

## The Tablet PC Convertible: The Next Step in the Evolution of the Notebook

by Eric LePage

For many of us, we plod through e-mails, discussion boards, and other word-processing activities each day with the old reliable hunt-and-peck method of keyboarding. If we're not carrying a notebook computer with us, we'll typically use a notepad and pen in meetings or a marker and whiteboard in the classroom for producing notes. However, we easily lose track of the papers as they start to pile up, and the notes on the whiteboard are only good until the class period ends and the erasing begins.

For the real "bit-heads" among us, personal data assistants (PDA - think Palm Pilot), slate-based Tablet PCs (see right image), electronic whiteboards, and notebook computers have provided instructors with the ability to store notes electronically which they can access at any time. However, each of these devices can be limiting in *how* you store your data – you're using either a keyboard or a stylus. Having to purchase multiple devices to support your various needs would be an expensive undertaking.

Fortunately, there is a new kid on the technological block that is taking the best aspects of notebook computers, Tablets, and electronic whiteboards, and combining them all together to form the next generation of mobile, flexible, efficient computing – the Tablet PC Convertible. Much like the basic slate-based Tablet PC model, the Tablet PC Convertible allows you to operate the computer with a stylus. However, it also operates exactly like a notebook computer, so you have the added benefit of using the keyboard as well.

The Tablet PC Convertible has its own Microsoft operating system – the Windows XP Professional Tablet PC Edition. At its most basic level, using the Windows Journal notepad program that comes bundled with Windows XP is a liberating experience. You simply flip the screen around and lay it flat on the keyboard (see right image). You can rotate the image on the screen at various 90 degree angles until you find the best horizontal or vertical writing angle that suits you. Using the stylus, you write directly on the screen as you would with a typical paper notepad. When you're done, you simply save your pages of notes to a digital file. You can even have the Tablet convert your handwriting to digital text. For those budding physicians, the Tablet has the uncanny ability of converting even the worst of handwritten scribbling to legible characters.

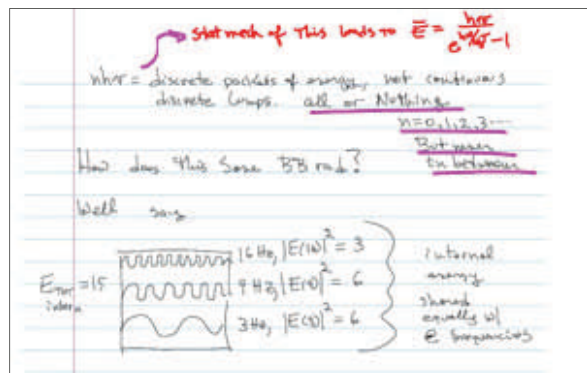


### Tablets at BSC

Recently, several Bridgewater State College faculty began experimenting with Tablet PC Convertibles, and they've taken every opportunity to speak to the many ways that Tablets have enriched their teaching. In the spring of 2004, Physics professor Dr. Edward Deveney became one of the first instructors to venture into this new realm. Dr. Deveney utilizes his stylus and Tablet for equations, sketches, and text notes in his classes, which he saves and then posts in his Blackboard course websites or in his Webhost folder. Students do not require any special programs in order to view his notes which appear as simple web pages.

Dr. Deveney had used PDAs in the past, and had explored the slate-based versions of Tablet PCs, but the screens on these devices were too small. "What I wanted was a true notebook whose screen was the size of a legal pad of paper, and which at the same time would essentially replace an existing legal pad of paper for me."

When Accounting & Finance professor Dr. Shannon Donovan learned of Dr. Deveney's experiences, she acquired her own Tablet. She's loved it from the start. Her Accounting & Finance classes are problem-oriented, and she uses the Tablet PC Convertible to create problems right in class. The problems can be displayed instantly on her projection screen. The added value over using a traditional whiteboard is that, with the Tablet PC Convertible, Dr. Donovan can save all of her notes to a file and then post them on her Blackboard course sites. Students can retrieve any notes they may have missed in class or need for further review.



Physics professor Dr. Thomas Kling caught the Tablet bug from Dr. Deveney and became a Tablet convert almost immediately. "Within 30 minutes, I decided this was the best computer I have had – ever." Dr. Kling found that the process of creating handwritten notes and then typing these notes into his computer would take him an extra ninety minutes to complete. Utilizing the handwriting features of the Tablet, however, has become a huge time saver. Dr. Kling is the first to admit that using the

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## The Tablet PC Convertible *continued*

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Tablet doesn't necessarily mean that he suddenly has an abundance of time on his hands. "I wouldn't say it's caused me less work, though ... I'm doing the same amount of work, but I'm producing more material for the students."

All three instructors utilize their Tablets for reviewing student submissions. They can hand-write notes on student Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and PowerPoint slideshows, save the document, and return the file to their students with the handwritten comments intact.

### The Future of Tablets

Affordability of Tablets may soon rival that of notebook computers, so it may not be far off in the future before this becomes a possible option for students and faculty. Dr. Deveney believes once those pricing levels even out, it's a "no-

brainer" for students. His students tell him that they want Tablet PC Convertibles, and Dr. Deveney believes it's only a matter of time before students are taking notes on Tablets in his classroom rather than carrying paper notebooks to class. Dr. Donovan agrees, and foresees increased interaction in her classes as she and her students collaborate on assignments with their Tablets. "Students could participate in class and get instant feedback" with the Tablets at their disposal.

If you are interested in seeing a Tablet PC Convertible, or if you have any questions about Tablets in general, stop by the Teaching and Technology Center in the Moakley Center – room M200. The TTC has a Gateway Tablet PC Convertible M280E on hand.

### Resources

About Tablet Computing Old and New  
<http://www.bricklin.com/tabletcomputing.htm>

Gateway Tablet PC Convertible  
<http://www.gateway.com/programs/convertible/>

Tablet\_PC - Wikipedia entry on Tablet PCs  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Free Tools for the Tablet PC Convertible  
<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/tabletpc.msp>



## More of the Best Free Educational Sites on the Web

*compiled by Adam Tavares*

### Google Earth [<http://earth.google.com>]

Google Earth allows you to view high resolution satellite photos of the globe through the use of an intuitive interface. It's the most complete globe application ever created.

### Google Maps [<http://maps.google.com>]

Google Maps is "Google Earth light." Not as easily navigable, but useful if you're using a public computer or an older computer and cannot install the full Google Earth application.

### The Processing Program Language [<http://www.processing.org>]

Processing is an open source programming language and environment for people who want to explore the use of programming in image, animation, and sound generation. It is an excellent tool for learning concepts in mathematics, physics, and computer science. The website includes thorough technical documentation and examples of other's work with the language. If nothing else, visit the site for eye candy and inspiration.

### Low Threshold Applications [<http://zircon.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/Ita/>]

Great resource for learning more about teaching with technology ideas and practices that are "easy to learn, non-intimidating and (incrementally) inexpensive."



# Digital Bridges

Building Bridges Between Teaching and Technology

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## Social Software: Changing the Ways We Connect in Cyberspace

by Aimee McAlpine

Computing is often perceived as a solitary endeavor. Traditionally, the majority of time individuals spend at a computer consists of interaction with software which allows them the ability to accomplish specific tasks. However, the growing trend of social software is revolutionizing computing and changing the ways in which we not only interact with technology, but how we interact with each other.

In its simplest form, social software refers to software which enables individuals to connect with others regardless of the barriers of time, space, and geography. Some argue that e-mail and instant messaging were the earliest forms of social software. The advent of blogs and wikis have created even more opportunities to establish online environments, enabling the

communication and collaboration of one-to-many and many-to-many. Connections can be made with individuals or groups from any geographic location, and they are formed by people around shared interests.

While the act of computing may remain physically isolating, there is no lack of opportunity for social connection if one chooses to use social software. Social software is a broad category encompassing a variety of technologies. Included in the genre of social software are: blogs, instant messengers, internet forums, massively multiplayer online games, media sharing, social bookmarking, social networks and wikis.

**Media Sharing** software is a popular way for people to share photographs. There are several online services available where one you can post pictures and

create online albums (both password protected and not) that can be viewed by your family and friends. A popular product, *Flickr*, takes the online photo album to the next level. *Flickr*, free for a basic membership, promotes itself as, "the best way to store, search, sort and share your photos." *Flickr* allows you to post pictures from your computer or phone, edit photos, share your photos with others, add comments and tags to photos, add notes to specific sections of a photo, enable selected viewers to comment on photos, and post photos to a blog. Similarly, *Photobucket* is a free online photo hosting service which can be linked to an eBay account, blog, and online photo albums. What makes these environments social is that they are not merely collections of photos that can be perused, but they are collections of photos that can be sorted and enable interaction

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## Making Blackboard Discussions Work for You

by Anne Hird

Moving class discussions from the classroom to an online discussion board can be a daunting challenge. Too often, ambitious instructors will add Blackboard discussion board use to a course and then abandon it when students and instructor alike find the whole experience overwhelming. While there is always extra work required in trying out a new teaching strategy, there are ways to increase the efficiency and at the same time enhance the learning experience associated with online discussion board use.

First, it is important to establish the purpose of the online discussion in the context of the particular course. You may want to use the Blackboard discussion board to continue discussion started in face-to-face (f2f) classes. In a course that is predominantly online, the discussion will replace much of the traditional f2f class time. The many potential uses of an online discussion include peer review of student drafts, simulations of real-life situations (e.g. town meeting), and hosting guest "speakers" who may not be able to make it to campus for f2f

classes. Above all, when considering the discussion purpose, also think carefully about how it fits into the course workload. What current assignment might be replaced by discussion board use? For example, is there a journal or short response traditionally done on paper that might be replaced by online discussion on the same topic? Unless you are one of the rare faculty members who has time left over at the end of the semester, adding any new course requirement

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