendo's Wii U game console does something similar by showing search results

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

from live TV and Web video apps. But by being integrated with the TV, Samsung's universal search function doesn't require the user to change the TV's source input.

And since you can also play some games on its new smart TVs, the new sets from Samsung are acting more and more like mobile computing devices with an extra-large screen.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/02/2015 - 12:27am):

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