TechTalk
Touch Bar on the New
MacBook Pro©
by John McCarthy

Hi and welcome once again to Tech Talk. If you'll forgive the introductory plagiarism, it is a truth universally acknowledged that Apple products have become famous over the years for their novelty features, impeccable design, quality finish and willingness to push customers toward new standards. The new MacBook Pro, unveiled to a highly expectant public just a few weeks ago, features an innovative new Touch Bar which sits right above the keyboard. The Touch Bar replaces the top level row of function keys, is used as a kind of touch screen and could be considered as Apple's first attempt at bringing multi-touch technology to its Mac line up. It provides the usual controls, as for instance brightness, volume and even has a dedicated Siri button, but the real beauty is that depending on the software you use, the touch bar will show controls for that specific programme.

In reality, the Touch Bar is an OLED strip that could be described as a display, although Apple prefers to think of it as an input device and wants developers to do likewise. It's incredibly useful not only because the Touch Bar adapts and changes to the application you're using on the display, but also because it's very customizable through the Preferences/Keyboard settings. The Cupertino-based company is certainly thinking outside the box with its new laptop by not following the trend of touchscreens featured on many of its Windows-powered rivals, where you have to prod the display and are invariably led to spending time wiping off smudges and finger-prints.

The change between applications is also seamless with the bar switching its functions in the blink of an eye. For example, write a message in Mail, and you'll get the option to send it to the recipient with a quick tap on the bar; sorting the inbox is fast and intuitive with buttons for flag, archive and delete, as well as a button that guesses where you might want to save each message. Quickly changing to Pages (that's Apple's version of Microsoft Word) and you'll have instant access to formatting options, or switch to Messages and it will auto-recommend emoji based on what words you're typing. In Photos, you can rotate images and perform various edits, such as cropping, adding

filters and retouching, while swiping to Final Cut Pro will display a projects time-bar for easy scrubbing as well as trimming tools. The list of uses for the Touch Bar is endless and all of Apple's applications including iTunes, Maps and Calendar have Touch Bar compatibility woven into their DNA. What might at first appear to be a gimmick eventually becomes part and parcel of using the Operating System, and in this case old habits will die very quickly.

Third-party developers are currently busy adding Touch Bar support to their products, and with such heavyweights as Photoshop, indeed much of Adobe's Creative programmes one would imagine, and Microsoft Office set to get Touch Bar compatibility in the coming months, this technology will get better and better over time. The downside is that with some developers only just getting to grips with it, we might not see the full potential of the Touch Bar for quite a while.

Incidentally, the Touch Bar has Touch ID, which will allow you to log into your Mac, indulge in internet shopping with Apple Pay and authenticate all kinds of transactions. It's a really useful feature and means we'll probably never have to type out our credit card details ever again.

Other novelties in the new MacBook Pro are the redesigned bodies featuring a thinner, sleeker case, plus the fact that they are lighter and considerably more powerful than the models they replace. I've been promised the loan of one of these machines in the New Year, so we'll probably give a proper review once we've put it through its paces.

Run out of time once again, I'm afraid; do join me next time for a new edition of Tech Talk brought to you by EnglishWaves.fr.