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FEATURE

MORE THAN A FEELING

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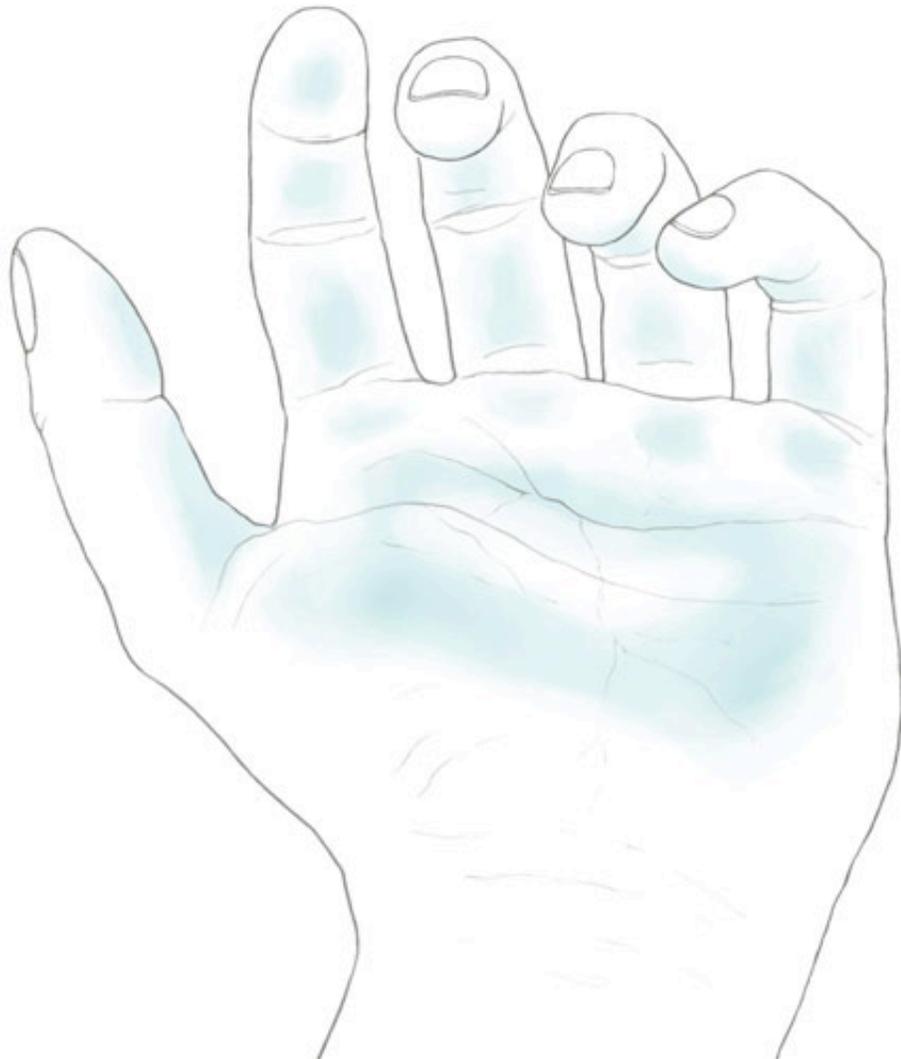


**DESIGN TO GO**



**THE PALM™ ENROUTE**  
**AWARDS IN MOBILITY**  
**DESIGN 2007**

**ENROUTE STUDENT**  
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It turns out that there's solid scientific reason to market touch. According to J. Duncan Berry, of the

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**CANADA'S BEST  
NEW RESTAURANTS**



**PANELISTS  
PAST WINNERS  
2006 WINNERS  
2006 NEXT 25**

neuromarketing research firm Applied Iconology, touch can be broken down into several components: the cutaneous, temperature, tensility and texture. "So there are at least four mappable, discrete tactile experiences that might affect the brand experience," Berry says. Using the still-embryonic field of haptics, the science of touch, developers are creating innovative gadgets that will make those vibrating cellphones seem ancient. Now that technology is cheaper and more advanced, these feel-good gadgets – like the new Novint Falcon, a video game controller that lets users feel the weight, shape, texture and force of a game – will hit the mass market.

To find this virtual reality in the grocery store, just pick up Sheba cat food. You can't help but touch the pair of multipacks bundled in what appears to be fishnet. The netting is, in fact, a pattern printed on the shrink wrap. The aluminum lids bear the Sheba brand and appear to float on an ocean wave pattern that forms the bottom of the package. In this case, both sight and touch reinforce the "fresh catch of the day" slogan, creating a powerful effect that marketers like to call "touch equity."

All this matters because companies want, above all, to get their products into our hands. "The hand is exquisitely sensitive to a range of textures," haptics researcher Susan Lederman, head of the Queen's University Touch Laboratory, told *New Scientist*. Packaging expert Dan Goodwin of Rochester Institute of Technology agrees. "Studies show that if you have the customer in a store, with money in his pocket ready to make a buying decision, and he picks up your product, the chances he will buy it increase astronomically compared to looking at the product on a shelf with a dozen others." This complex split-second effect is both conscious and subconscious, emotional, rational and yet oddly difficult to describe. It's something you feel rather than know.

Which may explain why, not long ago, when I was shopping for a new printer-scanner-copier, I quickly read the specs to narrow down my choices. Then I ran my hands along the sleek silver-and-black control panel of the first one, a Canon Pixma MP130, and said, "I'll take it." It may also explain why, when I'm having people over, I'm inclined to serve those elegant silver cans of Sapporo. Sure, the beer tastes good and the cans look great, but they feel even better. ←

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