

Cape Town – June 2009

Touch The Future

DisplaySearch forecasts that the total touch screen module market will grow to \$9 billion in 2015, from \$3.6 billion in 2008 and with a compound annual growth rate of 14%.

According to Mauro Mercuri, MD at Tactile Technologies, the official distributor of Elo TouchSystems in South Africa, touch screen technology is quickly taking off in the local market and it's now being used in a diverse array of applications, including the fast growing mobile, retail and interactive digital signage industries.

From its appearance around a decade ago in restaurants and fast food outlets, touch screen technology has developed dramatically and it keeps gaining popularity with mobile products like the smart phone and personal digital assistant (PDA).

However, it is a growing concern that organizations purchasing touch screen technologies are not making the right choices due to their lack of knowledge of this rapid evolving industry that only recently arrived on research house, Gartner's, radar screen. First of all, many companies do not yet understand the importance of touch screen monitors as interface component in the entire solution. Secondly, many companies that are ready to look into acquiring touch solutions do not know how to choose the right touch screen technology. Some vendors also lack sufficient knowledge of the technology and the broad range of products available, making them unable to correctly supply the customer demand.

A local tendency is to buy the cheapest product available. But companies need to bear in mind that the wrong technology will not do the job properly, and that low price does not necessarily indicate a low total cost.

Total cost of ownership is a vital factor in the equation when dealing with touch screen technology. While the purchase price may be higher, the business will experience lower failure rates, reduced maintenance costs, better performance and a longer lasting product, that leads to a better experience for not just the business, but its customers as well.

Organizations looking to implement touch screen technology should consider the following key features before buying:

- Will the products be used inside or outdoors?
- By employees or in public access areas?
- What is important to you? Picture quality? Viewing angle? Robustness? The fact that the user can touch with any stylus and not just a finger?
- Make sure to express your needs when choosing a touch technology.
- Check the background of the brand.
- Check if the touch technology is stable in time and whether the technology will drift or not.
- Check that the products have been specifically designed for touch and that touch has not been added as an after-thought.
- Does the vendor manufacture the product himself or is it outsourced to a third party?

- Product selection should be focused on the application, its environment and the specific needs.
- Product life cycle must cover the total deployment and support window of your solution.
- Warranty conditions?

With many touch technologies available and more applications to come, the touch industry will continue to grow steadily. Companies should therefore be educated and informed to be able to make the most of the opportunities that this growth brings.