



# Is good *penmanship* the secret to easy surfing?

A few issues back we reported on Digimarc's MediaBridge technology and its potential challenge to the market dominance of Eyes and Fingers International ([www.eyesandfingers.com](http://www.eyesandfingers.com)), the unofficial body which supports the deployment of eyes and fingers for accessing the Internet (GX May/June 2000). A MediaBridge-enabled camera connected to a personal computer captures embedded watermarks in printed advertising; users' Web browsers are then automatically taken to the website encoded in the ad, circumventing the need to manually type a URL.



Now, from the A. T. Cross Company—the 150 year old Rhode Island-based manufacturer of quality writing instruments—comes word of another competitor to EFI and MediaBridge. The CrossConvergence Pen ([www.cross.com/cross/convergence.html](http://www.cross.com/cross/convergence.html)) is a battery-driven device (available only online at a cost of US\$89.99) which not only puts ink on paper but also reads both “Digital:Convergence cues” and compatible

UPC, ISBN or EAN product codes; it stores up to 300 of these codes, ready to be downloaded to a computer. The CrossConvergence Pen comes with an “OptoLink coupler” which attaches to a Windows-based PC (no Mac version yet). The enabling software behind this technology, :CRQ by Digital:Convergence Corporation, then whisks the user to the vendor's Web location to view details on the product.

Cross includes a handy set of helpful tips on using the CrossConvergence Pen properly, such as “Make sure the writing end is up and the swiping end is touching the symbol you are swiping”, as well as “Try to swipe in a straight line through the center of the codes. Try left to right and right to left.” They also provide fully detailed instructions on how to change the batteries.

The user guide also covers potential problems with downloading data through the OptoLink coupler, with suggestions like “Make sure you are pointing the swiping end of the Pen directly at the OptoLink sensor or place it near or on the OptoLink sensor”, and “Don't be afraid to hold the OptoLink in your hand.” Of course, when all else fails, users may use the dual purpose CrossConvergence Pen to simply write things down.

Meanwhile, Digimarc ([www.digimarc.com](http://www.digimarc.com)) has not been idle. The company has signed an agreement with PIA (Printing Industries of America) giving its 10,000 member printers a discount on MediaBridge usage in printed materials. The tedium of locating website addresses for business contacts can be eliminated simply through the use of a MediaBridge-embedded business card and a digital camera.

As well, Digimarc just announced a deal with John Dickinson Stationery of the U.K. to begin applying its technology to direct mail. At the International Direct Marketing Fair in London, England (March 13-15), John Dickinson is demonstrating “how marketers can use envelopes to link consumers instantly to specific Web pages”. Presumably this will permit junk mailers to forego the bother of actually putting printed material inside the envelopes.

However, as of press time, Eyes and Fingers users continued to make up over 99% of the digital interface market, according to available data. 🌐