

# IT'S ALL IN THE TOUCH

As touchscreen technology continues to become more advanced, the choices available to game developers continues to grow at the same pace. **Helen Fletcher** looks at the latest touchscreen offerings and how these are being incorporated into successful gaming and amusement machines

**TOUCHSCREEN** technology keeps expanding in all aspects of our lives – from mobile phones with touchscreen features to all types of devices in banks, restaurants, machinery and of course gaming devices. With this comes a natural improvement in robustness, response time, accuracy and reliability, but more recently, there have been some exciting developments in multi-touch systems and tactile feedback.

Historically capacitive touch, which offers fast and accurate touch performance, excellent physical durability, premium light transmission, advanced anti-glare properties and field-tested high reliability, along with SAW technology, which is nearly impossible to wear out and provides excellent scratch and damage resistance and superior drift-free calibration stability as well as a superior level of light transmission, have been favoured by the gaming industry.

For Kimson Tan of Chinese manufacturer General Touch, SAW touchscreen technology has dominated the industry in recent times, having been marketed aggressively, and is the more desirable choice for gaming products.

"Our SAW touchscreen LCD monitors have been designed especially for use in high-traffic casino gaming, video game entertainment and self-service kiosk environments," he said. "Features include a pure glass sealed screen that withstands damage from drips, smoke and other potential hazards found in a gaming environment."

Advances in technology such as these assist manufacturers in developing products demanded by the industry, as Javier Lanfranchi, director of international sales at Merit, explains: "The newest technology in touchscreen has allowed Merit to develop the only touchscreen amusement machine that is weather resistant – the new Megatouch RX – answering our customers that require a machine that can be placed in outdoor locations due to smoking bans affecting most of the pubs and bars around

the world."

"SAW touchscreens in casinos have gone from being an interesting addition that replaced, or augmented buttons and mechanical arms on slot machines, to a product that can be used throughout the property," continued Tan. "Nearly all new slot and video poker machines now have touchscreens and an increasing number of machines are now able to expand play in bonus rounds and offer other interesting features to players."

3M Touch Systems is one touchscreen developer that has played a major part in moving the market forward and the company recently demonstrated its dispersive signal technology touchscreen in London, which allows up to four players to play on one machine simultaneously.

Used in Tab Austria's Fun4Four game, this technology was chosen for its large size and fast, accurate, repeatable touch response and the product is already being shipped to customers with great success throughout Germany, Spain, Austria, Luxembourg, the UK, Ireland and Switzerland.

According to Tab's Dietmar Straubinger family board games and poker work particularly well with the technology. "We run a lot of games and our Silverball Terminals offer, in total, more than 250 games and our brand new multigame table Fun4Four runs card games, skill, trivia, web surfing features, GoogleMaps and of course, poker," he said.

3M has also developed the MCT System, which allows players to experience tactile feedback, which can be implemented either as part of the original gaming machine direct from the manufacturer or as an after-market retrofit to existing video slot machines.

"Many operators are taking the initiative to upgrade games in designated zones on the slot floor," said Paolo Pedrezzoli, marketing operations manager for 3M.

"Once these zones are created to



correspond with existing on-screen touch

buttons, players can experience tactile feedback with their favourite games. Over the coming months, these enhanced games should provide casinos and gaming halls with the key player feedback and usage patterns needed to expand the MCT System throughout the entire slot floor."

There are clear benefits of developing touchscreen games - for both the game developers and players - as Josef Öhlinger of Funworld points out: "Touchscreens allow the creation of flexible interfaces that can be customised for various different application scenarios. If an application is optimised for a touchscreen, it will be very intuitive to use, therefore it will easily surpass the usability of applications designed for common button operated terminals."

And when it comes to developing new games, for Öhlinger the high flexibility of touchscreen interfaces allows developers to create a bandwidth of games that would be impossible in other environments.

"This is not only a result of the higher