



Resource Review

Name of reviewer:	Marcus Hill
Job title and department:	
Institution:	Craven College

Name of reviewed item:	Gyromouse Ultra Suite (Wireless gyroscopic optical mouse, compact keyboard and media control software.)
Distributor:	Thomson Europe www.thomson-europe.com
Publisher / distributor details (see note below):	www.gyration.com Software developed by Southpac Software
Publication / release date:	Sept 2005
ISBN number (if applicable):	n/a
Technical details:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gyration compact cordless keyboard G15IBKN 1: Wireless keyboard range 30'. Minimum configuration - fully functional with IBM-compatible PC's using Windows 2000, ME, XP or higher. Partially functional with MAC OS 8.0 and above and with Windows 98. Uses a USB port. 88-key compact keyboard with 15 hot keys for Internet, e-mail and media access. Package includes: mouse, rechargeable battery, recharging cradle, power supply, compact keyboard, 4 AAA batteries for keyboard, • Gyration optical, gyroscopic, cordless LW 2.4 GHz mouse G15IBM 1: 2.4GHz wireless mouse with 30' range - RF technology, no line of sight, digital security signature - 800 channel radio - works on the desk and in the air - miniature USB dongle receiver - PC and MAC compatible - 2 button mouse, clickable scroll wheel, 2 user programmable buttons, SWIPES button for motion activated control and effects • Gyration Media Control Software for Windows Version 1.0., GC15SB1: GyroTools™ Media Control software for Windows - 2 yr warranty.
Price:	£60.00 (approx)

Review:

Introduction

This package provides a compact cordless keyboard, a cordless mouse ('air mouse') and media control software which allows the user to programme the mouse to operate various computer functions.

Getting started

The equipment and software are very easy to use. After a 9 hour battery charging period (for the mouse), the equipment is ready to go. A 'dongle' (RF receiver) – which is similar to a memory stick – is inserted into a spare USB port on the computer. Pressing the 'connect' button on the 'dongle' and then the 'connect' button on the keyboard and mouse allows the equipment to function straight away. I found I did not even have to reboot my machine and the keyboard and mouse immediately took over from the ones I unplugged from my computer. Incidentally, I found I could use both the new mouse/keyboard and the existing mouse keyboard simultaneously, whichever one I chose (thus, you could have multi-users of the keyboards/mice in the room!)

Applications

The Air Mouse uses gyroscopic technology which allows the user to control the cursor whilst the mouse is in the air rather than flat on the desk. This means that the user can move around the room whilst still controlling the computer. Of course the further you get away from the computer screen the less you can see exactly where the cursor needs to go (e.g. minimizing applications) so it is only useful whilst you can see the windows you are operating in (or whilst projected onto a screen.

Similarly with the cordless keyboard, this can be moved away from the computer up to a distance of 30 feet. This means you can sit wherever you feel comfortable to type and there are some useful 'quick keys' to help you operate the computer without needing the mouse also. I found myself using the keyboard on my lap, like a laptop computer, which with a bit of practice I could balance and type into.

The compact keyboard allows the user to play music, raise, lower and mute the volume, access the internet, view internet 'favourites', refresh the web page, search and open the e mail facility without the use of the mouse. This will be useful when needing to interchange between applications whilst teaching a group. I noticed that the volume control, because it is controlled via a series of button presses to increase/decrease volume, does not allow the same fine control as a normal fader or control knob. Thus it is difficult to get the exact volume level required (either slightly too higher or too low.)

The cordless keyboard and mouse will be useful for any student/tutor operating from a wheelchair. The 30 foot range should provide ample flexibility to operate computer functions from distance. The compact keyboard should also be useful for anyone who has limited hand movements.

Being able to operate a mouse and a keyboard 30 feet away from the computer allows you rove around the front end of a training room/lecture theatre whilst operating PowerPoint and other applications.

I think the ability to control the computer from distance would be particularly useful when running presentations on client's premises. I have often felt chained to the

computer when having to operate the keyboard or mouse during a presentation. The Gyro Suite will allow you, for example, to sit amongst the audience or at the back of a small room and still operate PowerPoint, bring spreadsheets onto the screen, open the internet (if connection available) from a discreet position.

Because the keyboard and mouse can be operated at distance, it would be possible to encourage students to practice directing a presentation whilst sitting at the front of the audience. For example, a student may be asked to control all audio-visual aspects of a presentation with this equipment, whilst sitting a distance away from the presenter. This responsibility can also be passed from student to student as the keyboard/mouse are passed around the room.

Neither the cordless keyboard nor the mouse have "line-of-sight restrictions", which means the operator does not need fresh air between themselves and the computer. This is a useful feature given that the equipment may be used at vantage points within a crowded lecture theatre, training room or boardroom situation.

An interesting assignment for a design student would be to assess the air mouse in relation to its ergonomics, aesthetic and usability. Personally, I found the mouse heavy (it houses a rechargeable battery and the website says it weighs 0.7kg,) although its centre of gravity feels right. Pressing the 'activation trigger' (which allows the mouse to be used in mid air) whilst pressing the usual left click and right click and scrolling wheel also requires different technique to usual mouse operation, which you will need to learn.

Although it takes quite a bit of getting used to, the air mouse allows the user to move from a horizontal mouse operating position to one where the mouse is literally waved in the air. Having no research to hand I could not comment on whether this hand action would significantly reduce the likelihood of repetitive strain injury, over the usual horizontal mouse operating position. The air mouse can also be used as a conventional (horizontal) mouse.

Never having used a cordless mouse or keyboard before, these accessories provided several advantages: the absence of cords snaking in front of the keyboard and mouse allowed greater use of desk space to place books, files, diaries etc when using. Also, the lead which comes out of my mouse usually scrapes from side to side over the edge of the desk on use; of course with the air mouse this was completely removed! Finally, the aesthetic of a clear desk, with a simple mouse and keyboard led to a perception of order, which gave me a distinctly (and unusual) organised feeling.

Gyrotools Media Control Software

The software provided with this suite allows the user to carry out various computer operations via 'swipes' and 'shakes' of the mouse in the air. One way of understanding this is to consider the face of a clock. It is possible to assign various mouse swipes to various parts of the clock face so that they operate computer functions. Thus, a swipe of the mouse up in the air towards the 12 midday (top) of the clock face could be programmed to launch internet explorer. Or, a swipe of the mouse down towards the 6.00pm position could be programmed to launch mail or activate a pen or highlighter. I, for example, programmed the web browser to activate with a swipe up to 1.00pm. I also assigned a purple highlighter pen to a shake of the mouse horizontally from left to right and back again. This is far more difficult to explain than to do and I can assure you that the process of assigning functions to your mouse movements is child's play. I wanted to see what benefit this facility would have for me during a typical PowerPoint presentation. Thus, I opened a PowerPoint presentation. I was able to stand away from the computer and scroll through the

slides using the normal left mouse clicks. Then I assigned the "Escape" function to a 6pm down swipe of the mouse and this enabled me to quit the slide presentation in PowerPoint and return to slide sorter view. I also drew some pretty big purple circles round text in the slides I wanted to emphasise. It was starting to be fun!

For someone using regular functions, say in a lecture theatre, this facility can be really useful. Also, anyone using desk top publishing software could use this facility to make repetitive functions easier (e.g. capturing images.)

Also, by using the quick keys on the keyboard (for example opening the internet browser) and the swipes with the mouse (for example to launch other programmes) it will allow for a far easier computer operation, for example, during a lecture.

Summary

This equipment and software provide flexibility of movement whilst operating the computer. I am sure there will be added applications for the cordless keyboard and mouse when used in a teaching environment. I also feel that students will find various new ways that this equipment will make learning and interaction with on-screen data easier. For me, this equipment has the greatest benefit whilst I am delivering training courses on a client's premises or in a new teaching environment. I am not forced to stay close to the laptop or computer whilst teaching and I can control the computer from far away. This makes the teaching experience far more fluid, as I can move around the room and interact with the audience. This helps to remove the 'us and them' (teacher knows all the answers) scenario and is more compatible with my personal teaching style which is facilitative and encourages students to 'take the reins' and moves the locus of 'power' around the room whilst teaching.

I really liked the Gyrotools software. It is a fantastic way to manipulate the applications on the computer remotely and easily. All you need to do is make a little note to yourself to remind you which functions you have assigned to each swipe and shake of the mouse!!

References

www.gyration.com