



Ability Newsletter

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iPod by Remote

The iH8 is a docking station for the Apple iPod. It provides speakers and an alarm clock as well.

It also comes with an infrared remote control. This means that the remote control functions could be trained into an environmental control device that would duplicate those IT commands.



Similar to this are the **Logitech mm50** portable speakers.

Both sell for \$130 - \$185 (it is worth shopping around).

ECU Options

Switch Control for Cameras

Digital photography has many advantages for people with a disability, not the least being the fact that a picture can be composed without having to squint through a small viewfinder. Pictures can be reviewed and re-taken if necessary; they can also be edited on a computer and printed on an inkjet printer. Photo albums can be stored digitally on a computer (or on one of the new digital photo albums).

This is all very well, but how do you actually take the photo if you can't press the shutter button? A very limited number of switch-adapted cameras are available and these often have basic features and performance.

Another option is to use a digital camera with an infrared remote control. These are available on some cameras. The infrared signals can be trained into an environmental control device controlled by a switch or other alternative method. The only complication is that the infrared sensors on such cameras are usually positioned at the front of the camera, which means the environmental control device would need to be positioned in front of the camera. This may not be a problem in many cases. A simple solution is to use a dedicated device such as the **GEWA Micro Jack Prog** (\$370) which can be trained to control two functions by switches.



Canon EOS 40D - a camera with an option wireless remote control



ECS Options

Door Control - the Ins and Outs

Control over the external doors in a house is a common and reasonable request by many people with a disability. How can this function be integrated into an environmental control system (ECS) and what are the issues that need to be considered? Here are some points:

- What are the person's options for escaping the dwelling in the event of an emergency, such as a fire? It is most likely that two external exits need to be made available.
- Does the person need full door control or a system that unlatches the door so that another person (such as a carer) can enter? The difference in cost is considerable.
- Does the person need to exit and then re-enter? If so, an RF controller will be required. Most automatic doors come with an RF controller and these can usually be modified for switch access.
- Does the person also need to see who is at the front door and converse with them? If so, a camera and intercom system will be needed, and these often involve further access issues.
- How will the door opening and closing operate? Will the door control need to have features such as "indefinite hold open" to maximise the person's control over the system? Will an obstruction sensor be required?
 - Will a security entry system (such as a keypad) be required for carer access?
 - How will others in the household control the door(s)?



These are just some of the issues that need to be considered when recommending door systems as part of an environmental control system.

- Gemma McDonald



Computer Access

LUCY 4

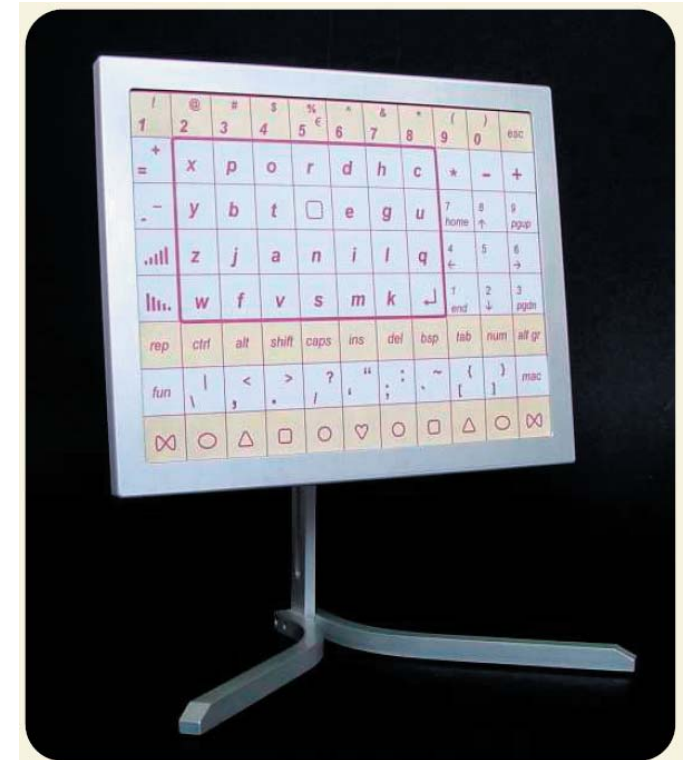
The LUCY is a flexible computer access device with many special features. We have used it mainly with the optional laser pointer, but it can also be controlled by a mouse device or trackball, and by (single or dual) switch scanning. It gives a direct computer access method for text entry and mouse control for people who might otherwise have been forced to use switch scanning as their only option

The new LUCY has USB connections to the computer and is plug and play compatible with PCs running Windows 98SE or later. It will operate without software, but the supplied software gives extra feedback on LUCY options and settings. It also handles firmware updates, which will be updated automatically.

The LUCY has a "frequency of use" layout that minimises the required head movement. It works effectively at long range, extreme angles and even in direct sunlight.

The new model is much lighter than the earlier model (see picture) so a stand is required for effective operation.

The LUCY 4 is available from Ability Technology. The cost for the basic unit is \$2,700 while the laser pointer is an additional \$800.



Computer Access

SlimBlade Trackball Mouse

This new offering from Kensington has yet to be released in Australia. It features Bluetooth connection, so it doesn't use up a USB port. But it does require batteries - a "fuel gauge" indicator lets you know when it's time to change (stated battery life is "up to" 6 months). It can connect over a distance of "up to" 30 feet.

Interestingly the device allows you to switch from trackball to mouse operation.

The US price is \$99.99 but no local price is yet available. It comes with the famous Kensington 5 year warranty.



New Dragon Bundles

Dragon Naturally Speaking Preferred Version 9 is available as part of a bundle.

The **Wireless** bundle includes a **Plantronics CS60-USB Wireless Headset**. It sells for \$679 including GST.

The **Mobile** bundle includes a **Phillips 7630U Digital Recorder**. This records up to 17 hours of long play recording (although it holds only 1.5 hours of high quality recording). It sells for \$489 including GST.

Both bundles are available from Ability Technology.



Computer Access

Pegasus Note Taker

The Pegasus Note Taker is a USB device that captures natural handwriting on any surface, onto a PC in real time. Connection to a PC is required and the information is stored as an image (not as editable text). It is claimed to be possible to convert the handwriting to digital text through the Microsoft Office handwriting recognition facility. The secret is a special optical pen. It sells for \$129 including GST.

Of more interest is the **Pegasus Mobile Note Taker**. This device does not require connection to a computer. It includes a small LCD display and can store up to 50 pages (2 Mb flash memory). It is powered by 2 AAA batteries. Resolution is 100 dpi. It sells for \$255 including GST.



We have not tested these devices ourselves. Reviews indicate that the pen is sensitive to changes in pressure when writing and this can affect the quality of the stored text.

The important thing to remember is that you are creating pictures of text, like a fax, not digital text itself. That requires the operation of the Microsoft software. So there are several steps along the way if your aim is to convert handwriting to editable text.

One reviewer pointed out that a Palm PDA already has handwriting recognition, although this is a modified form of writing called Graffiti. Commercial products such as MobileWrite are also available for the Palm.



Feature

Postgraduate Unit in Assistive Technology New Remote study option

We are pleased to announce that the University of Sydney, in conjunction with Ability Technology, will be offering a postgraduate study option in computer access and environmental control in 2nd Semester, 2008. The course will be offered through the Faculty of Health Sciences and will be primarily aimed at OTs, although other professionals will be able to enrol.

Some will choose to do this unit of study as part of their progress towards a Masters or Postgraduate Diploma. Others can undertake this as a standalone unit of study, for which they will receive a certificate from the University. It is a 6 credit point unit of study.

Apart from a two-day workshop, the course will involve online discussions, critical review of selected texts and a 3000 word case study assignment. This will enable OTs in rural/ remote areas to study, without overly disrupting their normal work and family commitments.

The fees involved in undertaking this unit are set by the University. They are \$1,530 incl GST.

This study option builds on the work we have undertaken in 2006 and 2007 in presenting an assistive technology professional elective for final year OT students at the University of Sydney.



With the festive season rapidly approaching, we take this opportunity to wish all of our readers a peaceful Christmas and a fruitful 2008!



Ability Activities

OT Vacancy

One of our OTs, Lynda Hutchinson, has taken up a position with Novitatech in Adelaide. Lynda has made a fantastic contribution to our work over 4.5 years, but it was time for her to return to her home town after many years in Tasmania and Sydney.

Lynda's departure means we need another OT to join our team. We have heaps of interesting work in the pipeline and the position will suit someone with a passion for assistive technology. We are open to part-time (at least 3 days) or full-time employment. Please contact us for more information. We are probably looking for a start in January/February 2008.

In-Service Training

We recently conducted an in-service training session for OTs at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre in Sydney. We enjoy sharing our work and experiences, so if you would like to arrange such a workshop, please contact us.

Environmental control project

Ability Technology has recently been funded for a project involving environmental control systems (ECS). The project involves the development of a video to promote awareness of ECS technology and options, the further development of a portable ECS assessment tool and implementation of a loan scheme for a range of ECS technologies (with short instructional movies on how to set them up). We will be contacting groups throughout NSW about the project very soon.

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