TouchLink™ GUI Templates and Beyond
Power-User Features in the New GUI Configurator Software

Infocomm 2009 brought the introduction of Extron’s TouchLink™ product line, the first fully configurable touchscreen interface for the professional A/V market. TouchLink was designed from the ground up to enable development and deployment of the most typical A/V control installations including room types such as a single display, dual display, video conference, multi-image and divisible room applications.

In order to make deployment of a touchpanel control system with a customized user interface simple for integrators who are currently familiar with our MediaLink® controllers and Global Configurator software, a series of pre-made templates were created in two different “skins” for each of these five typical applications. While the templates help speed up and simplify the implementation of TouchLink systems in the most common applications, many users have been pleased to learn about the powerful design capabilities of GUI Configurator software that enable users to start from scratch to create fully customized GUI layouts.

Figure 1: Modifying one of our templates using GUI Configurator software.
Modifying A Template
The templates are automatically copied to your PC when you install Extron’s new GUI Configurator software application. Each template can be customized to allow for the most common types of modifications needed for a specific customer’s installation, as shown in Figure 1.

What types of modifications are most common? Here are just a few:

• Inserting the end-user’s logo on the screen to give it a more personalized look and feel
• Changing the source names so the users of the system will easily recognize them
• Deleting any unused buttons and arranging the remaining ones to better use the space on the screen

Simplified Configuration
Modifying a template is quick and easy and allows you to move right into the true configuration aspect of the system, which is handled by another Extron software application, Global Configurator. If you have experience configuring a MediaLink system, you already know how to configure a TouchLink system. Take a look at the two screen shots, Figure 2 and Figure 3, above to see how similar the two user interfaces are in Global Configurator.

You might have already figured out that Global Configurator and GUI Configurator, combined together with Extron’s ready-to-use design templates, make configurable touchpanel control systems easy to deploy and support. What you may be surprised to learn is how the design capabilities built into GUI Configurator enable you to create touchscreen layouts for our TouchLink panels to handle nearly any AV control system scenario. If you are experienced in designing and creating user interfaces for touchscreen control systems, you will find yourself right at home using GUI Configurator, whether you heavily modify our templates to suit your specific needs or create your own from scratch.

Features For Power Users
In addition to providing a platform for modifying our pre-designed templates, GUI Configurator offers powerful built-in design capabilities that enable you to fully develop your own design or replicate an existing touchscreen interface to meet the specific needs of a particular installation. Let’s look at just some of the “power-user” features built into GUI Configurator:

Master Pages: Conceptually, this feature is very similar to that found in Microsoft PowerPoint®. A master page, as shown in Figure 4, can contain any control objects that can be drawn on a regular page. Placing any control object on a master page, or similarly a master popup page, will cause those objects to appear on every other page in your project if desired. Any page can use the master page objects or not, it’s your choice. This capability is used in our templates to apply the same background to all pages in the project. This feature can be found in the GUI Configurator workspace and is unique to each project.

Layout Tools: When creating or modifying a project, the ability to keep buttons aligned, evenly use space, re-size objects to maintain uniformity, etc., is critical to your project looking neat, organized, and professional. GUI Configurator provides a vast array of these “fix-it” tools to adjust any object you create, not just limited to buttons. You have the ability to change the alignment of objects to one another, alignment of objects on the screen, sizing of objects relative to other objects, and horizontal/vertical spacing of objects in the project. These features can be found on the layout drop down menu or as a tool bar for easy access.

Resource Library: GUI Configurator treats graphic files, audio files and border styles as resources. Graphic files can be imported in any of the most common file formats, including .png, .jpg, .tiff, .gif, and .bmp. Once the graphic files have been imported, GUI Configurator will handle
adjusting the shape and size of these according to how they are used on the control objects that reference them and you can see how they will look before you load them to the panel. Once a resource is imported into GUI Configurator they become part of the project Resource Library, as shown in Figure 5. You can be assured that the project file you have is complete and there aren’t any missing elements when you hand it off to someone else to deploy or modify at some later date. Additionally, resources can be exported either individually or more importantly as resource “sets”.

This allows an organization to create a standard set of resources that can be shared with anyone involved in developing GUI Configurator projects. Use of a shared resource library of graphics, borders, and audio files helps to ensure consistency so that the customer always gets their “approved” touchscreen elements when new systems are developed for them. The resource library can be accessed using the view windows drop down menu or as a tool bar icon. GUI Configurator’s project resource library is sure to be enjoyed by any designer or installer familiar with the tedious “old school” method of hunting for a previous project that contains the graphics you used for a customer or device, such as a lengthy CATV channel lineup, and then copying the pages or objects to the new project. On the other hand, if you enjoyed that older method, GUI Configurator can support that, too.

Border Styles: As mentioned above, border styles are treated as resources. Other control system touchpanel layout tools allow you to change the look and feel of your button objects, but it can be a time-consuming and convoluted process to make the button look the way you want. Using GUI Configurator, you can easily select from any of the pre-designed border styles.
Panel Manager: GUI Configurator and TouchLink panels were designed with configurable based solutions in mind. Many configurations are often replicated in several rooms in a facility or organization for ease of training, support, and maintenance. These identical systems are typically referred to as “cookie cutter” systems. Each GUI Configurator project can specify one or more TouchLink panels to receive the same project layout. The Upload Manager handles the batch upload process — which, by the way, happens in parallel — automatically. Whether you need to upload the project to one or one hundred panels, GUI Configurator takes care of all the heavy lifting for you.

These features just begin to touch on the extensive design capabilities built into GUI Configurator. You can fully replicate an existing customer’s user interface to reduce or eliminate the users’ need to “re-learn” how to use their new or recently refreshed rooms. Templates are a great place to start and are sufficient for most customers, but if your application requires something more, GUI Configurator puts the power at your fingertips to create the look you desire.

Visit www.extron.com/touchlink using your Extron login to download the latest software, along with any new template designs and resource library elements.

**Figure 6:** The GUI Configurator Panel Manager enables you to copy a touchscreen layout to multiple TouchLink panels.

**TouchLink™ GUI Customization Service**

There may be circumstances, such as lack of in-house resources, or the need to duplicate an existing touchpanel interface, in which you may choose to have Extron either modify existing templates for you or create a unique, custom GUI - Graphical User Interface. To address these requests, we created two levels of TouchLink GUI Customization service.

**Option #1: Template Modification**

With your first option, we will modify one of our ready to use TouchLink templates to meet your needs. The process is simple. Just provide information on your system application and details on the desired functionality of the interface, along with some design elements such as a company logo, school or company colors, and background images. We will produce a professional-looking TouchLink GUI based on an existing template that has been modified to suit your application.

**Option #2: Custom GUI**

Your second option provides a customized GUI designed to your exact specifications. Sometimes TouchLink GUI design concepts go beyond the boundaries of what you can do with our ready-to-use templates, or you are trying to duplicate the appearance of an existing control system. This service provides a TouchLink GUI that is built to meet your requirements. Provide us information on your system application and details on the desired functionality of the interface, along with some design elements such as a company logo, school or company colors, and background images, and with this clean slate approach, our S3 Control System Specialists will build a fully-customized GUI for you.

For more information on Extron TouchLink template modification services contact an Extron S3 Control Systems Representative, or visit www.extron.com/tltemplate