



Stir launching new, less expensive 'smart' desk

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I called the Stir Kinetic Desk one of the most important products introduced to the industry in 2014 for good reason — the product made it easy to use height adjustable desks the way they were designed.

Stir (the California-based company behind the desk) is launching a new desk, the Stir Kinetic Desk M1, which promises a slimmer, more flexible design at a lower cost with updated electronics and faster processing speeds.

You'll certainly remember the original Stir Kinetic Desk F1 if you saw it at NeoCon (or read about its launch or my review on it in these pages). It is the desk that uses an integrated touch screen to remember how you work and adjusts to you, keeping track of how much you move throughout the day and reminding you to sit or stand with a unique "Whisperbreath" feature — a gentle invitation to stand or sit based on your settings.

The mastermind behind the company and series of desks is JP Labrosse, who worked at Apple where he was one of the first 35 employees of the iPod division. He led the engineering development teams for two of the early iPod programs. Other Stir Kinetic Desk developers are alums of Disney and IDEO.

Though definitely revolutionary, the F1 version's design and scale isn't really universal enough to make it a product that can be deployed throughout an office building. M1 is lighter, smarter and more adaptable in every way. That means it will work not just for the manager, but for the masses.

In many ways, Stir is following the roll out model of Tesla by launching the high-end version first for the well-heeled trendsetters and introducing a lighter scale model for the masses after the original takes off. But don't think of the M1 as the clunky family sedan and the F1 the sports car. Instead, think of it as Stir 2.0. It is an update; a refinement of the original that takes it a step further.

Like the executive F1, the new M1 is a height-adjustable desk driven by software that senses your presence, learns and adapts to your preferences, enables you to set goals and actively reminds you to change positions while you work.

Both products are "upgrades," similar to how the iPhone 6 is better than the iPhone 5s, even though they are technically the same product — still smart phones, but with added features in the update.

The new M1 and the F1 feature entirely new, custom designed electronics that provide a faster and richer experience for users. The latest processor is four times faster and storage capacity has doubled. The new 5-inch LCD touchscreen has an increased resolution with a 360-degree field of view, significantly increased brightness, and an anti-glare film — all designed to make the screen much easier to read in any office environment.

Five-finger, multi-touch support has also been added,

enabling enhanced support for gesture-based interactions. Finally, the electronics design includes a Single Board Computer (SBC) and is housed in a removable electronics enclosure making the desk upgradable in the field.

Stir has also followed the Tesla model by handpicking dealers in the top 30 markets to distribute its height adjustable desks, a difficult task since Labrosse was flooded with interest about Stir at NeoCon last June. "Flowing from NeoCon, we had a ton of interest," he said.

The company has also worked hard to refine its manufacturing process. The desks are now built by Symbiote, a technical furniture manufacturer in Zeeland, Mich., though the company is still headquartered in Los Angeles. "Where we are manufacturing in West Michigan is now

within a 20 mile radius of where everyone is doing everything," he said. "Whatever it is we want (from a supply standpoint) is right here."

The new M1's shape is definitely different from the F1. While the F1 is straight lines and rectangular shapes, the M1 is much more organically shaped and "softer" with a gently sloped front edge to make it comfortable for the users' arms. The slim, flexible desk profile allows for the addition of a



broad variety of accessories including most monitor arms, keyboard trays and task lamps. Power cable cutouts allow for easier cord management. All of the changes came from extensive consumer testing.

The new M1 is 30 inches by 60 inches and can be assembled by two people using the eight provided screws and a single hex wrench. For large-scale installations, M1 is available in a rectangular shape in three sizes and edge types; though it can be manufactured with nearly any work surface, finish or customer originated material.

The shape and scale is immensely important since Stir also is pushing into the retail market. The company has deals with Relax the Back retail stores and allmodern.com to sell its products through the retail channel. Customers can also buy M1 directly from the stirworks.com website.



More importantly, Labrosse said Stir desks are “changing the way people work.” On average, Stir Kinetic Desk users stand for half their day, and 95 percent of its users move up and down every day, which he said “is a massive change, especially when compared with push-button and other manually height-adjustable desks.”

The M1 is still priced higher than most height adjustable tables on the market with a list price of \$2,990, but few of those have the technology to back up that kind of a price tag. The F1 retails for \$4,190 and includes white glove delivery. While the price of the Stir products might give you pause, Labrosse said it is a simple sell to CFOs when they see the use statistics. It is one of the only height adjustable desks on the market that can truly track return on investment. “We are changing the conversation from cost to value,” he said. “When you can put data behind the assertions, it makes it easier to sell. I can show a CFO how (an employee using a Stir desk) can burn off the same amount of calories every two weeks as running a marathon. That’s powerful.”

Height adjustable table competitors aren’t standing still. While Stir was one of the first on the market with software and components that track movement and help remind users to sit and stand, they are not alone in the market. Workrite Ergonomics has been making height adjustable desks for a long time and already has products to track and prompt height adjustable desk use, with powerful updates on the way. And Humanscale is introducing OfficeIQ, which uses integrated sensors and software to monitor

workplace activity such as sitting, standing or time spent away from one’s desk.

Stir is not content with simply helping office workers use their height adjustable desk more efficiently, though the statistics collected about how much people use the Stir height adjustable desks is impressive. The new Stir Kinetic Desk line also comes with a cloud-based architecture. This allows for transferrable user data that can “travel” with workers as they move between desks within a company network, or around the world. Leveraging low-energy Bluetooth devices like Fitbit, the desk recognizes and can identify one user from another, making it easy for users to be logged in and out of any Stir Kinetic Desk. This advanced cloud architecture will provide the platform for more integrations and expanded features in the future, with Android and iOS compatibility currently in development.

It is the promise of the future that sets Stir apart, at least for the moment. Imagine a desk that senses you, pulls up your important documents and e-mails (whether you are in Wichita, Kansas or Kuala Lumpur) and through the cloud, keeps everything current. The power of using a desk like this is not lost on Labrosse. “We are taking the foundation we have and we are making it tunable,” he said. “This is the tip of the iceberg. The desk is always learning and as a company with a smart platform, we can learn from it too. This is laying the groundwork for a more and more adaptive office.” 

