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2000 International CES Report

Universal Electronics

Mosaic

Universal Electronics, an OEM maker of remote control products, was displaying their very first LCD touchscreen model, the Mosaic. Although I am uncertain exactly when or from whom you will be able to purchase the new remote, the Mosaic will retail for under $200 – bringing a new level of customization to that price point. The Mosaic starts off with physical channel, volume, mute and backlight buttons plus a large 4.6" black & white touchscreen LCD with 160x240 resolution that you can use with either your finger or the included stylus. The stylus slips into its own groove so it's not lost.

Case Design

The case is ergonomically styled, though at 3.6" wide, 7.25" high and 1.5" deep it's a bit large. The Mosaic has four broadcasting LEDs for broad dispersion of the infrared signal, plus an electroluminescent (EL) backlight for easy visibility of the screen in darkness. A contrast dial allows for instant changes of the high-contrast LCD's appearance. The remote also features audible beeps and an LED to confirm commands, low battery indicator (it runs on 4AA batteries) and non-volatile memory that doesn't loose its programming even without power.

Click to enlarge. (81kb)

Codes & Customization

To begin with the Mosaic will not feature computerized customization software, though a wealth of features right on the remote will aid users in configuring personal setups. Up to 15 devices may be configured, each with up to 38 keys. The built-in code database is the same one used with the "One For All" line of remotes – the absolute best out there. Devices may also be configured by device code, brand list or via device search. Also available is a "Home Theater" mode that allows you to select various volume, transport keypad and menu functions and assemble them under one device.

Click to enlarge. (75kb)

In addition to the built-in library, the Mosaic allows you to learn any number of buttons from a source remote. A total of 21 macro buttons with up to 32 commands each may be configured. Use the Keymover function to copy a button from one location to another, and then re-label it using traditional letters and numbers plus a wide variety of symbols.

Remote Upgrades

The Mosaic includes a magnetic coupler that allows you to phone a number, punch in a few codes, then place the remote up to the handset to download upgrades. UEI is taking this even one step further with an Internet upgrade option – visit their web site, download a .WAV file and play it through your PC's speakers to upgrade and configure the remote. Neat!

Help when you need it.

Something included and yet new to the remote world are in-depth help screens. For instance, under the configuration screen may be 8 options. If you hit the Help icon brief descriptions of what each option does will be displayed. If you enter one of these modes, the Help icon will then provide detailed assistance on actually configuring the option.

Convergence remote – control galore!
The friendly folks at Universal Electronics kept me for a while longer, showing more of their products. For instance, they had a hand-built prototype of a convergence IR remote that includes about everything you could think of – QWERTY keyboard, mouse control and what even looks like game pad buttons. I wouldn't mind getting one of those for my own PC! They also demonstrated another method they've come up with for entering device code numbers – using bar codes. Simply run the back of the remote over the proper code, which is provided in a special book, and it's configured. It'll even step you through other brand code variations if the first one isn't the correct one. It's that simple.

Click to enlarge. (43kb)

The six-pin mystery…
I got to see exactly what the six pins on the back of their remotes are used for. They had a large black box sitting on a table with a few buttons and two cables out each end, one for a source remote and the other for the target. Basically, Universal's OEM customers may configure a single remote exactly how they want it with brand codes, re-mapped keys, advanced codes etc. They may then duplicate it to any number of remotes using this box, which writes directly to memory.

Design Innovations
Last but not least, I had the pleasure of meeting one of UEI's lead engineer/designers. His team designed a number of remote controls for Radio Shack, which some of you know as the six-in-one backlit 15-1994 learner ($40) and seven-in-one backlit IR/RF 15-1995 ($70). Indeed, the 15-1995 was a 2000 CES Design Innovation award winner and was on display in a special section at the Sands convention center. The other models are available as the four-in-one backlit 15-1993 learner ($30), four-in-one backlit 15-1992 ($25), four-in-one 15-1991 ($15) and three-in-one 15-1990 ($10). With smart, clean styling and logical button arrangements, these remotes have proven to be remarkably popular.

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