Ability Newsletter

Product News and Views

Ability News

Hands Free Mobile Phones

At last!

For many people with disabilities it is not just the inability to walk that restricts their mobility. If they are unable to use a telephone independently then they are limited as to where they can go and for how long.

Recently mobile phones have emerged that enable the user to dial calls with their voice. They can access a pre-selected range of destinations just by saying the name of the person or organization. The phone hangs up automatically. As with most modern phones, they can be set to answer automatically.

The only problem with these new phones is that you must press a small button to activate the voice-dialling feature. Otherwise the phone would be making false dial-ups continuously. These buttons are not accessible to people with upper limb or hand impairment.

One of our technical staff (Alan Bimson) has come up with a simple solution. This is how it works.

1. Get a hands-free kit (either earpiece or headset) designed for the new voice-dial phones. These kits have an activation button on the small microphone unit. This is the button you are supposed to use to switch on the voice-dialling feature.

2. We can modify this unit by running a lead from the small microphone/button unit to a switch socket. This means you can activate voice dialling by plugging in the switch of your choice.

3. So far you would have to wear the earpiece or headset all the time to use the voice-dialling feature. We can get around this with another device. It provides a small amplifier and speaker instead of the earpiece. You could attach the speaker to your shoulder, say, with Velcro.

4. Viola! You have a phone you can use with voice control.

Ability will undertake the modifications for you. You send us your voice-dial mobile phone. We will supply the adapters, test the unit, and send it back to you. The whole modification will cost $170 plus postage. If you are interested in this service, please contact our office. Let us know the exact model of mobile phone you plan to adapt.

**Product
News**

Running PC Peripherals on a Mac

There has always been a greater variety of peripherals such as keyboards and trackballs available for PCs than for the Macintosh. The USB system on more recent Macs goes some way towards overcoming this problem, as a manufacturer can make a USB version that suits both PCs and Macs.

However many of these peripherals, especially keyboards, are still only available in PS/2. This denies Mac users access to useful devices such as the Cherry Compact keyboard.

We have tested an adapter that enables PS/2 devices to be used on a Mac with USB. It is the **Y-Adapter**. We tested a range of PS/2 devices with it and found they all worked happily with our iMac.

One word of caution however. When you use a PC keyboard on a Mac remember that there is no Apple (Command) key. This means you will be unable to use keyboard shortcuts for tasks such as opening documents or printing. We are investigating keyboard mapping utilities that may enable us to overcome this problem.

The Y-Adapter is available from Ability Technology for $169.

The Cherry Compact keyboard - one of the PC devices you can use on a USB-Mac with the Y-Adapter.

Services

Environmental Control Service

A new range of Ability services

We are pleased to announce a new service for those requiring independent advice on environmental control options. Our service is available to individuals, rehabilitation organisations, insurance companies and disability organisations.

The elements of the service include:

* **Determining the required system infrastructure**, in partnership with the individual involved.
This will identify what appliances and facilities need to be controlled. These may include lights, doors, curtains, TV, radio, video, telephone (fixed and mobile), gates, security system, sprinkler systems, beds, heaters and air conditioners. Some of these items will be controlled through the house wiring; others will be infrared or radio controlled.

Budget limitations needs to be specified, as well as patterns of care and tenancy arrangements at the residence.

* **Determining the most suitable method of control**
This will be matched to the person's capabilities and the required system infrastructure.
Controlling devices include remote control units, scanning systems with switch selection and voice operated systems. We can also use a computer to control an ECU or use a voice system through a remote microphone and remote speakers.

* **System specification**, whereby we detail the actual modules required and their placement.
This will require house plans and a video (if a direct visit is not possible). It also gives clear guidance as to the work required by an electrician.

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COMPUTER SPECIAL NEEDS SOLUTIONS

* **Supply of modules**.

The modules required as part of the infrastructure can be supplied by AbilityTechnology. These will be required, regardless of what controlling system is chosen. However, apart from computer-based systems, the actual controlling systems (which range in cost from several hundred dollars to nearly $20,000) will not be supplied directly by Ability. We can however procure these items for you.

* **Install system and provide training**.

If required, Ability can provide an electrician and arrange the installation of the whole system. We would then provide training and support as part of this package.

We are excited by these new services, which have been carefully planned over the past 9 months. They build upon our major research in this area, as well as detailed testing undertaken by our technical staff.

Please contact the Ability office for more information.

**Ability
News**

Web-based assessments

We are currently undertaking some fascinating research into the possibility of doing assessments over the Internet. Using an advanced system of artificial intelligence, the system will guide a client through a detailed series of questions. Answers given in one question or section will determine the questions that follow. The intricate logic of the system will give an accurate "word picture" of the person's computer needs, in situations where an in-person assessment is not possible.

We expect to begin beta testing on the system by the end of August.

Brain Injury Computer Centre

Many of our clients in recent years have suffered traumatic brain injuries. We have explored innovative ways to adapt computers to their needs, including modified keyboards/mouse devices, larger cursors, memory prompts, simplified word processors, web browsers and e-mail programs, budget templates, speech output, etc.

These clients often rely on a predictable set of activities to give their lives routine and structure. We have often bee asked if we could provide a computer-related activity for them.

As a result we are planning to offer a Computer Workshop for several hours each week for people in this situation. Computers would be provided and participants would be supported and encouraged to use computers creatively. It would be enjoyable and stimulating. It would take place at our Seaforth venue (wheelchair access).

Numbers will be strictly limited, so contact Ability if you are interested.

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