

Transcript from Marketplace article “Microsoft Invades Your Kitchen”

This week the vast consumer electronics show opened its 2002 exhibition in Las Vegas. Microsoft’s chairman Bill Gates kicked it off last night by unveiling some gizmos that he claims will revolutionize the way we use our personal computers at home. Market Place reporter Aaron Shachter is our guide.

AS-You’re traveling through another dimension. Journeying to a wondrous land without a basketful of remote controls. A world where your computer is as portable as a pad of paper and it wirelessly delivers internet content, accesses music files, channel surfs and records your tv and DVD. Your next stop...the Microsoft zone. The big news is essentially two new technologies dubbed Mira and Freestyle. The former allows the Windows operating system to connect wirelessly with a flat portable computer display. The latter makes the personal computer into a fancy remote control for TV and other devices. Craig Mundy, Microsoft’s chief technology officer says this is a no-brainer for the tech savvy consumer.

CM-Many people today say: “Look, I have one computer, it has all my things on it, I don’t really want to get into networking two and three computers in order to be able to work out of places” and this essentially allows you to leave the computer and the printer and even the keyboard, but you can pick up the screen and then have a wireless touch based interface through the screen anywhere in the home.

AS-But ask one of thoses tech-savvy consumers what he thinks of Microsoft’s new-fangled inventions and you might get an answer like this: “eh”. From my own informal survey of the buying public I found my brother-in-law David Dehunn was not impressed despite his coffee table being cluttered with about five remote controls which Mira and Freestyle might eliminate.

DD-I think Sony has this gadget which is a universal remote control with a screen on it, kind of like a palm pilot screen, and it was a hundred and fifty bucks. Everybody said: “The heck with that, I’m not going to pay a hundred and fifty bucks just to duplicate what I already have?”

AS-Not that my sister’s husband doesn’t have all the answers but I also asked technology experts what they thought and some came to the same conclusion. Carl Howe is an analyst with Forester Research.

CH-The consumer is very fussy and very particular and at the moment they’re not inclined to open their wallet except for things that are just wonderful and blow their socks off. So I think Microsoft is going to have to work hard to articulate what the need is and not just have them be: “Oh wouldn’t it be great to have this cool device.”

AS-There is no word yet on how much the cool device might cost. Despite his scepticism Howe says “If consumers do snap up Microsoft’s Mira and Freestyle at the end of this year or early next, it could help breath life back into the troubled tech sector.” I’m Aaron Shachter for Market Place.