Ability Newsletter

WE'RE BACK!

Not that we've been away... we've been busy getting our new web site up and running. We thought that it might take away the need for a newsletter. But many people have told us they missed our Newsletter... to be honest, we've missed it too. We enjoy the opportunity to let you know about new products, new research, new people and to make comments on disability matters without fear or favour. So we're back! Four issues per year is our target. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy preparing it for you. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.

Feel free to pass the Newsletter on to anyone who might be interested.

Away we go! Here's what's in store with this issue:

HOUSEMATE LITE and MOBILE

The HouseMate Mobile is an Android-based switch controlled ECU (environmental control unit). It incorporates the Click2Phone system and extends it to provide control of home devices through a trainable infrared unit. This device connects to the phone via Bluetooth and can control up to 250 codes in 16 grids. Other features include auditory scanning and backup to SD card or over the internet. It sells for $1,590. The Lite version is also a very useful product, featuring up to 20 commands that can be trained from other remotes, one or two switch scanning, auditory feed-back (user recordable) and macros. It sells for $990 and may suit those who have previously used the Sicare Senior Pilot ECU.

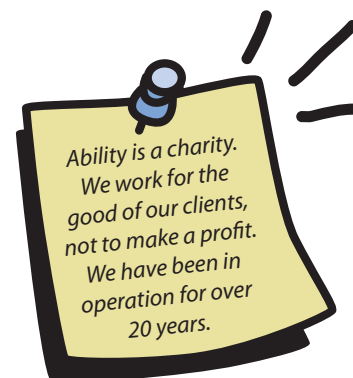Both products are available from Technical Solutions in Victoria.

HouseMate Mobile

HouseMate Lite

TAWK - voice control for Android

TAWK is a free Android app that lets you launch apps, find information, change settings, send SMS or email and dictate text (to the Clipboard) all by voice. You can also make phone calls by voice. The Pro version (small cost) allows you to create commands to send URL commands. This is a feature we are testing at the moment, to allow an Android device to be used to control home appliances via URL commands to a receiving device (such as the RedEye).

Ability is a charity. We work for the good of our clients, not to make a profit. We have been in operation for over 20 years.

SOLUTIONS - a new resource for finding products

Part of Ability's new web site is a substantial resource for anyone seeking solutions in the areas of computer access, telephones, personal security, literacy, work productivity and environmental control options. The products are organised in terms of function/need rather than product type. We are updating the list frequently as new options become available.

Note that these are products we have identified. Many of them we have tested, but we have included others for information purposes. Most are available in Australia through local suppliers (contact us for details) but some need to be purchased on-line. The links take you to the manufacturer's web site, as this is usually the most complete and up-to-date information available on each item.

You get to the solutions page this way: **www.ability.org.au/solutions/assistive-technology**

Select the activity or appliance you have difficulty with to explore the solutions available:

Using a keyboard	Using a mouse	Navigating around the computer	Seeing the computer screen
Email	Browsing the web	Playing computer games	Writing
Reading	Spelling	Maths & Drawing	Memory
Planning & Organising	Manipulating books & newspapers, turning pages	Accessing hard copy print material	iPad, iPod & Tablet
Mobile phone	Landline telephone	TV, Foxtel, DVD, radio, music	Lights & lamps
Air conditioner	Fan & heater	Bed	Call buzzer for assistance
Doors	Windows and curtains	Camera	Playing with toys

ABLELINK - support for cognitive impairment

ABLELINK products help those with cognitive impairments. Endeavor Desktop provides a simplified environment for the user. Endeavor "sits on top" of Windows and Mac computer operating systems, and customised content is pushed directly to individual home screens. Instead of searching for applications or information, the simple click of a button launches content with individualized settings.

The Base version of Endeavor Desktop includes content palettes for Web Browsing, Visual and Audio Media (including built-in simplified players), and "Toolbox" or "System" links to launch any program or application on the host computer. The Pro version of Endeavor includes all of the base functionality as well as palettes for step-by-step task creation/playback and picture-and-audio based Email. Single user versions cost US$299 and US$499.

A Pocket Endeavor version is also available for Windows Mobile devices (unfortunately not for Android or iPad/iPhone).

Other related software is also available: see www.ablelinktech.com.

Pocket Endeavor

iOS5 - more access for those with physical impairments

APPLE has at least listened to those (like us) who have been calling for some alternative to the hard Home button on the iPod, iPhone and

iPad. This was a barrier to many people with physical impairments who were unable to press this button, even though they could touch, swipe and do other maneouvres on the touch screen of these devices. iOS5 overcomes this problem brilliantly. A new Accessibility feature called "AssistiveTouch" provides a floating white button always visible on the screen; when this is touched, a palette window opens which includes a Home button and other options including accessing and creating gestures and shortcuts to other apps. Apple says "It also supports the use of adaptive input devices, like headsets and switches" but it is not yet clear how this feature operates.

Infrared Lights

We all know that devices like the TV have IR remotes with signals that can be trained into ECU devices. But this is not usually the case with wall lights and lamps. We have tracked down an infrared globe (www.worldofthought.com.au) and also several wall lights that, once installed, are controlled by infrared. Such devices simplify ECU requirments and minimise the need for more complex (and less reliable) X-10 modules.

Memory Aids Study

Ability has received funding to undertake a comprehensive review of electronic memory aids for people with cognitive impairment. This will include a literature review, evaluation of previous studies and resources, consultation with therapists and others in this field and the development of a comparison tool. Outputs for this project include an e-book and dissemination of results at a number of rural workshops in NSW.

RURAL WORKSHOPS

In August-September 2011 Ability conducted assistive technology workshops in 15 country centres throughout NSW. Topics covered included environmental control options, phone options and iPad/iPhone possibilities. We met lots of very interesting people and visited some wonderful places. We look forward to an opportunity to follow-up with more visits in the future. Later in 2012 we will visit a few country centres to present our memory aids research findings.

USER VIDEOS

Ability completed a project in which four people, who were extensive users of assistive technology, describe in their own words what impact this has on their lives. Each video is around 15 minutes.

We loaded these compelling videos onto YouTube and they can be found here:

http://www.youtube.com/user/abilitytech/videos

Portable Games Devices

This study will examine the suitability of portable games devices and games for people with traumatic brain injury. We know from our past research that computers and games devices can provide self esteem benefits for people with cognitive impairment, but that many off-the-shelf games are too complex and demanding for this group. Portable games devices will now be scrutinised and evaluated. The output will be a resource on our web site to guide parents, therapists and disability workers in the choice of suitable systems.

ABILITY PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

*The **ARATA National Conference** will be held in Sydney, **August 22-24**. This is a unique event, bringing together suppliers, therapists, researchers and people with a disability. See www.arata.org.au for details.*

ECU E-Book

This is the result of many months of testing and evaluation of environmental control systems. We have set up X-10 and C-Bus devices and appliances at our centre in Seaforth and this has enabled us to undertake comprehensive testing of devices to determine which ECU devices work with what appliances. The e-book includes detailed information about each item's capacity and functionality, as well as its compatibility with the devices tested. The result is a unique set of practical information to guide people in the selection of available and suitable options.

The first version of the e-book was distributed to a few people for comments and evaluation. A second edition is now being prepared, with updated information, a revised layout and improved compatibility with devices such as the Kindle.

Contact us (info@ability.org.au) to be on the list to receive the 2nd edition, when available.

ABILITY News

Assistive technology is an exciting field! Always something new and always new benefits emerging for people with a disability. Monitoring these rapid changes requires a dedicated team - and that is the heart of Ability's work. In each of our Newsletters we will introduce you to one of our team members.

We will also take this opportunity to describe in more detail one of our services.
But it might be useful here to recap some of the main features of Ability. First, we are a **charity**. That means we are devoted to our client group, not to making a profit. Second, we have been doing our work for **over 20 years** (not as a charity initially). Finally, Ability travels! Although we are based in Sydney, **we travel all over NSW** (and sometimes beyond). We have a good range of remote support technology available as well.

Regards
Graeme Smith

ABILITY Staff - Bronwyn Simpson

Bronwyn is an Occupational Therapist who joined the Ability team in 2011. Since graduating in 2003 she has specialised in rehabilitation of adults with neurological injuries, including stroke, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy and progressive conditions such as Parkinson's Disease and Multiple Sclerosis. This provided her with a broad range of experience in assessment and intervention, however she developed a particular interest in adaptive aids and technology.

Bronwyn has also been involved in teaching roles at a university and rehabilitation college for student Occupational Therapists and Allied Health Assistants. She is currently completing a Masters of Applied Science, investigating handwriting retraining after stroke.

Bronwyn is a valuable member of our team and joins our other occupational therapists, Gemma McDonald and Rowena Clarke.

ABILITY Services - Technical Support

We all know the benefits that can flow when a person with a disability has suitable computer and home control equipment. But what happens when something goes wrong? It can be a nightmare having to deal with hardware companies, software companies and operating system companies, all of whom are likely to blame each other! Many tech support services will simply wipe your hard drive and start afresh - with the loss of all your data.

Ability has always taken tech support seriously. We have the expertise to deal with nearly all problems that arise. Some can be solved over the phone, while others can be dealt with over the internet (whereby we can control your computer from our computer). Sometimes a personal visit will be required.

In the disability field, technical support is required from a service that knows the special equipment involved and has the sensitivity to deal with people with a range of disabilities. That's what we offer at Ability Technology.

Coming Up
We are keen to test the **CONTROL OMNI** from GEWA. It has a dynamic picture/icon display, a built-in phone module for text messaging or regular phone calls and auditory scanning.

iTunes U for the iPad/iPhone/iPod gives you access to a wide range of courses from institutions throughout the world, including a huge catalogue of free educational content.

Ability Technology

ABN 26 090 463 997

29 Frenchs Forest Rd, Seaforth NSW 2092 Australia
P: 02-99079736   F: 02-99079599   E: info@ability.org.au   W: www.ability.org.au