

## Yet another 'first in the world' story: An analysis of a pioneering piano distance learning project

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*Theme: Video Technology Experiences and Usage in Research*

Finland was early in developing piano distance learning systems. In the late 90's two similar projects were launched independently of one another.

In the autumn 1998 the author created the 'MIDI Combo', a system for the Windows NetMeeting collaborative platform. In addition, a much more ambitious effort was going on in a group of developers working under Xenex Telecom, an innovative Finnish videoconference company. The product of Xenex was designed to work with MIDI solenoid pianos and videoconference equipment.

Although the systems don't share the same set of objectives and solutions, the coincidence of parallel discovery raises interesting questions. In the next decade a couple of efforts with similar outlook emerged in other countries. Competition is one of the driving forces behind invention, but claims of being first inventor shouldn't bypass the need for careful and often tedious product development.

This study of Xenex' project aims at making a synthesis of the experience gained by the innovative musicians, software and system developers behind the product. The author explores the preconditions of technological breakthrough, as well as the complex process which innovations have to go through before they can become products for the educational technology market.

The empirical data of the study stems from DV recordings of an interview round, which was executed in a series of videoconferences. The author's experience of this novel interview setting seems to indicate that respondents are easy to reach and that they seem to feel even more comfortable in a videoconference than in a telephone interview. Apparently the video data also improves the transcriber's ability to reliably interpret the information.

The material was processed with the help of a transcription system developed for an on-going Canadian-Finnish project called 'Trans-Atlantic Piano Teaching: The Alliance of Technology and Pedagogy'. The paper amplifies the on-going project by pointing at success and pitfalls of the earlier work of the Xenex group.

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