



Ability Newsletter

Adjustable Tables

Need not cost the earth

People who use their wheelchairs when they access their computer usually benefit from a table that is adjustable in height. The most common of these have variable adjustment provided by a wind-up handle. They are especially useful in situations such as schools and assessment centres.

But many users only need to adjust the height of their tables occasionally. Having the expense of a continuous wind-up facility can be unnecessary.

Ability can supply the adjustable table shown. Its height is peg-adjustable from 610mm to 930mm. Its basic dimensions are 1175 x 585mm. Extensions are available, full length or part length, with or without a cut-out. A full length extension increases the depth of the desk from 585 to 825mm.

These tables are sturdy and can support the full range of equipment a user is likely to need. But it is good to know that occasional adjustments in height can be made if, for example, a person changes their wheelchair.

The cost normally is \$375 for the table and \$125 for the extension. **For a short time Ability is offering both for \$420 - a saving of \$80.** This will be on a first-come-first served basis, so be quick!



Product and Service News

- 1 Adjustable tables
- 2 Mini Keyboard with Touch Pad
- 2 Mobile phone hangups
- 3 Foot pedal keyboard
- 3 Micropoint Mouse
- 4 Toughbooks
- 5 Mouse control by voice
- 6 Ability News

Mini Keyboard with Touch Pad

This is a conveniently sized keyboard with 88 keys. It has 12 function keys and an embedded numeric pad. It connects to the computer through two PS/2 ports.

Its dimensions are 289 x 227 x 27. It weighs 0.72 kg and has a built-in wrist support. This keyboard is well priced at \$159.



Voice Hangups

Developments in mobile phone technology have brought them tantalisingly close for many people with disabilities. Voice dial capability, initiated with a "magic word", in conjunction with a hands-free kit, means a person can access a range of phone numbers with their voice alone. The news is not completely good, as we believe that one cannot hang up from a user-initiated call by voice alone. We have taken up this matter with the various phone companies and hopefully the matter will be rectified (user experiences welcome at this point - please email us with your stories).

However few people like to have an earpiece in their ear all day. We have small amplifiers that will convey the earpiece sound through a small speaker. This costs around \$80.

Remember that Ability can adapt the hands-free kit so that an external switch can be used to activate the voice dial feature and to hangup calls. This modification costs around \$90.



X-Keys Foot Pedal Keyboard

This unusual device is available in USB or PS/2. It operates as a standalone keyboard or in conjunction with a standard keyboard. Each of the three pedals accepts multiple keystrokes or keyboard combinations (up to 13 keys each). Programming is simple, through a standard keyboard. Great for repetitive keys in spreadsheets and databases. Supports both Windows and Mac. Cost is \$399.



Micropoint Mouse

This device (formerly called the Felix) is a cross between a touch pad and a mouse. The small knob (for want of a better word) glides effortlessly across the pad area. It is not detachable, so the user's movements are limited.

However the buttons on the device are very small and are located on the knob itself. This means that a clicking program (such as Dragger or Point n Click) would sometimes be required.

Another interesting option to consider! Cost is around \$265.



Toughbook

Rugged notebook computers

These notebooks are designed for those in trades and professions where their portable computers would be exposed to dust, moisture and rough handling. Does that sound familiar? Yes, some of our kids and other clients give their special equipment just as solid a workout. So a notebook with special features to withstand rugged use is of interest to those who must recommend notebook computers for clients.

Cheaper notebooks have plastic cases that can be easily damaged, along with the fragile LCD screens within. Stronger notebooks, with magnesium alloy cases, have been only available in expensive business-level machines.

The new Panasonic Toughbooks have a number of special features:

- * They have full magnesium alloy cases
- * Some have moisture-resistant casing
- * They have hard drives that are shock-mounted and components that have flex connectors
- * They are dust-resistant
- * Some have touch screens
- * Some have special LCD screens that have high visibility in sunlight.

The Toughbooks range from around \$6,000 to \$10,000 in price, but they would work out cheaper than replacing damaged notebooks. My only concern is their weight (3-4 kgs). We often recommend lighter notebooks for students and others, as this may reduce the likelihood of dropping the device in the first place. So it still may be better to get a lightweight business-level notebook (which usually has some shock protection anyway, to defend the notebook against slippery lobster-mornay-smearred fingers) than a Toughbook. Ability is a reseller of the Toughbooks.



Mouse control by voice

Controlling mouse functions by voice would be useful for many people with disabilities, so we decided to have a closer look at some of the options. Tests were done on a 1.3 GHz Compaq with 512 Mb RAM and Windows XP Professional.

Dragon Naturally Speaking

Dragon seems to be very slow under Windows XP. We found it to be fairly accurate in recognising commands and dictation however it is slow in responding to them. *Mouse Grid* – where the screen is successively divided up into a 9-panel grid – is not a desirable mouse alternative. It has some difficulties especially when working with drop down menus. Dragon is designed to be used with voice commands rather than by using the voice to control the mouse (so you say 'File/New' rather than use the Mouse Grid option). There is the option of using a direction/distance command (*Mouse Up 5*) however this only works over short distances (maximum is 10mm). There is an option to have the cursor continuously move in a certain direction (*Move Mouse Up*) however slow reaction times on our test computer made this option untenable.

IBM ViaVoice

Voice Mouse we found to be the easiest to use in relation to mouse control. It seems to be the most intuitive mouse operation using a direction/distance command (*Move Left 2 inches*) or a direction/speed command (*Move Up Slowly*). The program was quick to respond to the commands. Unlike *Mouse Grid*, this method does not interfere with drop down menus.

QPointer

This is a new program which is based on the Microsoft Speech Engine. Of the three, QPointer was the hardest to train as it frequently misunderstood what was being said. It was also the least accurate when in use. The program works by the user saying a keyword, for example 'Microsoft'. The program then 'tags' (using numbers and letters) all items with the word 'Microsoft' in their name that are visible on the screen. The user then says the tag number to select the item. An interesting concept, but limited in practice by the low accuracy of the underlying speech recognition engine.

NOTE: Q-Pointer is a new program and this was a preliminary test. We are undertaking a more extensive evaluation of the product in the next few weeks and will report on the results.

Overall, we found all of these options annoying to use and time consuming. ViaVoice was the best of the three. But our advice would be to find a direct mouse control system rather than rely on voice alone.

News

Lobbying

We have been lobbying politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra, to encourage the development of an assistive technology policy in Australia. We are encouraging them especially to take seriously the potential for assistive computer technology to assist people with disabilities to obtain and retain jobs.

'Making Connections' - 27-28 January 2003

The forum that featured Christopher Reeve was a stunning success. A huge turnout, extremely slick organisation and a great program combined to make this a memorable event. There was a real buzz at the Forum and we enjoyed meeting lots of people at our stand in the Showcase. Congratulations to the person who made the event happen - none other than our Ability Board member, **Joanna Knott!**

Microsoft Certification

Well done to **Matthew Stevenson**, our intrepid technician, who has passed his Microsoft MCSA, CompTIA (A+ Hardware and Software; Network+) exams with flying colours. He is now a fully authorised service and networking technician

Technology Workshops

We'll keep you posted for our next round of trips and workshops. The best way of finding out about these is to join our e-mailing list. Just send an email to the address below and asked to be placed on our mailing list.

Assessments - How to Get the Ball Rolling

If you are interested in an Ability assessment, then the first step is to complete a **Client Information Form**. These can be found on our web site, under "Advice". Just complete the form and then email, fax or post it to us. We will then contact you to discuss the next step. There is no obligation.

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

