

Your user interface is your brand – do you make the most of it?

A user interface is the point where your product meets your customers. It's where they can see and feel the quality of the machine they work with. And that's why the choice of material and appearance is important. Silicon keyboards score well for both look and feel, not to mention durability.

When a building worker stands up to his knees in mud on a cold wet site and has to operate heavy machinery, the supplier of such machinery needs to be sure of two things: the control panel will work in any weather, even when it's wet and dirty. and that anyone working on the machine *feels* that it is capable of doing the job. The first is all about quality, functionality and durability – the second is about feelings, user perception and branding.

Mekoprint has over 30 years of experience with user interfaces in everything from the medicines industry to construction, successfully supplying foil keyboards, silicon keyboards and touch screens adapted to any situation. The art of marrying user perception to functionality is a specialism.

Curiosity is the driving force

"We believe that the seeds of the best solutions are sown in initial discussions with the customer. We are really curious," says Domenic B. Nielsen, Key Account Manager at Mekoprint Graphic Electronics. "We always start by finding out what the customer ultimately wants – what is the final scenario for the product and production? We start on a journey together, getting close to the product's value creation, customer resources, production setup and the situation with competitors. When we know all that, our technical and commercial teams can start to outline the best solution for that particular requirement."

Plug and play solutions

Nhiem Le is Business Manager for User Interfaces at Mekoprint Graphic Electronics, and he adds: "We focus heavily on developing the best solutions in consultation with our customers, to ensure the gains are higher and costs lower throughout their lifetime. We make the extra effort to understand the world the end-user lives in, and develop a solution that expands the envelop and moves the product. We also get right into the assembly processes, to be able to deliver something that's easy to approve, integrate and pass on. Even though the solution can be new, it has to be a "design for manufacturing" for Mekoprint and our customers – in other words, it has to be "plug and play".

The many advantages of silicon – price is just one

Mekoprint helps many customers whose control products have to work outdoors or in extreme environments, and this is where silicon keyboards come into their own. Silicon forms a perfect seal and is less temperature-sensitive than other materials. It's also easier to operate, because it can be designed in three dimensions. Because the structure of the keyboard can be felt with the fingertips, the user can quickly learn to use it. An extra dimension is the option of being able to create an exclusive design on the surface, and ensure elegant diffusion of background light, ideal for controls that have to work perfectly in the dark.

"Many customers are not aware of the vast number of advantages offered by silicon, or think that it must be expensive compared to foils. But we have a number of examples of the customer finding considerable value from choosing silicon," says Nielsen. "The magic occurs when we are invited to take part at an early stage of the customer's R&D process. The user interface is not just something stuck onto the product before it's released on the market. It's an important part of user perception, and key to perceived value of the product as a whole. If the product feels easy to use, more exclusive and durable with a silicon keyboard, then it's almost always worth a little extra in price compared to traditional foil keyboards."