Ability Newsletter

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COMPUTER SPECIAL NEEDS SOLUTIONS

ACECAT Flair

USB Graphics Tablet and Mouse Pen

Pen-type mouse devices are not new, but offer an interesting alternative to a standard mouse device. The **Acecat Flair** is a new offering that is inexpensive and has USB connectivity. It features a 5″ x 3.75″ tablet with a cordless pen (which requires an AAAA battery). It works on both PC and Mac. Note that it functions as a very effective drawing tool, but our interest in it stems from its role as a mouse replacement.

Holding a pen is second nature to most of us. However the **Acecat** feels strange at first, for a number of reasons. First, you don't actually have to touch the tablet with the pen for the cursor to respond. Hovering up to about 2 cm above the tablet is sufficient to control cursor movements, even if there are objects (like a piece of paper) between the pen and the tablet. This hovering capability is very different from a touch pad. Until you are used to it you may find yourself creating unintended cursor movements by dangling the pen over the tablet. The second difference to a touch pad is that the area on the tablet is mapped to the area of the screen. In other words, if you point the pen to the top right corner of the tablet, the cursor goes to the same relative position on the screen. You can't do small dragging movements as you would with a touch pad. Again, this is not a weakness, just a difference. With practice, it becomes a very useful feature.

Left mouse clicks can be activated by pushing down on the pen, or from the small buttons on the barrel of the pen. Button functions, click pressure and pen sensitivity can all be adjusted through the software.

It requires Windows 98/ME/2000/XP or Mac OS 8.5 or later. It sells for between $100 and $125.

Pens that read and store data

Quicklink Pen

The QuickLink Pen is an electronic highlighter that lets you copy, clip and store printed text, Internet Links, tables and charts, from newspaper articles, books and documents, and transfer the data to your computer, PDA or text-enabled cell phone. You can scan information directly into any application real-time, or store up to 1000 pages and transfer it at your convenience through the serial port, infrared or optional USB adapter.

It has three modes: **QuickLink** - to capture data on the fly and download at your convenience; **Scan to PC** - to scan real-time into the active cursor of any application which accepts text; and **Beam to PDA** - to transfer data from your address book or notes to your Palm Pilot or Visor. Available from Ability for $389.

Quicktionary II
Reading Pen

From the same manufacturer, we have a pen that reads text aloud to you. Just roll this pen across typed text and it will read the text to you. It can read a single word or whole line. The text is also displayed in large characters on the pen's screen. The pen has a dictionary of 200000 words and it can read the definition to you. You can adjust the speech volume, speed and pitch.
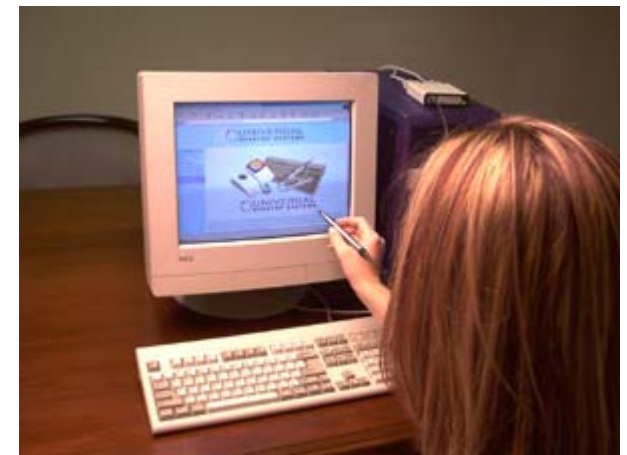
Please note: to use all of the functions it is necessary to press small buttons on top of the pen. Available from Regency Park for $594.

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Light Pens *by Microspeed*

An interesting alternative to a touch-screen. The pen is connected to the computer via a cable. It has a replaceable nosetip. Models are available with one, two or three switches (with programmable functions). The buttons are small, and this may pose a problem for some users.

The Light Pen is pixel point accurate. It offers greater convenience than a touch-screen, without leaving fingerprints and smudges on the screen.

Touch screens and light pens offer intuitive interfaces for people with certain disabilities. However endurance can be a problem when used with a monitor in a standard position, because of the need to hold the arm upright. More creative positioning of the monitor can overcome this problem.

The DT-600 Series Light Pen is available in USB and serial versions, and is compatible with Windows 3.x, 95/98, NT4, 2000, ME and CE.

Pricing is still being confirmed. Contact Abilitytech for details

Unibody style barrel available in stainless steel or aluminum

Cable options include shielded straight, coiled, or optional armor

Field replaceable nosetips

Available in one, two and three switch models

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QUICK GLANCE

Eye control technology

Quick Glance is a mouse replacement device designed for Microsoft Windows 98/2000/XP. It allows the user to place the mouse pointer anywhere on the screen simply by looking at the desired location. Cameras attached to the display detect your eye movements. "Clicking" can be done with an eye blink, a hardware switch, or by staring (dwell).

The eye-tracker is hosted on a PC (200 MHz or faster) running Windows 95/98 or Windows 2000. A video capture card goes in a PCI slot inside the PC. Nothing is attached to the user.

The Quick Glance is a great option for those without any other method of control available. We have several clients who have only eye movement available to them. One possibility is an eye-blink switch, but these can be cumbersome and intrusive.   The Quick Glance, in combination with an on-screen keyboard, gives the person direct control and access to the world of communication.

Quick Glance is sold direct from the USA. Current pricing is US$3950 plus US$150 shipping. Abilitytech plans to bring a unit to Australia, to use in assessing several of our clients for whom this device is likely to be beneficial. Please contact us if you are interested in being assessed by one of our staff for use of this device.

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Keyboards...

Lower case keyboard

Just like it says. This is a standard Windows keyboard with lower case key labels. A better alternative than keyboard stickers, in many cases.
Cost: $76

Ortek MCK-90

This is a compact USB keyboard with a two port bus powered USB hub built in. It is about the size of a notebook computer keyboard. It sells for around $95.

Skyhawk Flexible PS/2 Keyboard

A plastic keyboard you can roll up! Easy to clean perhaps, but reportedly very wobbly to type on. It costs $88.

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News

Road Trip ... North

The Ability Roadshow is moving north at the end of October. FREE WORKSHOPS will be held at Port Macquarie (28/10), Coffs Harbour (29/10), Grafton (30/10) and Tamworth (31/10). Please contact the office for more details. Although the workshops are free, we advise that you book so that we can provide for the correct number of attendees. The workshops will cover the latest in computer access alternatives and home automation options.

Occupational Therapist position

Ability is expanding and we are now seeking another Occupational Therapist to join our team. It is a part-time position, to assist with assessments, training and research. We would like someone who is as excited as we are with the possibilities for modern computer and home automation technology to enhance the independence and productivity of people with disabilities. Contact Ability for more information. Confidentiality assured.

Training Seminars

There are still some spots available in the first of our training seminars, to be conducted at Ability House, Seaforth, on **Wednesday 23 October 2002**. The Seminars, aimed at therapists, rehabilitation counsellors, special education teachers and others, will cover two topics:

1. Home automation (environmental control) options; and
2. Voice recognition.

Each Seminar will be for a half day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), so it will be possible for a participant to attend both Seminars on the one day. Please contact the Abilitytech office for details and bookings.