Ability Newsletter

ABILITY
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BlueSonic

Bluetooth Portable Speakers

This device, from Blue Ant, has some very interesting features. It can be paired to a mobile phone, as long as the phone is bluetooth-enabled. But it can also be paired to a computer and used for VoIP telephone calls. It comes with a USB dongle and software to enable this function. It can be paired with up to 8 separate devices. Built-in DSP helps to reduce echo and background noise.

Another feature is that it can stream music from your computer or PDA over A2DP (Advanced Audio Distribution Profile). It also comes with a cable to plug in your iPod or MP3 player direct.

The device has a jack for plugging in an external microphone. It also has rear magnets for attaching the device to a filing cabinet or other metal surface. Battery life is between 5 and 10 hours, depending on volume. Standby time is 48 hours.

The unit is 195x75x40mm and weights 360g. It comes with a 2 years warranty. RRP is $189 but you can get them cheaper if you shop around.

Computer Options

Micro computers

Ultra mobile computers

Computers are increasingly being used by people with a disability for tasks such as communication and environmental control, as well as standard computer functions. However the size of notebook computers has limited their viability as an all-purpose device. PDAs and Pocket PCs don't run the software required for these tasks.

Two new micro computers may provide a new option. One is the **Sony Vaio Companion PC**. It comes with a 1.2GHz processor, 512 Mb RAM, a 30GB hard drive and Windows XP Pro. It has 1 x USB 2.0 port, Bluetooth, a built-in camera and microphone, wireless LAN and a 4.5" wide Clear Bright Display (1024 x 600). Battery life is "up to" 3.5 hours. The unit weights 517g and is 150.2 x 95 x 32.2 mm. It comes with a Port replicator (with USB 2, Firewire, AV Out, network and DC-IN. Access is via a 64 key keyboard (revealed by sliding up the LCD screen) and a stylus (a Bluetooth mouse can be used also). The screen can be rotated. RRP is $2,499.

Another option is the **Samsung Q1**. It has a 7" screen, a Celeron 900 MHz processor, 512 Mb RAM and a 40 GB hard drive. It also comes with wireless networking, USB 2.0 (2), VGA, DC-IN. Of interest it has a built-in array microphone and stereo speakers. An optional external drive can be CD-RW/DVD or DVD+/-RW. It also has an optional USB ultra-thin keyboard with mouse pointing stick. On the unit itself is an 8-way joystick. It can operate in multimedia mode, for movies, photos and music, without having to go through Windows.

Size is 229 x 140 x 25mm. It weighs 770g. Battery life is 3 hours, or up to 6 hours with the optional 6 cell battery.

Local prices are $1699 for the basic unit, $300 - $450 for the optical drives and $165 for the external keyboard.

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Computers

A Macintosh Comeback?

Some thoughts by one of our technical staff, JEFFREY TAYLOR

Some of the unconverted may think I must be mad switching to Mac for my day to day activities. The main reason I turned to Mac was it reliability and stability. In fact I prefer working on a Mac so much now, that I just bought a new desktop too which is also a Mac. I say this coming from a person who twelve months ago said "I would never buy an Apple product"; look how things have changed.

The high resolution wide screen on my MacBook Pro and iMac allow me to run applications side by side at the same time. You can type a report and check the web at the same time, on screen, side by side, which makes things like research so much easier and faster.

The only thing I don't like about Macs are the way you have to push a CD into the drive.

On a Mac you are still able to use Applications like Microsoft Office, and their version for Mac is very good. Noticeably, the Mac OS X Tiger has very good Universal Access for people with disabilities compared to Windows XP. Eg. built-in speech over & sticky keys. However I noticed that one group of programs runs better on Windows, being Instant Messaging Applications. And of course there are some applications that just can't run on a Mac.

I like how Macs just function every time. It seems as if things don't get in the way of your work as much as with PCs. Also, I don't have to worry so much about computer security, viruses and other threats out there. Microsoft Windows is so complex, trying to do everything; this often leaves open security flaws, where the Mac OS X is based on the world's best operating system - Unix.

- Jeffrey Taylor

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Computers

Two in one - Mac and Windows

More thoughts by JEFFREY TAYLOR

You can now have Mac OS X Tiger and Windows XP on the same system. You heard right this is no joke, no need choose between PC or Mac as Intel Macs run both operating Systems. Although you've been able to do this for several years with Microsoft *Virtual PC for Mac*, it was noticeably slower and nearly unusable. That all changed this year when Apple mentioned they were going to change their Mac processors from PowerPC to Intel. So people started thinking; "Does this mean Intel Macs can run Windows?" In fact there was a competition the first person that could get Windows running natively on a Mac. A few weeks after, Apple came out with "Bootcamp Beta" a program which made it easy to run Windows XP SP2 natively on a Mac.

You can now actually do this in two ways:

1. With Apple **Bootcamp** which boots either of the two operating systems on start up, after pressing the option key; you need to partition your drive. All Windows programs run natively at full performance, such as games and graphic applications just like a normal PC.

2. With a program called **Parallels** which runs the two operating systems side-by-side. Parallels Desktop is unlike Microsoft Virtual PC for Mac, as it doesn't need to emulate the Intel instructions. So it runs nearly natively in performance. (Note: To run Parallels I recommend a minimum 2GB RAM) Unfortunately, to run any operating system side-by-side smoothly requires about 700MB to 1GB RAM allocated to the Virtual System. So this means you can't run stuff like 3-D games in Parallels Virtual System. However most applications are able to run on Parallels Desktop, such as Microsoft Access which, is only available on Windows. The main advantage with the two operating systems running parallel; is you can be working on a combination of Windows and Mac programs at the same time; eg working in MS Access for Windows and editing video in iMovie for Mac. In concept you could run as many virtual machines as you want, being limited only by your amount of RAM.
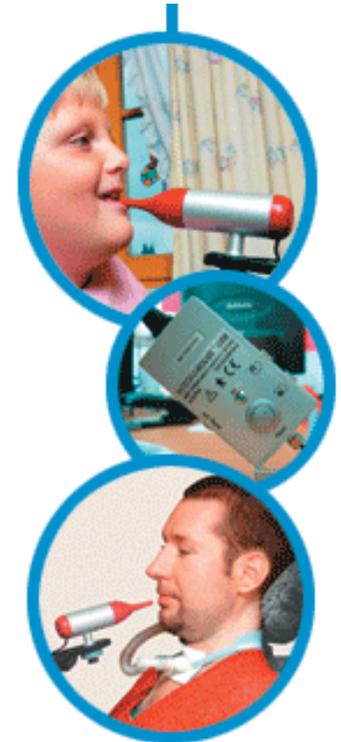
- Jeffrey Taylor

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Computer Access

IntegraMouse

One advantage of this type of device is that nothing is attached to the user. This increases the independence of the user. In addition, mouth-control devices have an advantage over head-control devices in that considerably less head movement is required. This means that there are some people who can use a mouth-control system who are unable to use a head-control system.

The **IntegraMouse** is a mouth operated joystick mouse alternative. Of those currently available, our testing has found that the IntegraMouse is the most responsive and requires the least head movement. We found that it gives great feedback when being moved, making it the most accurate to control. We have also recently trialled the IntegraMouse with a client of ours – a lady with C2 quadriplegia and who was unable to use a head controlled mouse alternative. She found however that she was able to easily navigate around the computer with the IntegraMouse while lying in bed! The mount you can purchase with the IntegraMouse is the Manfrotto Magic Arm with mounting rail. We found that this mount was fairly easy to operate, and most of the moveable parts can be locked using a central wheel lock – this makes positioning easy.

The IntegraMouse is expensive, with a price of $3,450, not including a mounting system. The IntegraMouse is recommended to be used with the Manfrotto Magic Arm with mounting rail; this is an additional $395.

Ability testing of Mouth-Control Devices

Ability Technology is continuing its series of detailed, practical comparative testing of computer access and other devices. We do this with completed impartiality, as a service to all of those who are involved with assistive technology decisions.

Our next test report will cover **mouth-control devices**. Please check our web site for details or drop us an email if you would like to receive a copy of the report (due in the next week or two).

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Mouse

Nomus

This is a mouse alternative that seeks to address "the three main problems associated with mousing ... reaching, gripping & overuse". It incorporates a wrist support which can be positioned effectively in front of a keyboard. This eliminates reaching and enables the workload to be shared whilst both hands are kept in a neutral position.

One hand operates the roller bar to move the cursor whilst the other is responsible for clicking. Instead of the roller function, there is a scroll button which automatically repeats movements upwards and downwards through the document. The scroll button does not require continuous rotation.

As the buttons are set up for left or right hand use, it is easy to alternate tasks, thus distributing the workload on each hand.

The Nomus sells for around $425.

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ECU

Proteor Keo

The Keo is a remote control with a small touchscreen which can be used with direct or switch access. To control an appliance using Keo, just select a picture on the touchscreen, such as the picture of the TV. The screen changes to show TV control options. Select a key to send an infrared signal to operate your TV. You can then return back to the home page to control all of your other appliances. One extra feature here is the ability to enlarge an icon as it is scanned, and to bring it to the centre.

The Keo can control many different appliances including:

* TV, video, stereo and other appliances with an infrared remote control.

* TS Phone with Infrared controller

* Mobile phone (using Keo with Bluetooth)

* Computer (using the IR Receiver for PC).

Access is via direct touch, or by using the optional switch transmitter for switch scanning access. **Setup** is by training infrared signals from your existing appliances into the Keo, then using Keo to control them. Two keyguards are supplied, to assist those making direct selections. However these can be removed for those using a scanning process.

The Screen is monochrome but quite legible. Backlighting is available. Icons can be chosen from the samples supplied with the device.

As an icon-based system, the Keo will appeal to those who do not wish to or who cannot memorise commands. Its output is infrared, but can be easily linked to X-10.

The cost is $1,857 for the basic unit, or $2,409 for the model that includes Bluetooth. The optional IR receiver for PC control is $295 while the switch transmitter is $177.

Overall, a very useful option in this price range.

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Ability Services

Training Seminars
at Ability Technology

The popular Training Seminars in Assistive Technology are on again. These are in-depth, hands-on and comprehensive. Numbers are limited to six, to ensure the full involvement of participants.

There are two seminars comings up:

COMPUTER ACCESS - Friday October 20

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL - Friday October 27

Both seminars are held at Ability Technology, 29 Frenchs Forest Rd Seaforth NSW.

Lunch is included in the cost of $229.

Please contact us if you require further information - but please do not delay!

Workplace Modifications
Ability staff accredited as Assessors

Ability staff have been accredited as assessors for workplace modifications under the new JobAccess program. Our involvement is national, resulting in our staff travelling to Cairns, Toowoomba, Townsville and Brisbane recently! It has given us greater appreciation of the diverse barriers and circumstances that can affect the employment of people with a disability.

We are supportive of these government initiatives, to assist people with a disability in their employment.

Ability Activities

Ability Activities

Training Videos

We have prepared some training videos that guide people in their use of certain assistive technology products. Stage One of this work was generously funded by the Dee Why RSL Club and the Manly-Warringah Rugby League Club. These digital videos will evolve further over the next few months. We also plan to produce a video on environmental control systems.

Staff

We welcome **Monique Jack** as our third occupational therapist. She will assist us in dealing with the large volume of work currently on our plate. We have also enjoyed having **Corvin Pirlog** with us over the past 10 weeks. Corvin is a Masters occupational therapy student.

Remote Support Option

Ability clients are benefiting from an internet-based support system we have implemented. It enables our specialist staff to provide advice, training and technical support to clients without having to leave our office. Special software enables us to share the person's computer screen, while talking with them on the phone. This service may soon be made available to other groups.

Recent Involvements

Graeme presented a paper at a Brain Injury Conference in May and at a Social Justice Conference in June. Ability staff have recently visited Perth, Cairns, Toowoomba, Townsville, Wagga Wagga, Melbourne, Dubbo and Bathurst!

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