Ferdinand Maier, CEO at ruwido, talks about short-term fashions and trends in technology, personalising the user experience and convenient interaction.

What are the key factors that enable you discern between what might be a short-term fashion in design and functionality and what is likely to be a long-term trend with wide market appeal?

Based on the findings of our scientific research we are constantly working to differentiate between technology that is a fashion and technology that is becoming a trend. For example using gesture-based interaction to control your TV was clearly a fashion, while the ability to (naturally) communicate and talk to others as well as to a system is a trend. It is the evaluation of consumer needs and user’s values that enables us to understand the long-term impact of technology on media consumption and to consult our customers. Our scientific research also helps us to understand what technology to invest in and which not to focus on. Seven years ago we said using voice is a kernel behaviour and we believe in the potential of voice for search if you know what you want. Now almost all of our remote controls feature BLE with speech transmission in combination with other interaction mechanisms, a trend with a wide market appeal for different age groups, and with a wide field of use.

To what extent do you think voice will be the primary input mechanism of the future, and what other long-term trends or evolution do you foresee?

The key market opportunity will be providing the perfect alignment of content combined with seamless interaction supporting several modalities. This includes voice interaction and standard control as well as new technologies enabling identification of users in front of the TV.

To reach ‘user experience excellence’ it is essential to provide a personalised offer for TV consumers that goes beyond basic recommendation algorithms. We need to support ‘convenience’ for the user with an instant personal selection that is more than targeted advertising. What we are talking about is highly personalised information, transparent, understandable and clearly structured. With the integration of new technologies, the system knows who is in control as soon as the remote is picked up. As well as instantly knowing a user’s preferred settings, completely personalised options for suggested content can be delivered. With the associated advantages for highly personalised information, the remote control will become a revenue generator for the operator.

Can you expand on the distinction you draw between the ‘smart home’ and the ‘convenient home’ when looking at the future evolution of in-home functionality? What kind of applications and services are consumers likely to be comfortable with?

With more homes becoming ‘smart’ the question is whether we really like the idea of a future living room anticipating what people want and machines adopting the behaviour and ‘feelings’ of humans. We strongly believe control is for humans not machines. People need to stay in control over their devices within the home environment, set the tone and remain master of the home. The living room is ‘the campfire of the new age’, a safe place, and we have to respect that.

So how can the demands of an increasing amount of ‘smart’ products be met and how can users be supported to reconnect with home appliances in a pleasant way?

What we are about to develop is the convenient home, not the automated home. The latest step in that direction is the enhancement of our TICTACTILE system. The holistic approach brings together our knowledge of haptic, visual and voice for a remote and synchronised user interface designed to provide convenient interaction with a range of day-to-day household needs, with no loss of control. Via the TV or specially designed screens, TICTACTILE can control all TV functions, sound systems or lighting for example. TICTACTILE is designed to remove the inconvenience of juggling different UIs across devices, because it uses the same stripped down 12 button structure. In order to make content or functions more easily accessible it is important to offer a holistic experience for the user, no matter which screen is used for access.

Remote controls have always been designed to manage and navigate content. Now they are also powerful enough to seamlessly merge different home appliances, with a consistent navigation paradigm. At IBC we will showcase how convenience can be supported, embedding the TV watching activities in the overall context of the home.

What are the major challenges you face in designing devices that delight consumers and how can these be overcome?

There is no major challenge, there are only customer requirements for more convenience. Technology is not the driver for the media and entertainment business, it is a natural interaction that will make the difference.

ruwido will be exhibiting at IBC, on stand 1.D69