

Ability Newsletter

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Windows XP

New accessibility features

Microsoft has expanded the range of accessibility options in Windows XP. However we suggest you not upgrade to the new operating system until you are sure that any special devices or software you have are compatible. Going on past experience there are considerable delays in getting updates from the manufacturers of specialised computer access equipment.

Nevertheless, there are some tantalising new accessibility features in XP Professional. You can read all about them at www.microsoft.com/enable. Here are some that caught our eye:

Text-to-speech (TTS) is the ability of the operating system to play back printed text as spoken words. An internal driver, called a TTS engine, recognizes the text and, using a synthesized voice chosen from several pre-generated voices, speaks the written text. A TTS engine is installed with the Windows XP operating system.

Narrator is a text-to-speech utility for people who are blind or have low vision. Narrator reads what is displayed on the screen—the contents of the active window, menu options, or text that has been typed. Narrator has a number of options that allow you to customize the way screen elements are read.



Products

Remote Assistance allows you to share control of your computer with someone on a network or the Internet who can help you solve a problem. Using Remote Assistance, an administrator or friend can view your screen and control the mouse pointer and keyboard while troubleshooting the problem.

ClickLock enables you to invoke a drag function by holding down the click button for a set period of time (customisable by the user).

Many of the previous accessibility features have been improved, such as the cursor controls and the on-screen keyboard (now with a 'Hovering mode' for automatic clicking).

Logitech Cordless Freedom iTouch Keyboard

This PS/2 and USB keyboard also provides two additional USB ports. It also has a detachable palm rest and one-touch multimedia controls. It sells for \$199.



Products

Dragon 6

New version of Naturally Speaking



A new version of Naturally Speaking has been released. The familiar Preferred version now comes in two variations – Preferred (Home) and Preferred (Business). The Home version has limited capabilities compared with the Business version, even though it uses the same 250,000 word vocabulary. For example, the Business version is fully integrated with Microsoft Office, Corel WordPerfect and Lotus Notes.

The Home version is only fully integrated with Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect. The Business version also allows you to create voice macros, import custom vocabularies, work on the Web by voice and to save your dictation with your document – features that used to be reserved for the more expensive Professional version. It also allows you to “speech enable” your own applications.

Both Preferred versions allow you to hear your own dictation read aloud and to have any text, such as e-mail, read aloud in synthetic speech.

EasyJack

This one has received plenty of publicity recently. A base unit is plugged into a fixed phone line and a power socket. The remote unit can be plugged into any other power socket in your office or home. You then plug a telephone, fax machine or modem into the remote unit. You then have an instant, free-range telephone extension. It sells for \$238.

Products

Microsoft Office Keyboard

This PS/2 and USB keyboard has a Touch Pad, Scroll Wheel and extra customisable buttons. It has special customisation for Microsoft Office. It is PC and Mac. The price varies from \$99 (discount) to \$129 (normal retail).



VersaKey keyboard

Not new but not be forgotten. A standard keyboard with 60 additional keys that can be easily programmed to store text. The text is actually stored in the keyboard, so that you can retrieve them from any system (at work or school, for example). You can store frequently used numbers, standard text, your address, etc. Perhaps a useful memory aid as well. It is available through Ability for \$539.



Products



Microspeed USB Trackball

The Clear-TRAC trackball has the familiar Microspeed shape but with USB connection for PC and Mac. An adapter is available that allows previous Microspeed PS/2 trackballs to be updated to USB. The Clear-TRAC costs \$242 while the adapter costs \$66.

Turbo Mouse Pro Wireless

This is the traditional Kensington trackball shape, but now with wireless connection. It works with Windows 98, Me, 2000 or XP with USB, and also with Mac OS 8.1 or greater (including OS X). It also has a PS/2 connection.



Guards for Expert Mouse Pro

Ability now has Perspex guards designed to suit the Expert Mouse Pro (USB). They are in stock now for \$79 each.

Research

Remote assessment and support

Major project in the Hunter completed

Ability has completed its study of remote assessment and support options for people with disabilities in rural areas. The study, funded under the Commonwealth's *AccessAbility* program, took place over the last 18 months. The full report will soon be available from our Web site and also the *AccessAbility* web site.

In essence, we found that new users had more frequent and wider ranging problems than experienced users. Support needs were most intense in the early months. About 40% of support needs could be solved over the phone, but most of the remainder required personal visits. As a side issue, the study confirmed that people with disabilities have a lot to gain from using computers.

We also tested videoconferencing as a means of assessing a person's computer access needs. We found it was promising but really gave only approximate results. There are also practical problems, like getting to a videoconferencing centre. But in the future, with widely available broadband services... who knows?

From the Workshop

Emkay RF-5615 Wireless PC/Telephone Headset

This device has been tested recently at Ability and works very well. A single switch allows you to move between a telephone conversation and a speech recognition task on a computer. We can easily modify the switch to make it a very accessible single lever.



Ability News

Cable Internet

Ability has recently installed high-speed cable Internet facilities at our Seaforth office. This will make a huge difference to our research and communication possibilities. What a buzz!

Price Changes

Not good news... some prices have changed upwards recently, through forces beyond our control. There are new prices for the *Goldtouch Ergonomic keyboard*. This follows a change in distribution arrangements in Australia. But the device still represents good value and is still cheaper than alternative products.

The *Track IR* also went up in price recently. We did tell people that the early price was an introductory price. But it is still great value and sells for a cheaper price here than in the USA.

Christmas celebration

Staff and Board members enjoyed a wonderful Christmas BBQ at Clontarf on 7 December. A total of 17 people attended - our work just keeps growing. Wait until you see our plans for 2002!

We've done our bit to get the celebrations rolling - now it's over to you! Have a great Christmas and may 2002 bring your dreams to life!

Our best wishes,

Graeme, Leigh, Shannon, Lesley, Alan, Michael, Matthew, Janelle and Helen.



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