

Microsoft World

Introducing the 'Customer Briefing Centre', Microsoft Australia's world-first presentation and training facility.

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MEETING THE EXPECTATION of customers is a combination of interpretation, project management and considered planning. Other times it is a result of good luck, voodoo and happenstance.

Not so when it comes to products and services offered by Microsoft, following the establishment of the Consumer Briefing Centre (CBC) at the North Ryde headquarters in Sydney.

Microsoft describes the CBC as an interactive space where various product partners, consumers, journalists, retailers and staff can experience first-hand the company's vision for what it calls Connected Entertainment. The space represents a trend among corporations to have a full-time customised space to display and demonstrate their products, away from the more traditional glare of a tradeshow or exhibition hall.

And upon entering the room, it's easy to see the contrast between this environment and a tradeshow floor. The interior architecture, planned by interior designers The World Is Round, is very swish, with the emphasis solidly on the many screens that people use in their daily lives, including mobile phone, PC and TV. And while the room in its entirety may represent every bloke's personal fantasy entertainment pad, it's not hard to envisage how the individual technologies in the CBC could quite easily be integrated into any modest house or corporate facility.

Matthew Ball, Marketing and Communications Manager for Microsoft Australia described the room as a multifunctional platform available for use in a number of ways. "Primarily it's purpose built to demonstrate our Connected Entertainment vision, which involves showing content transition from one of the many screens in consumers' lives to another," he said. "For example, we demonstrate video content moving from PC to mobile phone to Xbox to

a PC on the other side of the world."

In other words, here's how Microsoft World would elegantly, seamlessly, work and play together. And it sure is an impressive display, encompassing 45 minutes of various visual elements transitioning from one medium to another – for those of us into this sort of thing, it's almost like a religious experience. An impressive vision.

GOOD GAME

Grand, integrated visions aside, wouldn't it be great to take over the CBC for a night of gaming? Fret not, Microsoft is thinking the same thing. The space will on occasion transform into a VIP gaming zone for key media, complete with live multiplayer interaction. Key retailers are also given demonstrations of products within the room and major Microsoft enterprise customers are hosted within the surroundings to introduce any or all of the entire Microsoft consumer proposition.

"We also use the space as a specific event location, such as if we were launching a new product, say an Arc mouse, for example," Matthew Ball said. "We would have the room entirely branded Microsoft – the screens, video footage, imagery, everything. We have product showcase plinths in the foyer, and these would present hardware models too."

Given that the room is quite new, Microsoft is yet to implement any changes to its marketing or design strategy following the feedback from the audience inside the CBC, but this is considered to be likely once the testing of products via this method becomes more commonplace.

"The room was a significant investment for the business and return on investment did not follow any standard rules of thumb," said Ball. "Firstly, because it is a room and secondly because it is a flexible platform. We were fortunate to have Microsoft executive David McLean as the project's executive

sponsor. He liked the vision for the room and provided strong direction on how to make our case to the business of the investment worth of this project."

It remains too early for Microsoft to ascertain if the installation has been effective, but reportedly most of the 500-odd people entering the room so far, experience an 'aha moment'. Most comment on the design, the atmosphere, and the different way to demonstrate consumer experiences. "We have had nothing but positive feedback," Ball told AV.

TECHNOLOGICAL IMMERSION

On the technology side, for Samuel Mangano, Microsoft Australia's Technical Events Project Manager, the room is an excellent immersive environment. "All of Microsoft's consumer hardware and software can be showcased in the one room," he said. "All the aesthetics of the room make it versatile for presentation, demonstration and trial formats. The room is very modern, loaded with technology, and very cool."

The dominating feature of the room is the Sanyo PDGDHT100L 1080P projector running a custom short-throw fixed lens mounted on a custom floor stand. The projector's native resolution is full HD (1920 x 1080) with an output of 6500 ANSI lumens. "The sheer size of the HD rear projection screen, gives us the ability to show up to five inputs at once," Samuel Mangano said. "The modular lounge format allows the room to be transformed from a presentation type mode to a gaming room mode, and the room is fully automated from an AV perspective by the folks at Credible Audio Visual Solutions (CAVS) and includes C-Bus lighting control." From start to finish, the build and installation took around three months to complete, with input from CAVS and Microsoft's own V-Team.



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Rear projection screen, lectern, modular couch and surround sound in the main presentation area.



HOWDY PARTNERS

In essence, the room is used to demonstrate the Microsoft products that you would expect, including Windows 7, Office 2010, Windows Phone, music players, the Xbox 360 and other Media Centre and extender capabilities. The regular fare of mice, keyboards and webcams are included for good measure, as well as the impressive Microsoft Surface.

Some of those items are demonstrated and used in conjunction with partner's hardware and are provided to Microsoft to assist with showcasing products. These include various laptop manufacturers and mobile phone suppliers.

This is what gives the room its versatility. From the aforementioned Connected Entertainment Vision to specialised product demonstrations, the ability is there to not only demonstrate a variety of products, but also control how the products can and should be demonstrated.

As far as is known, this facility could be a world first in terms of the platform's flexibility. Other showcases do exist, such as the Microsoft Home of the Future in Seattle as well as many fixed gaming lounges around the world, but nothing along the lines of this Sydney installation. As Matthew Ball said: "It is a pleasure to use the room. To showcase the full power of the MS Connected Entertainment vision in a way that is simple to understand and simple to see and demonstrate. In action, it makes the 'seeing is believing' philosophy a reality." 🐦

SURFACE APPEARANCES

Looking no more threatening than a modest coffee table, Microsoft's Surface has a touchscreen as the table top, which allows users to manipulate content by the use of gestures. In fact, the gesture recognition system does not solely rely on hand movements, but can involve the movement of any object on the screen surface. This includes such things as coffee cups or café menus. After several years of being a solution to a problem that nobody had yet encountered, around 20 Microsoft partners, across many countries, are currently developing applications for Surface's interface.



Video conferencing facilities in one of the meeting rooms

SOME DETAILS

Rear Projection

Sanyo PDGDHT100L full HD 1080P (1920 x 1080) projector fitted with a fixed short-throw lens and on a floor-mounted rear projection stand.
4380mm x 2460mm (w x h) Screen Technics custom rear projection screen.

Front Projection

3 x Sanyo PLCWXU30 720P ceiling mounted Data Projectors projecting images from 3 x Acer EL1600 eMachines.

Visualiser

Lumens CL500 25fps progressive XGA ceiling-mounted visualiser

Video Switching

Extron MGP464 Video Wall Processor controlled by an AMX NI4100 Integration Controller & Samsung Q1 Touch Panel.

Gaming Consoles

10 x Xbox 360 Elite Consoles connected via HDMI

TVs

8 x Samsung LH46MGQLBC/XY 46-inch commercial LCD display panels
1 x Samsung 55-inch Series 8 LED display panel

PCs

1 x Sony VAIO VGN-CS36GJ/W notebook PC
1 x Acer Aspire One A0751h-52Bk netbook
1 x HP Pavilion DV series notebook
1 x HP Touchsmart touch PC
1 x Samsung notebook
All running Windows 7 & Office 2010
1 x custom-built network server

Networking

2 x Netgear ProSafe JGS524 Gigabit Switches
2 x Belkin managed routers
1 x Belkin ADSL 2+ modem

Surface

1 x Microsoft Surface retail unit

Amplifier

Integra DTR 8.8 7.1 THX Professional theatre / AV receiver

Speakers

Sonance THX in-wall front speakers in a custom enclosure
Energy centre and rear surround speakers
Energy 12-inch active sub-woofer

Music Players

2 x HD music players

Mobile Phones

4 x Windows Mobile 6.5 devices

Video Conferencing

Polycom VSX-7000

Lighting

Clipsal C-Bus controlled