



Ability Newsletter

DASHER

Exciting new text entry interface

Product and Service News

- 1 Dasher
- 2 Z-Pen
- 3 Wireless headset
- 3 Phone solutions
- 4 Ability Training Day
- 4 New Training Service
- 5 Ian Shearman - a Tribute
- 5 GST Fiasco
- 6 Ability News

"Dasher is like an arcade game: 'Attack of the killer alphabets' perhaps" (Financial Times). That's probably a fair description. As you move the cursor to the right, you are presented with letters moving towards you. The letters grow larger as they approach. Language models determine the most likely letters to follow what you have written. Rather than select text (by clicking) you actually steer through the letters to create words. You are zooming in on an alphabetical library, steering as you go. It also "learns" from your patterns of writing to help improve its accuracy.

Any pointing device can be used. It has been used successfully with *Quick Glance* eye-gaze system, resulting in speeds of up to 25 words per minute.

We have had a short play with Dasher and find the concept very exciting. Some practice is involved in adjusting to the new style of text creation. We are certainly planning to trial it with some of our clients. A new version (3.0) is due out by the end of September.

This exciting interface is the work of The Inference Group, supported by the Gatsby Foundation and by a partnership award from IBM Zurich Research Laboratory. The main scientists involved were David MacKay and David Ward from the Department of Physics at the University of Cambridge.

Dasher is FREE for download at www.inference.phy.cam.ac.uk/dasher. Versions of Dasher are available for Windows 95/98/NT/2000/XP as well as Linux and Pocket PC.

Z-Pen

The notion of a mouse pen is not new. However the Z-Pen has some interesting features. Its shape provides for a comfortable grasp. It comes with a special mouse pad. It has four programmable buttons and Sensiva symbol navigation software.

Mouse pens such as the Z-Pen are comfortable in use. But if your work involves frequent interplay between keyboard and mouse, then the process of picking up and putting down the pen will slow down your work considerably. On the other hand, use of a pen device allows for great flexibility in the positioning of your mouse device. It would be ideal for sustained mouse activities.

The Z-Pen is expected to be available in Australia for around \$100.



Wireless headset

We have several clients who like to move around when they dictate text into their computer. This is because of discomfort when sitting in the one place.

One solution to this need is to use a wireless headset. One such device is the **Emkay Wireless Headset**.

It sells for \$525 from Abilitytech.



Voice dial phones

New generation mobile phones continue to offer features that are favourable for people with disabilities. New Ericsson models have, for example, a voice dial feature that can be activated by saying a "magic word" rather than pushing a switch or button. This means a person can make a phone call without using their hands at all. We understand the T65, T39 and T68 have this feature.

When these phones are used with a hands-free kit, they can be set to Auto Answer. A person can then receive calls automatically without using their hands.

To complete the system, Ability has a small amplifier/speaker unit that attaches to the earpiece of the hands-free kit. When the small speaker is attached to the user's shoulder, this creates a total hands-free solution for the user, with reasonable privacy as well.

Training...

New training service for schools

Ability is now able to offer a training service for schools. Our specialised staff can offer training in a range of hardware and software, including:

- * Speech recognition
- * Intellikeys
- * Discover: Kenx and Discover: Switch
- * Clicker 4
- * Read n Write

and many other packages. Please contact Ability for more details.

Training Days at Ability House

As part of our commitment to training, and to share our expertise and insights with others, we have begun a series of Training Days at Ability House, Seaforth. These days will feature specialised training in speech recognition and home automation. Each session will include hands-on practice with the equipment, discussion of research findings and guidelines on how to recommend this equipment to others. The first day is set for **Wednesday 23 October 2002**.

The Training Days are particularly aimed at therapists, rehabilitation professionals, special education teachers and others. But all who are interested are welcome to attend.

Please contact Ability for details regarding costs and bookings. Places will be strictly limited, so we suggest you book early.

Ian Shearman

A tribute

Some of our readers would have heard of the passing of Ian Shearman last month. Ian worked for the Northcott Society in the area of technology for people with disabilities. He was well known for his energy and passion and was a frequent attendee at expos and conferences. He will be missed. We express our sincere condolences to his family.

We wish to honour Ian's memory in a special way. One of our plans is to fund a technology scholarship for a young person with severe disabilities who undertakes a tertiary education course. We have commenced raising money for this activity. It will be named the **Shearman Scholarship**.

GST shambles

It seems that people with disabilities have been duded by the GST - something we feared but hoped wouldn't happen. The poor wording of the GST legislation, especially Schedule 3 of the GST Act, has resulted in the GST re-appearing on special software and items such as environmental control systems.

Even before the GST we had great trouble with the sales tax system as well. The taxation system is based on the fear that by giving concessions to people with disabilities, others will sneak a benefit as well. So to avoid that possibility, the concessions to those who need them are unnecessarily restrictive.

This is consistent with the mediocrity and lack of vision that characterises government policies on assistive technology.

News

Road Trips ... South Coast

Ability staff will be visiting the south coast NEXT WEEK. We will be conducting workshops in Nowra and Batemans Bay on 9-10 September, before attending the VORN Expo to be held at Wollongong TAFE on 12 September. There is still time to contact the office if you would like an assessment, training, technical support or if you would like to attend a workshop.

... north Coast

We are also planning a north coast roadtrip, from **28-31 October 2002**. At this stage the trip will extend to Coffs Harbour and Grafton. Please contact our office if you are interested in training services (including in-service), workshops and assessments.

Training Seminars

The first of our training seminars will be conducted at Ability House, Seaforth, on **Wednesday 23 October 2002**. The Seminars, aimed at therapists, rehabilitation counsellors, special education teachers and others, will cover two topics:

1. Home automation (environmental control) options; and
2. Voice recognition.

Each Seminar will be for a half day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), so it will be possible for a participant to attend both Seminars on the one day. Please contact the Abilitytech office for details and bookings.

Conferences

Graeme Smith will be presenting papers at the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association conference (19/9/), the Computers in Education conference (30/9) and the Catastrophic Injury conference (28/11).

ABILITY TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

ABN 26 090 463 997

29 Frenchs Forest Rd Seaforth NSW 2092

Post: Private Box 44, 145 Sydney Rd Fairlight NSW 2094

Ph: (02) 9907-9736 Fax: (02) 9907-9599

Email: info@abilitytech.com.au Web: www.abilitytech.com.au

