

Controlling the TV with a wave of the hand

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A TriplePoint illustration shows a man working an interactive TV screen. Touchscreens are so yesterday. Remote controls? So last century. The future is controlling your television with a simple wave of your hand. Softkinetic, a Brussels-based software company, has teamed up with another Belgian firm, Optrima, and US computer chip giant Texas Instruments to make this vision of the future a reality

Touchscreens are so yesterday. Remote controls? So last century. The future is controlling your devices with a simple wave of the hand.

A wiggle of the fingers will change television channels or turn the volume up or down. In videogames, your movements will control your onscreen digital avatar.

It's called 3D gesture recognition and while it may not be in stores this Christmas a number of technology companies are promising that it will be by next year.

Softkinetic, a Brussels-based software company, is one of the leaders in the gesture-control field and has teamed up with US semiconductor giant Texas Instruments and others to make this touchless vision of the future a reality.

Besides TI, Softkinetic has forged partnerships with France's Orange Vallee for interactive TV, another Belgian firm, Optrima, a maker of 3D cameras and sensors, and with Connecting Technology, a French home automation company.

"On the consumer side you have three markets -- television, videogames and personal computers," Softkinetic chief executive Michel Tombroff told AFP in a telephone interview.

"The objective is to be on the consumer market at the end of next year, by Christmas, so people can buy these things," he said.

"In the same way that the [Nintendo Wii](#) completely changed the way that people play videogames this [3D camera](#) technology will allow us to completely transform the way people interact with television," Tombroff said.

Roger Kay, president of Endpoint Technologies Associates, said he believes that gesture [recognition technology](#) is "directionally correct because anything leading to a more natural interface for a human is better.

"We're in that transition to a time when gestural input will be quite natural," Kay said. "From what I've seen of the demos they're pretty close."

On the gaming front, "using a camera in real time to capture motion and then take the representative avatar from that and play it on a screen with

other elements in a [virtual world](#) is a pretty compelling experience," he said.

US software giant Microsoft demonstrated a gesture recognition program called "Project Natal" for its Xbox 360 videogame console in June and has announced plans to launch it next year.

Tombroff said Softkinetic's gesture recognition solutions involve using a 3D camera that "looks like a little webcam" and is mounted on top of a television set or computer monitor.

"It looks at the scene and it can analyze gestures without you holding anything in your hand or wearing any special equipment," he said. "It's really the ultimate gesture-based solution.

"With the Wii you need to hold something in your hand," Tombroff said. "With this we look at your full body. You don't need to hold anything.

"You just stand up or just move your hand," he said. "We let you interact without any intermediate component."

Tombroff said the technology has the capability of transforming television.

"It will become an active component of the living room," he said. "It's not just about sitting in the living room, turning it on and watching.

"It's about interacting. The TV will recognize you. If you step in front of it, the camera will recognize it's you," Tombroff said.

"Maybe it will start with a quick recap of your email, the weather, and the traffic because it knows you need to go to the office," he said.

"That's the personalization," Tombroff said. "After that it may propose interactive programs. So instead of just sitting and watching TV you'll be able to play games or enter into programs.

"In the same way that the iPhone completely transformed the user experience as far as the phone is concerned this will transform the way people experience television," he said.

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