



Big Brother could be coming to a retail outlet near you. But don't worry, he will only be trying to help you find your ideal house.

The new Telecom store in St Lukes, Auckland, features interactive screens

Few manufacturers or suppliers expect retailers to be spending big bucks on fixtures and fittings over the coming 12 months, but that doesn't mean innovation is out of the question.

In fact, according to one retail expert, 2009 could see the start of a new and significant trend in interactive shopping experiences. Pretty soon – if Peter Wethey of Pizazz Graphic Display Systems has his way – we'll be viewing

new houses or choosing potential travel destinations interactively.

The company has worked with a New Zealand inventor to develop a system where a retailer's products or offers can be advertised effectively 24/7.

Imagine the scenario: you're walking down a quiet street in the evening and, as you pass a real estate agent's window, you turn instinctively to the sound of a video voice-over starting up – describing the unique features of a

\$3 million house being sold by that agent. Your eye is drawn to a 40-inch video screen where you see a walk-through of what could be your dream property.

After the video is finished, you touch the shop window to select another property and this time you get a series of slides showing you the house, inside and out.

Wethey says: "These displays can be wall-mounted or suspended inside the

window. You can have sensors that make the video or PowerPoint presentation come on when someone walks past – the sensors pick up that movement. In a travel agency, while you're waiting to speak to the customer services agent, instead of browsing through their leaflets you can use one of these interactive screens and it means it's almost like having another salesperson.

"You can touch it and see a video of Fiji or the Gold Coast, for example, and it



could mean that by the time you get to talk with the agent you might have made up your mind about where you want to go.

"This seems to be becoming more of a trend; stores have gone from having a poster on the wall to an illuminated one, then one with movement.

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"Now, as a retailer, you can have an interactive display to sell your products even when the store is closed. They are vandal-proof, easy for the retailer to load with their products, and you can get one for about \$4,000."

MADE IN NZ

It's the latest sign that New Zealand is welcoming products that have been available elsewhere for the past year or so – Wethey first saw the interactive displays at GlobalShop three years ago. What he has produced, and is almost ready to sell, is a technology based on

a printed circuit sheet with sensor pads sandwiched between acrylic sheets and displays set on top of the acrylic.

The technology means the screens can be mounted immediately behind the glass in a shop window, as the sensor picks up movement before the hand or finger touches the window.

Retailers can choose to have up to 40 different items available on the interactive screen and the beauty of the system is how easy it is to operate and maintain.

"Let's say you're a real estate agent and one of the houses you load onto the system gets sold," says Wethey. "You can take your video or your stills, download them into our programme, and cut and paste so the new selection is available immediately.

"You don't need someone to come in and change things over for you, the system is really user-friendly. Most people can take photographs and put together a PowerPoint presentation and the rest of it is just cut and paste so you can manage and modify it yourself."

Having a sensor pick up the movement of a person walking past the shop

window seems Orwellian, or at least something out of a science fiction movie. But Wethey is convinced these interactive displays will be a real boon to the retail sector.

"I can envisage a whole range of things that it can be used for – there has been interest from the education sector, for one. They are ideal for all sorts of retail outlets. Let's say you go into a mobile phone shop; usually they've got a dozen or so models on display and no one knows what on earth they can do. But now you can have one of these interactive displays, and if the customers touch on one of the graphics which shows a certain model and that model comes up – with a video showing people how it works and the benefits of that phone – it's like a complete demonstration on how that model works.

"When you've got people waiting to be served, it's like you've got another salesperson on deck and I think that's a real benefit."

The interactive display screens are still in pre-production but, says Wethey, there are few people who, visiting their showroom and seeing the display there, come away less than impressed.

There's still a relatively small penetration of interactive touch-screens because of the expense, but use of an affordable mini-computer to drive the screens has brought down the cost in the last year or so. The lead-time is also attractive, as Wethey reckons he can put together a fully operational unit within a couple of weeks.

Real estate agents are sure to be among the first sector to be interested, now that the market has started to improve. Wethey says: "You can imagine a real estate window where its top 10 houses are in the \$2-5 million price bracket; well, they're the ones they are likely to display on these screens.

"But the point is, it draws everyone into this display, gets them interested and then at least you've got them at the window – then they can move to the side and perhaps look at something more in their price bracket.

"It's a bit like the old magnetic effect to draw people in; it's moving and it's interactive, it's getting people interested." ■

By **Andy Morris**, a freelance writer based in Auckland and a regular contributor to *NZRetail*.



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