



Ability Newsletter

Product and Service News

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EasiTrax Low profile joystick by Traxsys

EasiTrax has a joystick that is 1.5 cm high. EasiTrax has three buttons above the joystick which provide left, middle and right click.

A long press (3 seconds) on the left and right buttons locks the joystick into "drag" mode. A red light on the button stays on as long as the joystick is in drag mode. Another press on the button turns off drag lock. These manoeuvres could be difficult for some users. Single button access to drag functions, as with the other Traxsys joysticks, would have been preferred.

A long press (3 seconds) on the middle button allows you to change the speed of the cursor. Five lights will show on the top surface of the unit, and you can increase or decrease the speed by using the left or right click buttons. Clicking the middle button again makes the lights disappear, and locks in the chosen speed.

The EasiTrax runs on Windows and Macintosh computers with a USB connection, although a PS2 adapter is also included. The cost is \$350.



Computer Options



I-Tech Virtual Laser Keyboard

The Virtual Laser Keyboard (VKB) uses both infrared and laser technology to generate an invisible field and project a full-size virtual QWERTY keyboard on any surface.

You can use the VKB (Virtual PC Keyboard) with both your laptop and PC or with a compatible mobile device, Smartphone and PDA. Direction technology based on optical recognition enables the user to tap the images of the keys, complete with realistic tapping sounds, which feeds into the compatible PDA, Smartphone, laptop or PC. The light weight device weighs two ounces and is similar in size to a disposable cigarette lighter. The Virtual Laser Keyboard includes a self-contained, rechargeable lithium ion battery, so it doesn't drain any battery power from the PDA or PC. The battery lasts two to three hours between charges. Price in Australia is \$249.



G-Tech Fabric Keyboard

This is a Bluetooth device and about the same size as a notebook keyboard (334mm x 126mm). But it is only 1mm thick and weighs less than 80 grams (including batteries). The keyboard is designed to be rolled up when not in use so and can fit into a pocket or handbag.

The keys themselves are only slightly raised, so tactile feedback is lacking. A beep accompanies each key press. There is a lag between typing and the words appearing on screen. You also need to press down firmly to ensure your key strokes are registered. It comes with a suite of drivers suitable for connection to Blackberry, Smartphones, PDAs & other handheld devices.

Price in Australia is \$249.



Computer Access



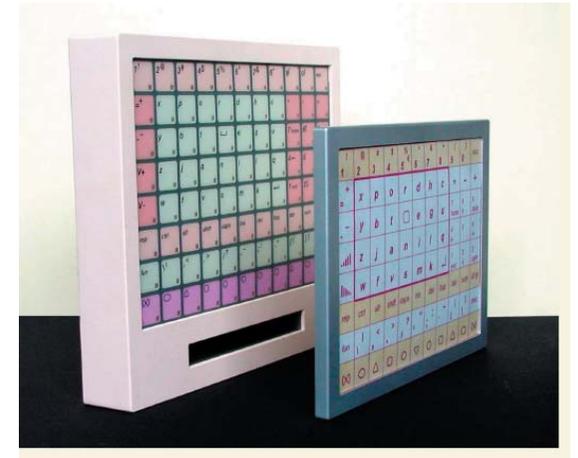
New USB LUCY

Version 4 of the LUCY keyboard has been announced, with shipping expected in the first quarter of 2007. As you can see in the picture, the new model is drastically smaller than the current model. However the input area is only slightly reduced. The new model is 19 cm x 25 cm, with a thickness of only 1 cm. It weighs 870g.

The new model is USB and requires no other external power source. It also comes with a USB socket to enable a pointing device to be installed. Two switch sockets are also included. We have mainly used the LUCY via a head-mounted laser pointer.

Using the LUCY keeps your computer screen free (unlike an on-screen keyboard). There is also no flicker. The LUCY "keys" (photosensitive cells that light up when selected) are arranged in a frequency of use layout to minimise the movement required by the user.

The cost of the LUCY is around \$2,500 (including the laser pointer).



TADAust Connect: Getting Faster

TADACT's popular low-cost dialup internet access service is about to get a lot quicker. New technology in 2007 will increase the speed of dialup access by 5 times through an accelerator.

For those who don't know, TAD offer a low cost dial-up internet access scheme for people with a disability, the aged and veterans. More specifically, the service is provided exclusively for people who possess a Disability Support Pension, Aged Pension or DVA Entitlement Card (subject to conditions). The cost is \$5.50 per month and access is available nationally for the cost of a local call. So far over 15,000 people have taken advantage of the scheme - a great achievement!

For more information, go to <http://www.tadaustconnect.org.au/dialup/> or call 1300 735 439.

Computer Access



New Orbit trackball

The new Orbit trackball is now available in Australia - at last! It features optical technology for greater precision (and fewer problems with dust). The Orbit has proven popular with children, as the ball is smaller than those in some of the popular trackballs. It comes with MouseWorks software and Kensington's 5 year warranty.

The Orbit retails in Australia for \$89. A wireless version is available for \$99. Both are available from Ability Technology.



Dragon Naturally Speaking 9

Version 9 of Dragon Naturally Speaking is available, with a swag of new features. It claims to be 20% more accurate than Version 8. It is also possible to use the software without having to read any training scripts. It supports some Bluetooth wireless microphones and a wider range of handheld devices. The Professional version now includes Citrix support and "Voice Notations" in Microsoft Word. Minimum requirements are still listed as 512Mb RAM and a 1 GHz processor - but if you run any other software concurrently with Dragon (as most people would) these requirements will be very inadequate.

Direct SMS

Sending and receiving SMS messages from an email account may be of interest to readers who cannot use a mobile phone. One such service is called DirectSMS. They charge 22c + GST per message (unless you purchase 1250 or more). There is no software to install and you use your usual email software. Get more info from support@directsms.com.au, or call 1300 724 387 or visit directsms.com.au

Computer Access



Microsoft Vista Accessibility

When Windows XP was released, there was some anguish in the assistive technology field due to a range of incompatibilities with specialised hardware and software. Microsoft claim that won't happen with Vista - they have consulted widely with AT vendors over recent years. We'll see.

What about access in Vista? It will include an "Ease of Access Center" where you can "get quick access to adjust accessibility settings and manage assistive technology programs". Based on your answers to some questions about your capacity to perform routine tasks, Vista will provide personalised recommendations regarding accessibility settings. A new Magnifier will magnify the screen up to 16 times. The Narrator text-to-speech tool has an improved voice and can be accessed without leaving the current active window. Speech recognition is included in Vista - hopefully it has improved on Microsoft's previous efforts in this regard. Other features include the on-screen keyboard, keyboard shortcuts, mouse keys, sticky keys, filter keys, visual notifications and captions.

We'll give you our impressions once Vista is released. But for now, we urge readers to exercise caution before rushing to upgrade. Compatibility is something we like to see and verify, not just read about.

Eye Twig

EyeTwig uses a basic web cam to convert facial expressions and movements into computer control. It features no headgear, no dots and what is claimed to be high accuracy. The Tracker Pro version includes 'stare to click' and voice commands.

Range is limited to about a metre, and a plain backdrop is required. A demo version can be downloaded from www.eyetwig.com. You will need a web cam as well as a reasonably fast computer.

Retail prices are US\$199 for the Tracker and US\$275 for the Tracker Pro. The latest version [0.96] was released on 30 October.



Home Control



Adis Doors

The Adis **AccessPro** retro fits on existing internal and external doors. Through a small radio frequency button controller (like that for a garage door) it enables a person to open the door and then close and lock it without having to come to the door and without having to use a key. It still permits normal key and manual access. An electrician is required to fit the door.

Ability can arrange for the remote control unit to be switch adapted. The door can also be controlled (from the inside only) through an X-10 Universal Module.

Adis have also announced the **Autoslide**. Autoslide is an automatic door system which attaches to new and old manual patio sliding doors, to enable the door to open and close automatically. It has been designed for the elderly and for those with a disability. It works on doors 2100-2400mm high and 720-1200mm wide. It is activated through wireless pressure sensitive mats on either side of the door. It comes as a DIY kit.

The cost of these doors is very reasonable. Contact Sharron at Autoslide, on 1800 600 602.



National Relay Phone Service

It is now possible for people with physical disabilities to gain phone support through the National Relay Service. This service will then connect them to any number of their choosing.

How do you dial the National Relay Service (NRS) in the first place? If you are unable to dial a handset, then you can use a switch-adapted phone and set phone (through the Delayed Hotline feature) to dial the NRS automatically. Telstra has a switch-adapted phone Telstra Big Button/ Multipurpose Phone) and also Technical Solutions (TS Phone - www.tecsol.com.au).

This is the simplest way for a person with a disability to make calls from their home phone.

Please contact Ability staff if you wish to discuss this further - (02) 9907 9770

Leisure Options

Mouth-Controlled Joystick for Playstation 2, X-Box, Game Cube

The Kye joystick mounts on a table or wheelchair. It has one mouthpiece that operates as a joystick. It has three holes for sip/puff (6 switches) and 4 lip buttons, giving access to all 12 buttons on the PS 2 controller. An adapter cable is available to enable it to access the X-Box, Game Cube and PCs. The cost is US\$225. Details available from: www.quadcontrol.com/joystick.htm.



Switch-adapted cameras

We've come across some switch-adapted cameras at ORCCA Technology (www.orca.com/photo.htm). Available models include the Kodak Easyshare C300 (US\$150) and the Vivitar Vivicam 10 (US\$50). They also supply mountings for the cameras.



Also available are the Bescor Motorised Pan and Tilt Controller (with hand control, or 2-switch left/right control or 4-switch left/right and up/down control). These are US\$160, \$190 and \$215 respectively.



Ability Services



Research Activities at Ability Technology

Research has always been an important part of our work at Ability. We like to reflect on what we are doing and also to contribute to the wider sector. Over the years our research has covered a range of issues surrounding the use of technology by people with a disability. This year has been no different. We are preparing our final report on the **TechAssist project** - a study of remote support technology to assist people in the education sector (students, teachers and parents). People were very positive about the experience - especially those in rural areas. It provided a convenient and effective conduit for tech support, training and advice. It was funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

In 2007 we will commence a research project as part of the **Employment Innovation Fund**. We will be exploring whether pre-equipping people with productivity-enhancing assistive technology makes them more employable. At present the Workplace Modifications Scheme funds equipment for the worker and workplace *after* a job has been obtained.

We also continue our unique **product comparisons**. Most recently we have completed a study of mouth-controlled mouse devices. This and previous tests are available on our web site.

From the Workshop

Bigkeys Problem

The BigKeys keyboard is a marvellous device. However one of our clients recently found a problem with it. Our client was using Windows Accessibility features under Windows XP. However when they did so, and activated FILTER KEYS or SLOW KEYS, they found that the "F" key on Bigkeys didn't work!



Ability Activities

Ability Activities

Staff - New OT Position

Due to our expanding work, Ability is seeking a full-time occupational therapist to join our team early in 2007. We are looking for someone with a passion for and experience in assistive technology. Contact Graeme Smith or Lynda Hutchinson for more details. Closing date is 25 January 2007.

Monique Jack has completed her short-term engagement with us. Thanks Monique for your invaluable assistance! We have also enjoyed having **Tina Yui**, an OT honours student, with us over the past 6 weeks.

Recent Trips

Graeme Smith gave talks at Albury and Canberra recently. Lynda and Lucy have been travelling far afield, including Emerald (Q), Brisbane, Gold Coast and Melbourne.

Ability Involvements

Graeme Smith has been invited to join a Communication and Technology Technical Working Group, coordinated by the NSW Department of Health and also involving the new Lifetime Care and Support Authority (LTCSA) and the NSW Department of Disability Ageing and Home Care (DADHC). The aim is to develop consistent guidelines for equipment provision under government schemes.

University Course

The successful 2006 "Technology for Life" course, a professional elective for final year OT students at Sydney Uni, will again be designed and taught by Ability senior staff.

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*Happy Christmas
to all our readers and
best wishes for 2007!*

