

Hands-on with GestureWorks' Gameplay Virtual Controller (Video)

Windows 8 tablets, with the exception of Razer Edge, aren't suitable for gaming. The majority of PC games are developed with keyboard, mouse, or a gamepad. While Civilization V and other select titles have special multitouch controls designed for the Surface Pro enthusiast, the majority of games are simply not playable without peripherals. The solution? Find an intermediary.

GestureWorks Gameplay promises to alleviate tablet owners' gaming problems on the move by creating a virtual touch interface that mimics keyboard and mouse inputs. The program lets users design multitouch controllers that can be customized using virtual joysticks and d-pads as well as buttons, buttons and mappable swipe gestures. It's a curious proposition, particularly when one considers the efforts Android and iOS gamers put into avoiding touchscreen controls. We spoke with the company to get an inside look at the beta version of the program.

GestureWorks CEO Jim Spadaccini welcomed us with a ThinkPad Helix. His son was also there, tearing through Castle Crashers on his Windows 8 device. The lower part of Spadaccini's tablet had been covered with an electronic directional pad and tiny buttons. These were superimposed on the game as native controls. Spadaccini made it look easy and fun to play with them but he resisted us from playing. He wanted to demonstrate how to set the system up.

Gameplay's menu is easy to navigate. It splits its main screen into profiles that can be downloaded and an array of layouts that have been saved locally. The community currently has approximately 50 profiles available to download. Editing or creating new profiles is easy. Spadaccini tapped the edit icon on Castle Crashers to pull up an identical layout to the display on his son's nearby slate. With just a few taps, we could add the ability to move, resize, or add buttons. You can map buttons to any keyboard input or mouse input. A virtual joystick can also be added for control of the cursor. There's also a gesture menu that permits users to map commands to swipes, pinches or flicks and we were told that motion control options will be added in the near future which will allow steering based on accelerometers for driving games. Users can save the profile from here, but if they aren't satisfied the layout can be tweaked in-game.

After creating a profile it is possible to link the layout to the game it was designed for, making it easy to launch a title simultaneously using its customized control setup. MINECRAFT SERVER LIST Launching Castle Crashers alongside our host's young son was as easy to do by pressing the play button and the game's basic controls were well-suited to the touchscreen interface. Spadaccini described Castle Crashers as the program's "sweet spot," and they worked just like magic. Portal 2 and Borderlands 2 were a different story -- while GamePad gives you access to all the game's main commands, managing them all with only our thumbs proved to be a bit difficult. We encountered some issues with the virtual

joypad, too that emulates a sometimes unstable mouse control, rather than an actual analog joystick input. Despite these issues, we were able to resolve a couple of GLaDOS "maniacal" tests with relative ease and were informed by GestureWorks to expect improved mouse emulation before the release of the final version.

Gameplay isn't perfect but it does seem to be a good application. It meets a need and delivers on its promises. The interface is simple and simple to use. Its gamepads that are touchscreen will never replace a physical one, but they do endow Windows 8 tablets with a mobile gaming experience that is otherwise impossible without additional hardware. That said there is a compatibility issue: it only works with games that run DirectX (that means there's no Minecraft Sorry kids!) If you own an Windows 8 tablet, a Steam backlog and aren't averse to the compatibility stipulation, GestureWorks Gameplay just might be the perfect fit for you. Visit the site of the company to sign up for the beta or simply wait: the full version launches on November 5th for \$14.99.