

# Ability Newsletter

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## Brainium DreamMax

### Windows CE portable

The gap between devices such as the **AlphaSmart 3000** and full notebook computers has been a frustration for many. The **HP Jornada 820** was the perfect candidate but, as we know, it was dropped from the HP range.

Enter the **DreamMax**. It has a clamshell design, a bit reminiscent of the Apple E-Mate some years back. It weighs 2 kg, has an 8" colour display, external monitor port, TV output, built-in networking, 2 PCMCIA slots, a floppy drive, USB and serial ports (supporting external keyboards and mouse devices) and 6 hour battery life. The Windows CE 3.0 software includes Pocket Office software. It is powered by a 206 MHz StrongARM RISC processor. Storage memory comes through Memory cards (Flash or PCM-CIA). A 56k modem is optional.

Too good to be true? It certainly has an excellent range of features. It costs around \$950 US per unit. Australian prices have yet to be confirmed. But the unit will soon be available through Ability Technology.



## Research

## *Brain Injury Research*

### *Ability report now available*

At long last the Ability report on recreational benefits of computers for people with brain injury has been released. The 40 page report includes a substantial literature review that examines numerous approaches to the use of computers for people with brain injury, especially the “compensatory” and “restorative” approaches. The review notes that computers often serve to bring motivational benefits, even when these were not the main purposes of the studies concerned.

Six participants from the Brain Injury Unit at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre, Sydney, were involved in the study. Issues of computer access, the selection of software and the identification of recreational benefits were considered for each participant over a 4 week period.

Each of the participants derived benefits from the computer activity. For some it provided a connection with past enjoyments and skills. For others it was an important communication tool. For all it provided motivation and enjoyment.

In terms of computer access, we noted that almost all participants had an initial urge to touch the computer display. However all of these were able to become proficient quite quickly with either trackball and joystick devices. A large cursor helped most. Nearly all of the participants benefited from a simplified or customised interface. Many gained from either small or large keyboards. **Importantly, none of the participants would have been able to be productive with a standard computer without some modification or customisation.**

Software preferences varied considerably, although much care was required in the selection of software for each person. Age appropriateness was important. We concluded that the judicious use of mainstream software may be a better option in many cases than specialised cognitive retarding software.

Much more research is required in this area. The full report can be downloaded from our web site: [www.abilitytech.com.au](http://www.abilitytech.com.au)



## Products

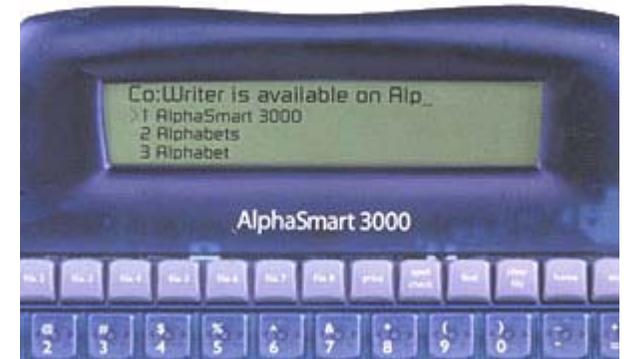
# Co:Writer for the AlphaSmart

## SmartApplet now available

The word prediction features of Don Johnston's **Co:Writer** are now available for the increasingly useful AlphaSmart 3000. This opens us new possibilities for students who rely on this type of device.

Ability first introduced the AlphaSmart to the disability sector several years ago. We have been thrilled to see it progress and bring benefits to many. As well as being a useful device it is also a robust one - we have had very few problems with them over the last five years.

The only downside about the new Co:Writer applet is the price: \$329 including GST. However I guess we must appreciate that the development costs of such products are substantial.



## From the Workshop

We have had several difficult technical support issues arise recently where the computer system was a mixture of new and old components. Adding new components to an old computer can produce unpredictable problems. Support can be tedious and expensive. It is usually better to upgrade to a new system rather than tinker with the old one.

We have just recently been setting up a network of Macs for the **Disability Discrimination Legal Centre** in Sydney. We see such work as within our disability focus. We can now offer such a service (including an effective FileMaker Pro shared information system) to other disability organizations.

Ability has a proud record of technical support for people with disabilities and injuries. Our rates are much lower than commercial companies. And we have an old-fashioned commitment and loyalty to our customers. This means we never leave people in the lurch.

## Comment

# *ARATA Conference, Brisbane 2001*

In spite of the Ansett debacle and the war on terrorism, the ARATA (Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association) Conference was held successfully in Brisbane in early October. Nearly 300 delegates, mainly therapists, rehab engineers, some teachers, some researchers and quite a few consumers attended.

The involvement of consumers at this conference was most welcome. It was also great to have some visitors from the US, especially in view of the crisis at home. Marcia Scherer and Kathleen Sleeman in particular made great contributions. There were the usual hard-working trade displayers, living that fine line between wooing potential customers and having coffee spilt all over their expensive equipment. As with most ARATA Conferences, there was lots of matching of faces to names.

There was some discussion about ARATA itself, especially its political role or lack thereof. Complaints about government policies and programs abounded, as usual, but because ARATA sees itself as non-political, these issues were not translated into action, as usual. Which is annoying, especially with another Federal election upon us and another opportunity missed to push legitimate assistive technology (AT) issues. To me there is an important difference between raising and articulating political issues on the one hand, and engaging in direct political activity on the other. The feedback and insights that emerge at ARATA conferences need to be given political shape by someone. Otherwise the conference acts only as a therapy session, a de-briefing.

The development of assistive technology is shackled to government policies and programs, whether we like it or not. The AT fortunes of the people we serve will depend to a large extent on these policies and programs. Working harder is not enough.

*Graeme Smith*

**Ability  
News*****Hunter Project***

Our Hunter project, looking at videoconferencing and remote support options for people, is drawing to a close. We are currently examining support data and also interviewing participants. A final report will be prepared by end November, and will be available at our web site (as well as the Accessibility site) soon after.

***An Ability computer?***

Ability is currently evaluating the option of assembling our own computers. This would be a significant change for us, as we have previously been strong advocates of brand name computer systems. And they would still be our preference in situations beyond our direct range of support. But for local customers, an Ability computer will be a real option. We are confident we can get high quality components. We would also be able to build system to the specific needs of customers. We are finding now that delays are caused when specific configurations are unavailable from vendors. We believe we can build systems quicker and at a lower cost, without compromising quality. Contact us for details.

***New staff member***

We welcome **Janelle Ellis** who has joined Ability in a marketing role. Our new logo and info pack are both fruits of her work. She will be reviewing our advertising and marketing material, as well as undertaking some special development work.

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