

# Wearable iPod gear at Macworld

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Sometimes it's the strange and almost accidental discoveries that become the most useful. This is especially true at a technology conference like Macworld Expo, wherein an obscure but good idea can be transformed into a wide variety of products.

This seems to have happened with Eleksen Ltd., a firm deriving several new products from its ElekTex circuitry materials. Using a five-layer laminate of electrically conductive materials that can function as an electronic sensor or touchpad, ElekTex can be swapped in where standard electronic hardware such as touch pads, flexi-circuits and polymer switches would be too clumsy or fragile to function.

The end result is a group of products featuring sensor and electronic technologies that might not have been thought possible. Termed "smart fabric" items, these include wearable iPod gear such as backpacks, jackets and iPod carrier cases with play controls literally built into the item's fabric.

Simply put on the garment, insert an iPod to its designated slot, hook the iPod to a built in connector and the user can adjust tracks, volume and play settings by touching a small control pad built into the arm of the jacket or an edge of the carrying case.

ElekTex is also responsible for the creation of portable, nigh-indestructible keyboards that can literally be rolled up as if they were a small piece of cloth, then laid out again for use with a device such as a PC, PDA or cell phone.

Standardize and they will come. While ElekTex-based wearable garments aren't meant as a control interface beyond a device such as an iPod, devices such as the portable keyboards derived from the technology are. Operating on a standard Bluetooth communications protocol, these keyboards can communicate with devices such as Mac OS X, Windows, Linux and Palm devices as well as popular cell-phone models. Almost indestructible, according to Eleksen representatives, these keyboards have been run over with cars and continued to function.

Eleksen is currently licensing its ElekTex technology to other firms for inclusion in devices with Eleksen customizing the included circuitry for the final product. Standard development cycles change but are generally completed within two- to three-month periods according to company representatives. The products are variably priced depending on function.

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