You arrive at your office in the morning, sit down, look at your to-do list and wonder how you're going to get through the day. You could order up a custom display to fit the odd space in your basement where you want to play online games, or put a long narrow display along one wall for your novel-in-progress. How do you organize your data? Don't groan, it must be done. More space might make it easier. There are many ways to improve the taskbar for a larger display area.

One of the user studies that the VIBE group required users to navigate through a series of tasks and then exit out of the screen. The research study required users to complete several different tasks, switch from one task to another, and enter different applications. None of the participants had used multiple monitors before. When the participants switched from a single to a dual-monitor setup, they found that their productivity increased by 9 percent. Further studies showed even greater increases - at times up to 50 percent for tasks such as cutting and pasting text and reorganizing icons. "They've been doing research in eye movements, but just give them a wider field of view, which is what you get with a dual monitor," said Microsoft researcher Michael Baldwin.

Researchers at Microsoft have two tasks. One is to discover the technologies that fit into our ever-changing interface needs, and the other is to find ways to support multiple monitors. Researchers Patrick Baudisch and George Robertson have designed some new behaviors for the taskbar, so that you can drag a window from one monitor to another, even if it's a long distance. "Typically, if you just project something on a curved screen it looks like you're projecting it on a dome, but you don't have to," said Baudisch. "Instead, you can put the display into a curved Plexiglas panel, resulting in a 3072 x 768 resolution display. The display was curved to avoid distortion at the farthest fields of vision."

"I'd like to think I could have a display that went around my door sill," said Starkweather. "I had to use some special mirrors to correct this so that I got a fairly smooth image." The researchers conducted user studies that proved the effectiveness of adding a second or third monitor. "When considering the change to a large display, several challenges come to mind. What will a computer operating system look like? How will it work? What will the user interface look like? How will we use the space? What will the productivity gain factor be?"

When considering the change to a large display, several challenges come to mind. What will a computer operating system look like? How will it work? What will the user interface look like? How will we use the space? What will the productivity gain factor be? "We're starting to imagine the possibilities of a display that can grow to fit your needs," said Starkweather.

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