

Philips Entertaible combines excitement of electronic gaming with the social fun and interaction of traditional board games

Philips Electronics announced today that it will unveil its prototype of Entertaible – a tabletop gaming platform that marries traditional multi-player board and computer games in a uniquely simple and intuitive way, at the 2006 Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

Entertaible allows the players to sit around a table and play a new class of electronic game, combining the features of computer gaming – such as dynamic playing fields and gaming levels, with the social interaction and tangible playing pieces – such as pawns and dice – of traditional board games.

Entertaible owes its name to the social entertainment experience it encourages and the tabletop form factor it is built upon.

Currently a working concept, Entertaible comprises a 30-inch LCD, sophisticated touch screen-based multi-object position detection, and all supporting control electronics. Its capabilities could breathe new interactive life into conventional multi-player board and electronic games. This may include, for example, using a portion of the touch screen to allow private tactical information to be shown to specific players only. Other enhancements to the gaming experience could include play-based rule explanation and feedback tips; the ability to electronically store large numbers of games – which could include rekindling those of the past without requiring large amounts of physical storage space for conventional boxes; instant retrieval of part-played games; on-line access to new or trial games; and a fast, simple set-up.

To demonstrate Entertaible's potential, Philips will bring a fully functioning sample to CES ready for visitors to play. Philips aims to encourage partnerships and collaboration with games vendors that plan to add new capabilities to their games. Entertaible provides the ideal electronic platform for these companies.

While the concept of a multi-user digital table is not new, previous solutions have utilised complex arrangements of overhead cameras and dimmed lighting that detract from the user experience. The Philips Entertaible, however, is based on a series of infrared LEDs and photodiodes discretely mounted around the perimeter of a single touch screen. It requires no special lighting conditions or other equipment and is entirely hand operated by touch alone. Yet Entertaible can simultaneously detect dozens of objects (including fingers).

One of the most obvious and immediate applications of this technology will be the board game market and the opportunity to reinvigorate established board game classics, comments Gerard Hollemans of Philips Research in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, who leads the research team that developed Entertaible. However, in the longer term, Entertaible could be used to invent brand new games offering unprecedented levels of user interaction – games that would never become predictable or ever quite feel the same twice, however often you played them.

The Entertaible concept could also be extended into other domains. For business or educational users, this might take the form of an interactive desk where several colleagues or students gather round a single workstation to work on a project or cooperatively create new ideas and learn together. For team game coaches in sports such as football, hockey or basketball, Entertaible could even be used to analyse player movements and plan tactics electronically.

Yet perhaps most important of all, Entertaible will host electronics games that promote invaluable social interaction within groups and families, expresses Hollemans. This contrasts completely to the solitary, isolated environment that can be encouraged by contemporary console-based electronic games.

For the most up to date information from Philips at the Consumer Electronics Show, please visit www.ces.philips.com

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