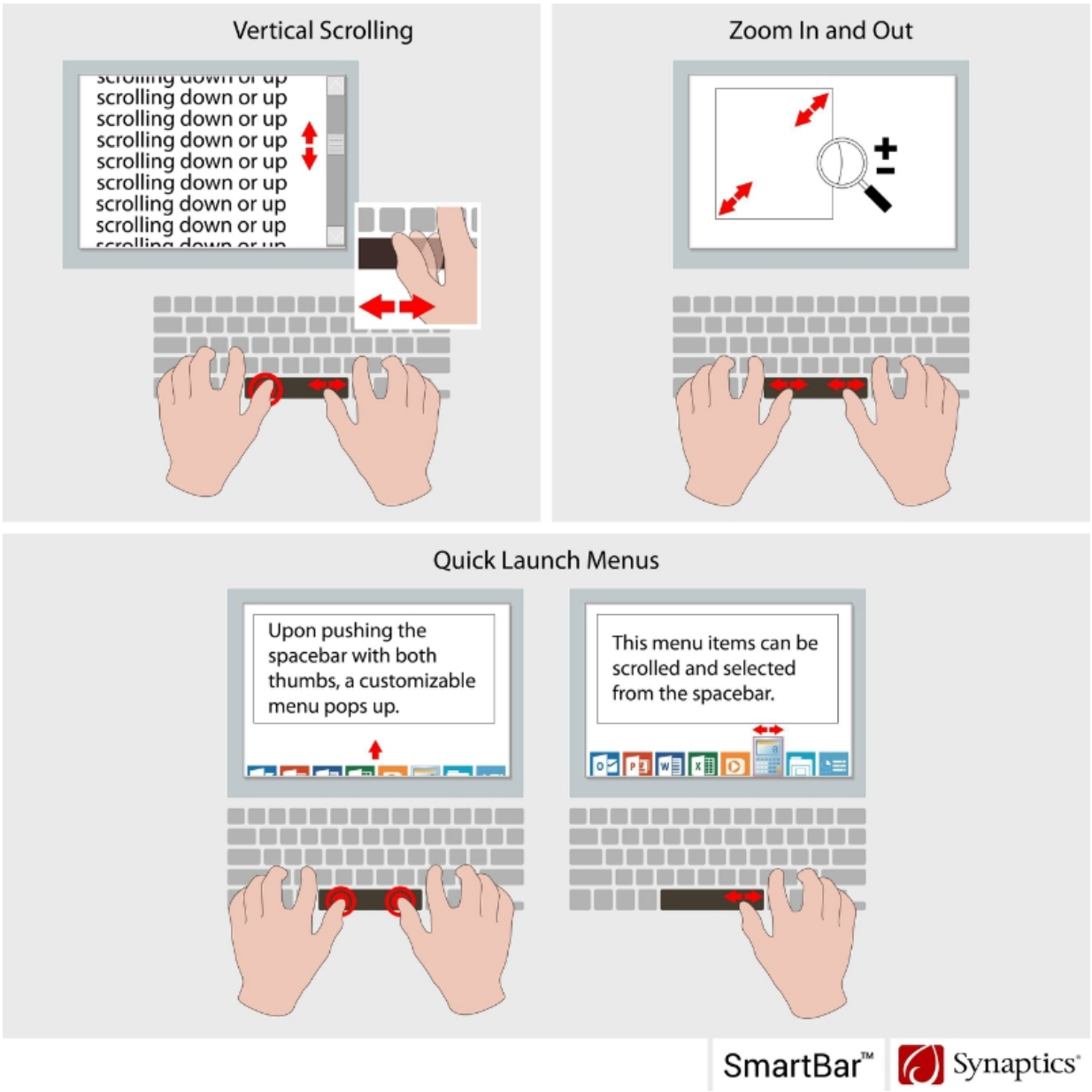
Synaptics aims to enrich PC keyboard with SmartBar

June 3 2015, by Nancy Owano



SmartBar technology—What do you think of, in technology context, when you hear the word SmartBar? For one, you might at least guess this is something for desktop PCs—you're right. You might also assume it has something to do with your keyboard—you're right, of course.

SmartBar from San Jose, California-based Synaptics, the human interface company, has been designed to add touch gesture features to the keyboard space bar, and this is intended for notebooks as well as desktop PCs. The company announced its debut on Wednesday, noting OEMs could now offer products with features even more attractive to productivity-seeking customers. (The OEMs would integrate SmartBar into their own products.) SmartBar is available now for OEM integration.

Tom Mainelli, vice president, Devices & Displays at research firm International Data Corporation, said "Desktop PCs still represent a sizeable portion of the PC market, especially in the commercial segment, but most desktop users have been left behind in terms of next-generation interfaces such as touch." He thinks that "feature-rich, touch-enabled keyboards represent a straightforward, affordable way to help increase worker productivity."

This is described as a capacitive sensing spacebar. "As the natural resting spot for the thumbs, users can now use SmartBar touch gestures for rapid editing of text, simplified zoom, or any number of customizable functions enabled by the provided macro editor," said the company.

Take "rapid editing" for example: A single-thumb swipe gesture on the space bar can be programmed to select an entire word, forwards or

backwards in the document, for quick text edits. Zoom function? You do a "double-thumb pinch" or expand gesture on the space bar to zoom in or out on a document.

The company said SmartBar can be configured with up to five logical buttons. Each can be programmed to execute a macro using an included macro editor. The goal is to provide the user with shortcuts to game controls or repetitive desktop functions.

Tim Verry of *PC Perspective* commented on Synaptics' announcement, which was made Wednesday at Computex 2015. Essentially, their announcement means OEMs can integrate capacitive touch sensors into the spacebar.

As for the user base, the functionality should not only go over well with productivity-minded workers but with gamers too. You can use the added functions to finish up an assignment or finish off a spear-throwing monster. Verry said, "The touch input would also be useful to gamers who want to future increase their actions per minute in RTS games or even something as simple as shifting gears or switching weapons in racing and first person games respectively."

Andrew Cunningham, senior products editor, *Ars Technica*, said, "The SmartBar isn't intended as a replacement for a trackpad, but it could potentially save you some trips to the trackpad if it works well."

More information: Press release: www.prnewswire.com/news-releas … ology-300093228.html

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