



Ability Newsletter

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USB switch interface

New device with plenty of features

This device has 12 switch sockets that allow users to run pre-selected macros by hitting a switch. Separate commands are available for press and release. It is easy to program the device through a standard keyboard when the device is set to "Programming Mode".

Keyboard combinations as well as Mouse clicks, scrolls and cursor movements can all be programmed. It supports up to 5 mouse buttons. Two layers of macros can be created.

This is an extremely versatile device. It sells for \$319 inc GST from Ability.



Free E-Books

If you have ever wanted to read one of the old classics, *Project Gutenberg* may be for you. This website began in 1971 and gives you access to over 6000 eTexts that are free to download (all of which were published before 1920). The site has novels, reference books and plays. There is a wide range of texts available, from *Alice in Wonderland* to the works of Shakespeare to *The Evolution of Man* (from 1911). As the texts have been converted to etexts by volunteers, a variety of file types have been used, including standard .txt (the most common), to .pdf and .html.

An added bonus on this site is the inclusion of music (such as Bach and Mozart). These however require additional software to be installed.

Talx

PDA for the blind

TALX is special software written for the Nokia 9110 Communicator (a device that combines mobile phone with personal organiser features). It enables a blind (or illiterate) user to:

- Write and read SMS and e-mail
- Send out fax messages
- Surf the Internet with WAP
- Manage contact information and dial phone numbers from the phone book
- Use the appointment calendar
- Customize the phone settings according to their personal preferences

Talx will soon be available in Australia through *Qantum Technology*. Contact them for pricing. The Nokia itself sells for around \$1700.



PDF Aloud

PDF Aloud is an add-on for Adobe Acrobat Reader. It allows the text in PDF files to be read aloud, with the text highlighted as you read. However it is only available as an option for users of textHELP *Read & Write 6.0* or *Gold*.

For your eyes only

Controlling a computer with eye movement

There are a limited number of options for controlling a computer by eye movements alone. Three that are known to us are **QuickGlance**, **Eyegaze** and **Visioboard**. They all use cameras to focus on eye movements, converting the information gained into cursor movements on the display. Nothing is attached to the user. The **Visioboard** uses one camera to track eye movement while the other is used to track head movements. The **Visioboard** and **Eyegaze** both come with a PC.

As far as we know, these systems are not distributed in Australia. One huge barrier is cost: they range from A\$9,000 to A\$40,000. But for a person whose only capacity is eye movement, one of these devices would give them precious communication opportunities and some independence at home.

Check out the specs at: www.eyegaze.com, www.eyetechds.com and www.metrovision.fr



BigKeys - Smaller prices

New distributions arrangements mean that the popular BigKeys keyboards are now available at a lower price than previously. The new recommended retail price will be \$299. Lowercase stickers are no longer available, but the BigKeys can be ordered with lowercase caps (for \$30 extra).

NEVO

Home automation through a Pocket PC

A long-anticipated development is now taking place. NEVO turns an HP iPaq Pocket PC into a powerful infrared home automation controller. New devices can be added via the Internet, Device ID or brand. Different configurations can be set up for each room. Clusters of events ("activities") can be set up, giving single command operation of different appliances and facilities. You can see more about the NEVO at www.mynevo.com.

One interesting feature is that Code 0167 in the library of commands will operate the X-10 IR543 controller. This is a device that allows infrared control of appliances through the house wiring. This means the NEVO-powered Pocket PC can control infrared and X-10 appliances.

The significance of this development should not be missed. Having such features in a generic device means lower cost and more consistent development. But obviously more needs to be done. More user control options (such as scanning/switch, external pointing device, speech input and output) are needed - this will require developments at both the operating system and hardware level.

But at least we have a start. The iPaq 3950 costs \$999, the 3970 \$1299 and the 5400 \$1499.



From the Workshop

Smart NAV for Mac

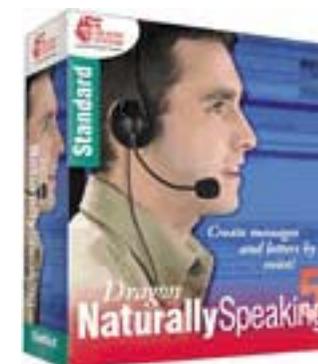
We have previously announced the release of the Mac version of the *Smart NAV* (formerly the *track IR*). However we must report that the Mac version is not quite as flexible as the PC version. It doesn't support the same level of cursor acceleration, which means that some Mac users will not have sufficient head movement to use the device.

Dragon Naturally Speaking on Windows XP

We noted in the previous issue that Dragon Naturally Speaking Preferred seemed to run slowly under Windows XP. We think we may have found the answer. XP has its own speech recognition engine. When this is turned off, Dragon runs much more quickly. Our tests are continuing.

Using drag functions to control table column width

A client reported problems in using the drag button on a Microspeed trackball to change the width of a table column in Microsoft Word. We did some testing and found the problem appears to be limited to Office 2000 running under Windows 2000 only. The problem also did not occur with a Kensington Expert Mouse. Our tests are continuing.



Intrepid technical staff, Alan Bimson (L) and Matthew Stevenson (R)



News

Farewell to Michael Berryman

Last week we bade farewell to Michael Berryman, who has been our Occupational Therapist for almost 3 years. Michael contributed more than just OT skills. He was a useful computer technician and was usually able to do some makeshift electronic work when required. His replacement, **Lynda Hutchinson**, is settling in well. Lynda brings with her plenty of experience from a similar role in Tasmania. She expands our software expertise and our services to children with disabilities.

Farewell to Ryde office

We have recently vacated our room at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde. With our current base at Seaforth consolidated, we have not used our room at Ryde very often in recent months. Medical staff at the centre require additional space and will make good use of the facility. Re-development decisions regarding the Royal Rehabilitation Centre have still not been finalised, but we hope to be part of the new complex, wherever and whenever it comes into being.

North Coast trip

Graeme Smith is to visit the Far North Coast of NSW (**Lismore** and **Tweed Heads**) during the week of March 17-21. If you would like an assessment, training or any other service, then please contact the Ability office ASAP. Time slots are filling up fast.

Conferences

Like most of those who attended, we were very impressed with the **Christopher Reeve** ("Making Connections") forum. It was extremely well organised and drew a lot of publicity to disability issues.

Graeme Smith is presenting a paper at the **Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association** NSW State Conference on 14 March 2003.

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