

MmIT Articles – February 2013

Kevin Curran

The International Consumer Electronics Show (better known as CES) is a major technology-related trade show held each January in Las Vegas. It is not open to the public and it typically hosts previews of products and new product announcements. It is where the forthcoming technology gets showcased. In this issue, I focus on just some of the technology that may become part of our lives in the not so distant future.

Perfect Plant Care with Wireless Sensors

Parrot, a wireless tech company have just showcased a new sensor that can alert humans to the needs of their household plants such as the amount of sunlight or water required. The two-pronged sensor can report on sunlight, soil, temperature, water and fertiliser conditions by using low-power Bluetooth signals to send alerts.

For instance, dangerous conditions for plants may trigger extra warnings. It also have an accompanying 'Flower Power' app for smartphones and tablets. The dedicated iOS app will push notifications and reminders about a plants' status and needs. The sensor and app combination acts as a digital guide for clueless plant owners. People can search for plant-care instructions from a database of 6,000 plants, or even search by colour and similar picture characteristics if they do not know the name of the plant.

A single battery allows the Flower Power sensor to send out Bluetooth signal updates every 15 minutes and still lasts for about six months. They have not yet released a price but expect this to be just one of the coming wave of low-power sensors that could transform ordinary household gadgets into smart devices.

<http://www.parrot.com/flower-power/>



Who said the Walkman was dead?

OK. It is dead but Sony are still managing to grab our attention with some innovative MP3 players such as the NWZ-W273 W Series Walkman Sports which was showcased at CES 2013. Sony brags of the W273 being the first 100-per cent waterproof Walkman, perfect for swimming and other athletics, or if you are just looking to clean it after you've got all hot and sweaty. It is a one-piece unit aimed at the fitness market. All storage of songs and control of playback is handled by the earphones themselves. They hold 4GB worth of tunes and offer eight hours of playback on a full charge. The good news is that a short three minute charge will still give you a whole 60 minutes worth of playback so you can charge them easily on the way to the gym. Supported audio file formats include MP3, WMA (Non-DRM), AAC-LC (Non-DRM), and Linear PCM, all of which are loadable from the Mac or PC. iTunes is also supported for transferring music on to the device.



You can also use them in a swimming pool. They work fine when continuously submerged in 2 metres of water. With no wires to worry about, the Walkman should not slow you down with dangling cables while you are in the pool or moving to the music. The stylish, ergonomic design features securely-fitting earphones with a selection of ear bud sizes to choose from, for maximum comfort and confidence during perspiration-drenched workouts. What I also found interesting, is that when you are done, you can keep on listening during that post-exercise shower!

They are due out in February in black, blue, white, and pink. The price is expected to be about £70. I cannot actually remember the last time I seen a product that I liked so much. It is simply the swimming pool aspect for me. Now I can take my son swimming and not be completely bored as I listen to my [twit.tv](http://www.twit.tv) technology podcasts. They are on sale now priced at £60.

<http://www.sony.co.uk/product/walkman-mp3-players/nwz-w273>

E Ink Watches

Central Standard Timing have created a watch that uses materials, technologies and processes new to the wristwatch industry and showcases the most innovative qualities of E Ink SURF segmented displays. Central Standard Timing was founded by Dave Vondle and Jerry O'Leary, who both also work as designers for the IDEO, the international design and innovation firm. The CST-01 is assembled by laminating thin, flexible components into a 0.5mm pocket etched into a single piece of flexible stainless steel, making it different than traditional digital watches which typically use the same form factor of an analog watch. An embedded Thinergy Micro-Energy Cell that charges in 10 minutes from an external dock, lasts for over a month and has a lifetime of 15 years, eliminates the hassle and expense of changing batteries.



The unique properties of an E Ink display seem well suited to an update of the wristwatch. It is likely to appeal to more traditional watch-wearers who are happy with simply knowing what time it is, and leaving the computing to the computers. Constructed of stainless steel and weighing only 12 grams, the CST-01 will be available in white or black. The high-contrast display uses a unique font called "CST-01 Numbers" designed by the creators, and the elegant charging base connects through a micro-USB cable into any standard USB port. They are in the process of prototyping various sizes.

Interestingly, the idea for the CST-01 began in December 2011 when Dave Vondle, one of the founders of Central Standard Timing, taped an E Ink display around his wrist and said, "I want a watch like this." A year later, they designed a watch that highlights the most innovative qualities of E Ink's SURF segmented displays; ultra-thinness, readability, ruggedness, flexibility, and low power.

Currently the company is looking for funding through a Kickstarter campaign which, at the time of this writing, has raised nearly £300,000 with 38 days left before the pledge period ends. Kickstarter is an American-based private for-profit company founded in 2009 that provides through its website tools to fund raise for creative projects via crowd funding. Kickstarter has funded a diverse array of endeavors, ranging from indie films, music, stage shows and comics to journalism, video games and food-related projects. People cannot "invest" in Kickstarter projects to make money. They can only "back" projects in exchange for a tangible reward or one-of-a-kind experience, like a personal note of thanks, custom T-shirts, dinner with an author, or initial production run of a new product.

<http://www.centralstandardtiming.com/>

Kevin Curran (2013) Technology Roundup: Who said the Walkman was dead? Portable power for smartphones & tablets; Perfect plant care with wireless sensors; E Ink watches, Multimedia Information and Technology (MmIT), Vol. 39, No. 1, pp: 34-35, February 2013, ISSN: 1466-190X, Cilip MmIT Publishers

Product Review - Portable Power for Smartphone's and Tablets

The Eton BoostBloc 6600, will charge a Smartphone or tablet up to three times and yet is small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. BoostBloc is a portable USB power charger with a 6600mAH lithium ion battery. It has dual standard USB ports enabling two devices to be charged simultaneously. It is re-charged through a micro USB socket from either computer or phone charger. Give the bloc a quick shake and an LED charge indicator lets you monitor the battery charge level so, whether you are on a plane or trekking on a mountain top, BoostBloc 6600 will keep you fully charged wherever you are!



It can fully charge most Smartphone's three times when fully charged (300% Dump Charge). It has dual USB output to charge tablet and Smartphone or 2 Smartphone's simultaneously and an LED battery charge indicator which comes to life when shaken. It measure 4.3cm x 4.3cm x 7.1cm and weights 184g.

The BoostBloc 6600 is available on Amazon and is priced at £69.95. It is also available in a 4000 mAh unit for two charges via the single USB output BoostBloc 4000 at a price of £44.95

<http://www.nevadaradio.co.uk/batteries-and-chargers/eton-boostbloc-6600>