

# Screensaver for Note-Review

Shirley Gaw<sup>1</sup>, Joseph ‘Jofish’ Kaye<sup>2</sup>, Ken Wood<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Princeton University; <sup>2</sup>Cornell University; <sup>3</sup>Microsoft Research, Ltd.  
sgaw@cs.princeton.edu, jofish@cornell.edu, krw@microsoft.com

**Abstract.** While screensavers generally display pleasant pictures or animations, our work discusses the possibility of utilizing a screensaver for reminding. We ported a peripheral notes display into a screensaver to support reviewing digital inked notes on TabletPCs. We demonstrated the screensaver to 18 participants, but they felt the screensaver was not useful in its current form as their notes became stale over time and as they felt the screensaver potentially leaked corporate data; however, they suggested a screensaver could be useful for more general reminding of items such as those in to-do lists or e-mail inboxes.

## Aiding Note-Review with a Screensaver

Reviewing notes is tedious. While the meaning of handwritten notes might be deciphered immediately after writing them, the quality of notes degrade over time (Kalhikaité, 2007). Unfortunately, the value of the notes themselves remains under-utilized if people cannot set-aside the time for note review.

Technology can potentially help by “bubbling up” old notes into the user’s peripheral vision, interleaving review into the normal workday. Hsieh et al (2006) designed a peripheral notes display, which was favourably received by participants. Our work looked at trying to include another group of digital note-takers to see if the suggested modifications of turning the application into a screensaver would be as appealing.

In the original design, participants ran a program that displayed excerpts from hand-written notes on a secondary or tertiary monitor. The program extracted text from Windows Journal files on TabletPCs and then displayed up to three

excerpts at a time, shuffling the order so that the sequence avoided repetition. Hsieh et al found participants, all researchers, liked the display. The serendipitous pairings of excerpts became a source of new ideas in addition to helping recall previously forgotten events.

The participants, however, suggested that a secondary monitor would be more useful for extending the desktop, so we ported the application into a screensaver. A screensaver could still take advantage of displaying information peripherally while at the same time conserving desktop space.

Furthermore, we wanted to look beyond researchers and recruited 18 TabletPC users from Microsoft's corporate campus in Reading, England. For each participant, we demonstrated the screensaver's ability to display excerpts from old notes and interviewed participants on their reactions for the new screensaver.

## Reactions to the Screensaver and Discussion

Most of the participants worked in sales or related jobs and many were early adopters of TabletPCs. Although they readily and eagerly tested the latest gadgets in their work, they remained critical of the screensaver.

Many participants said they took digital notes, but they were sceptical they needed a method for reviewing them. Often, jotting a note meant it had short-lived utility, and notes rarely related to each other. Most people jumped from project to unrelated project, so the notes from earlier work became almost useless over time. Seeing random notes paired also had little value when work rarely required cross-pollination. Finally, participants were especially wary of the uncontrolled nature of the screensaver. Participants feared the software could reveal corporate secrets, disclose notes about one customer to another, or share personnel reviews.

The original concept of bubbling notes was less valuable than bubbling other kinds of easily forgotten data. Participants suggested repurposing the screensaver for reviewing to-do list items and e-mail headers from overfull task lists and inboxes. While the suggestions divert from the original intention of a kind of unfocused serendipity, they point to developing screensavers with reminding functionality rather than just displaying pretty pictures or animations.

## References

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