

Technological devices offer glimpse into future

October 8 2009, By Bridget Carey

Nancy Lan-Lan Ma, a student at Keio University in Japan, demonstrates her product, Cheeron++, at the UbiComp in Orlando, Fla. Sorry, Elmo, the dolls of the future are not just for tickles.

Take, for example, the Cheeron++, a snugly color-changing robot built by students in Japan that cheers after a day of exercise, and gets mad when you haven't been active enough.

That was just one device presented at the 11th International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing at the [Walt Disney](#) World Resort in Orlando, where nearly 300 students and researchers from around the world gathered to present their ideas for the gadgets of tomorrow.

The concept of ubiquitous computing centers around finding new uses for devices, like sensors, and integrating them into everyday activities.

Putting [computer chips](#) in clothes hangers, for example, could help a computer keep track of your outfits and share it with a social network like [Twitter](#) to help you coordinate your wardrobe, which is what Hitomi Tsujita has worked on at Ochanomizu University in Japan.

"I think many people asked the same question this morning, what should I wear today?" she said. "Sometimes your boyfriend isn't any help and you can't ask your sister all the time. Therefore we developed a system that organizes your clothing with a social network."

Sumi Helal, a professor at the University of Florida and chair of the conference, gives an example of a garage door remote as a ubiquitous computing gadget. But today's minds could take the remote to a new level:

"The next step is that you don't even have to press anything," Helal said. "The door will open knowing it's exactly you."

Many such devices revolved around new technology in cellphones. There was a way to use cellphones to record [medical information](#), and research from the University of California on how a phone's vibrations can make a person feel more connected in a long-distance romance.

If your boyfriend leaves a particular area, like home or work, your phone will give a unique vibration. When he returns, the phone will do a different vibration.

But it took some getting used to for the subjects, who would automatically pick up the phone when it vibrated, even though they didn't have to.

"People are preprogrammed in their mind when the phone is vibrating, it wants me to do something," said Elizabeth Bales, a UC student involved with the project.

Students from Tsinghua University in China used [cellphone](#) cameras and a projector to let passersby use a phone to brush the air and paint on the projected image.

A group from Carnegie Mellon University proposed sensors in cellphones to test the air quality.

"We're used to using our mobile phones as a communication tool, but it

can also be a measurement instrument," said Eric Paulos, assistant professor at Carnegie Mellon. "We know what happened when people added a camera, we got citizen journalism. . . . What happens if you could measure things? You could talk about the air quality in your neighborhood."

Companies like Nokia, Microsoft, HP and Intel flew representatives in to see what ideas and sensors might be part of the next generation of computers.

"The industry is all over this new technology," Helal said.

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