modeling held on March 20 and 21, and there is little doubt that they persuaded many specialists in the field of the usefulness of a mathematical approach to these biological processes.

IN BRIEF

TOUCHPAD OF THE FUTURE

The era of tediously moving the cursor around on your computer screen with a mouse, touchpad or TrackPoint is over! Géry Casiez and his colleagues at the University of Toronto have perfected a new mechanism that combines the advantages of these various modes of cursor movement while eliminating the disadvantages. This touchpad, christened the RubberEdge, can be used to move the cursor comfortably even with a small workspace and a large screen. The central portion of the touchpad operates with the precision of a mouse, and its elastic edges work like the TrackPoint to control cursor speed, eliminating the need for multiple small motions when moving the cursor a great distance across the screen. In creating this mechanism, which is the only one of its type, the main challenge was ensuring continuity between the two different operating modes for speed and directional controls. The researchers also tested the device’s ergonomics to test its convenience and learning curve. Based on experiments, they developed models to predict the impact of the touchpad’s characteristics (size, transfer function, etc.) on user performance.

The research was presented at the prestigious UIST conference on human-computer interfaces last October in Newport, Rhode Island, and is now protected under a patent filed with the University of Toronto. The main potential applications include small, portable objects such as new-generation telephones and PDAs.

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It is a structured, large-scale approach: one ADT can involve three to twenty people. It offers an opportunity for researchers working on different projects to meet and propose ambitious programs and initiatives that would not have been possible previously. New directions for research can emerge from this process that might not even have occurred to the originators before they worked together. This prospect is highly motivating for researchers.

The first ADTs will begin in 2008. The call for proposals for these initiatives is scheduled to end in early April, and the number of applications already received demonstrates how enthusiastic researchers are about this approach.

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