

Windows 8 - Worth the Wait?

It would be fair to say that Windows 8 has met with a mixed reaction in the community. The reaction in the disability community has also been mixed. There has been some hostility to an interface that some feel is more at home on a tablet device than a desktop computer.

In terms of accessibility features there have been some gains (see a good summary at: <http://www.disabled-world.com/assistivedevices/computer/windows-8.php> and also <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/products/windows8/default.aspx>).



www.microsoft.com/enable/products/windows8/default.aspx.

One of the main gripes has concerned shutting down. The proper way of shutting down Windows 8 is through the Charms menu, which can be opened by moving your mouse to the top right corner and then sliding down (a very awkward gesture), or hitting Windows

Key-I. Then you click the Power button and select Sleep, Shut Down, or Restart. A further option is simply going to the Desktop and hitting Alt-F4. This pops up the familiar Windows Shut Down dialog box. None of these options is as simple as the previous version, on Windows 7. (We have however had success in placing a Shut Down icon on the desktop.)

There are also some compatibility issues, although these seem to be gradually

rectified (such as iTunes not working with Windows 8). We are still testing a range of assistive technology devices and software for compatibility, as there is usually a lag involved in achieving compatibility with new operating systems.

Many have criticised the non-intuitive nature of the new desktop, with key commands hidden from view. Others have

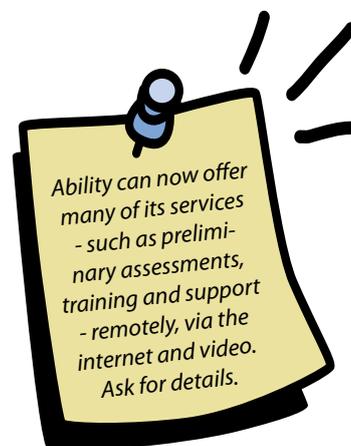
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questioned whether it is realistic to have a single operating system for computers and tablets.

Turning on a Windows 8 device for the first time can be a daunting experience. But perhaps that is normal with something so new and different as this. Greater comfort comes with more familiarity.

We may just have to get used to it, as new computers mostly now come with Windows 8 pre-loaded.



Practical Design Fund

Ability has received Australian Government funding to develop a resource, to help prepare for the NDIS (now Disability Care Australia). Our funding, under the Practical Design Fund, involves the creation of an interactive multimedia house with appliance "hot spots" that link to movies and information about assistive technology solutions. Users will be invited to include basic information about their disabilities so that device options can be tailored to their capacities. This will be optional. Users will also be linked to their nearest assistive technology service, for more information.

An exciting project!

ABILITY PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Victoria Roadtrip - iPads and More

Ability Technology has been funded by State Trustees in Victoria to undertake a series of workshops on iPads and other tablets in rural centres in Victoria. The workshops are aimed at, first, describing the benefits and weaknesses of tablets in general, especially in comparison to computers and dedicated devices. Second, the issue of access will be addressed. Finally, a careful comparison of iPads, Android tablets and Windows 8 tablets will be included. Workshops will be held between 6 and 15 May 2013. There is no cost to attend. Places are limited so please hurry if you'd like to attend.

We have always been concerned about the plight of people in rural areas with regard to assistive technology and this has been reflected in our past projects and initiatives. This new project builds on those foundations.



NEWCASTLE EXPO 3-4 May 2013

Ability will be participating in the exciting *possABLE IDEAS Expo*, to be held on 3-4 May at Newcastle Entertainment Centre. We are hosting a stand and presenting workshops. More details available from <http://2013possableideasexpo.com.au/>

Ability Research Centre

We are excited to have received funding from Trust Company to undertake comparative testing of assistive technology devices. We have commenced this work by examining wheelchair-based environmental control solutions, head and mouth computer access options and mobile phone voice control. Other technologies will follow.

Good quality, independent, comparative testing will give users and prescribers more objective information regarding equipment options - something that is sadly lacking currently. The testing will involve people with a disability and therapists.



Friedreich ataxia Research Project

Ability Technology has just completed a significant study on the assistive technology experience and needs of people with Friedreich ataxia (FA). It involves a detailed analysis of the experiences of 8 volunteers who participated in the project. Some recommendations were made regarding how people with FA might be better connected with the assistive technology resources and services that might assist them.

Making your iPad LOUDER

The iPad has emerged as a much cheaper speech generation option than many of the dedicated speech devices. Great software such as Proloquo2Go on the iPad have helped generate this trend.

Without getting into the pros and cons of the iPad v. dedicated speech devices, we can observe that the iPad does not of itself have sufficient volume to generate speech in many situations. Some form of volume enhancement is required if the iPad is to be used for this purpose. (Also the iPad is not as robust as purpose built devices.)

One solution is to use additional speakers from one of the many Bluetooth speakers that are available. These are wireless and often quite small. But some people would find it a nuisance to have to carry around separate speakers.



Bluetooth speaker

Another option is the GoTalk case. As well as providing a protective case and carry handle for the iPad, it does not have any electronics in the case requiring charging. It works by channelling and redirecting the sound to the front, yielding a more consistent and richer audio performance. Volume is increased by an average of 3.2dB across all measured frequencies – almost doubled. It sells for around \$100.



GoTalk Case

The iAdapter (below) provides a a strong protective case for the iPad and a hi fidelity dual amplified speaker system, powered by rechargeable batteries. It sells for \$365 from Communicate AT.

Ability Facebook Page



If you want the latest news on assistive technology then go to the Ability Technology Facebook page. Here you'll find the same insightful information about new technology options for people with a disability as you get from the Ability Newsletter, only much quicker! Join in the discussions, add your comments, share your experiences. Check it out now!



iAdapter

TALKING TABLETS - tablets with phone

The Samsung Galaxy Note 8 is an Android tablet that also functions as a phone. This feature is also shared with other mid-sized tablets, such as the Nexus 7. Such a convergence of devices does offer an attractive possibility for many people with a disability.

All we need now is to add voice control for an environmental control system!



EASYSWITCH - convenient switch interface

For a very small cost, the HelpKidzLearn EasySwitch offers a plug and play option for switch access, without the hassle of cables.

The EasySwitch dongle connects to a USB port on your computer. You then pair your switches and you are ready to play switch accessible games and activities such as Smarty Pants, Splat the Clowns, Five Little Aliens and many more. The device is reported to work with a wide range of other switch accessible software, but more details on this will emerge when the EasySwitch hits the market in April. Red and yellow wireless switches come with the unit but there is no provision to plug in other switches if the standard switches are not suitable.



EasySwitch

There is no software to install and the EasySwitch works on both Windows and Mac computers. It will sell for \$269 here.

TAP.it - tough touchscreen

TAP•it stands for Touch Accessible Platform Interactive Technology. The main feature of the TAP•it is the 42" LCD monitor which is made of military grade, shatter-resistant safety glass. This is extremely robust and allows for any program to become touch accessible. It reportedly is able to recognise the difference between an arm resting on the the screen and a finger intentionally tapping an image.

Another important feature of the TAP•it is that it has motorised adjustments to accommodate for a range of situations, adjusting from around 1.4 metres to under 20 cm in height and tilt adjustment from 0 - 90 degrees. Commercial grade locking casters keep the workstation stable.

TAP•it supports a range of input methods, including head pointers, switch/scanning, trackballs, joysticks and on-screen keyboards. It can be used with any software that you currently use on your computer.

Note that TAP•it is not a computer but a display. You need to plug in a computer in order to operate it. Using a carefully mounted laptop would retain the mobility of the system.

Tap.it sells for under \$8,000 in the USA but somehow that translates to over \$13,000 here...



TAP.it

CANBERRA WORKSHOP - iPad Basics - 10 April

Bronwyn Simpson

*Ability Technology, in conjunction with Hartley Lifecare, will be conducting its next assistive technology workshop in Canberra on **Wednesday 10 April, 2013** from **2-4 pm** at Hartley's assistive technology centre, 6 Hodgson Place, Pearce, ACT. The topic will be **iPad Basics** and will include how to set up an iPad, getting an Apple ID and iTunes account, how to arrange your desktop and how to use the built-in apps.*

To make a booking call Hartley on 6282-4411.

BUTLER DOOR SENSOR OPENER

Door control systems can be complex for people in a wheelchair. The Butler uses a compact wireless key velcroed under the wheelchair seat to open doors. It uses a secure Wireless RFID Key and infrared proximity sensing to activate an existing powered door opener, door lock, garage door, powered gate, elevator door or parking lot access gate, all completely hands free. Its Proximity Sensing Range is adjustable from 0.75m- 3.0 m.

It can be used in parallel with a second system e.g. door button or key pad. The key can be programmed to work with multiple doors.

The Butler sells for US\$1200. Further info from <http://www.broadenedhorizons.com/butler-door-operator>. Note that we have not yet tested this device.



Budget Door Unlatcher

One of our technical staff, Alan Bimson, has developed a basic door unlatcher that would enable a person with a disability to grant access to a visitor remotely. It involves using a 12 volt door striker powered by a basic 12 volt powerpack, with a switch by a single 240 volt AC, RF controlled module with RF remote. The RF remote could be switch adapted.

All the parts are available from Jaycar for about \$110, plus the cost of switch adaptation and the switch itself. We'll be testing this soon.

VITALCALL with switch access

VitalCall now have a universal transmitter available, which will enable any switch to be used to activate the unit. When pressed, the switch activates the universal transmitter and sends the activation signal to the PRU base unit. Details available from

<http://www.vitalcall.com.au/ProductsAndServices/Pages/UnitAccessories.aspx>

FREE VICTORIA WORKSHOPS - iPADS and MORE

Dr Graeme Smith

Ability Technology, with funding from State Trustees in Victoria, will be conducting a series of workshops in country Victoria on the use of iPads, Android tablets and Windows 8 tablets for people with a disability. The workshops are FREE. The itinerary is as follows:

- * **Mildura - Monday 6 May**
- * **Bendigo - Tuesday 7 May**
- * **Wangaratta - Wednesday 8 May**
- * **Traralgon - Friday 10 May**
- * **Warrnambool - Monday 13 May**
- * **Ararat - Wednesday 15 May**



Please reserve your place - email to info@ability.org.au

Endeavor Desktop - Simplified Interface

Ablelink, a USA based company, make a range of technology products designed for people with cognitive impairments. Endeavour Desktop is one product that may assist people who find the standard layout of a computer complicated to use.

Endeavor Desktop is a simplified computer environment. Rather than needing to navigate the standard computer desktop, the user can open programs from the simplified Endeavor Desktop. The desktop is designed to be clear and simple, without distracting or unnecessary information. There are no hidden menus, and only icons for the desired programs are shown. These icons are large, and can be customised with symbols, photos and spoken or recorded instructions. Endeavor Desktop comes with several simplified programs built-in, including a music player, video player and photo gallery, email and software that can display task sequencing prompts: a series of instructions for performing a task, which can include photos and recorded instructions. Apart from these built-in programs, Endeavor Desktop can launch any other program that is installed on the computer, e.g. Solitaire. These programs will open in a window in front of Endeavor, and are closed using the standard 'Close' button in the top right corner.

Endeavor is simple to navigate. On each page, there is a 'back' and 'home' button. An exit button closes Endeavor Desktop and returns to the usual



computer desktop, however this button can be hidden. Settings are accessed by double-clicking a small logo at the top of the screen, so it is unlikely that the user could inadvertently change settings or make a mistake of any consequence. Because all icons and buttons are large, Endeavour Desktop is easy to use on a touch screen computer. The large buttons and spoken instructions could also make Endeavor Desktop a suitable option for someone who has low vision.

Setup of icons and programs is required to use Endeavor. Ongoing setup may be needed to add new photos and music as required. A manual is available, but it is likely that training from someone familiar with the program would be desirable. Lots of video tutorials are also available.

Endeavor Desktop is available for Windows and Macintosh computers and can be purchased on-line from Ablelink for \$499. Group environments e.g. schools may consider purchasing the multiple user edition for \$1299, which enables multiple users to have their own desktops set up on a single computer.

For more information or purchase, visit the Ablelink website: <http://www.ablelinktech.com>.

Endeavor Desktop is available for trial loan for eligible consumers through the Enable NSW Environmental Control and Computer Access Systems Pilot Project:
<http://www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/home/services/ecs>

Equipment Loan Pool

EnableNSW has launched a pilot project to create a loan pool of computer access and environmental control devices. Occupational therapists are able to borrow devices for trial and access comprehensive clinical and technical support through the trial period. If trials are successful, prescribers are able to apply for permanent allocation of the equipment for their consumer.

Enquiries can be directed to EnableNSW on 1800362253 or Ability Technology 02-99079736.

MOBILE MAGIC CARPET

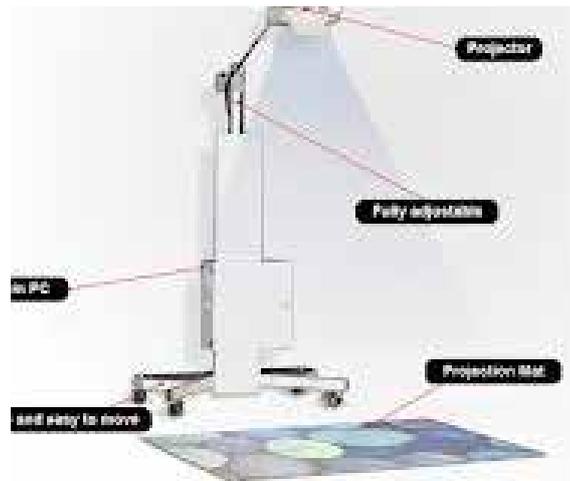
The Mobile Magic Carpet projects games, activities and images onto a projection mat on the floor that users can then interact with, by moving on or over the projected image. It is a portable interactive floor system that projects down from above. This feature means that users can access the system whilst sitting in a wheelchair (projects onto trays), in a standing frame, laying on the floor with a projection sheet above them, projecting on to a table, floor or any other horizontal surface.

It can then be used in a range of educational settings by encouraging exploration and fun. It can easily be customised to suit individual requirements and can recognise group involvement. It requires only minimal movement and can be activated by light.

It comes with a Content Suite with over twenty activities.

It supports a range of access methods: trackball mouse, touch (Inclusive Interactive Plasma and LCD screens), eyes (Tobii PCEye) or movement (Magic Carpet motion recognition). The angle and height can be fully adjusted to suit.

The Mobile Magic Carpet is available in Australia through <http://linkassistive.com>



CANBERRA WORKSHOPS

Ability Technology, in conjunction with Hartley Lifecare, conducts regular workshops at Hartley's assistive technology centre, 6 Hodgson Place, Pearce, ACT. Topics are determined closer to the dates, but are always topical and stimulating. People with a disability, their family members, therapists and those working in the disability sector, are all welcome. Email info@ability.org.au to be on the mailing list. Future dates are:

- * Wednesday 12 June
- * Wednesday 14 August
- * Wednesday 16 October

ABILITY News

■ We hope to soon include some Zigbee devices in our environmental control testing centre at Seaforth. Zigbee offers an alternative wireless protocol for controlling home appliances - at a low cost.

■ A new filing system doesn't sound very exciting, but it certainly makes life easier for Sandra Kulhan, our admin

assistant. The files are now stored in large cabinets and are loaded vertically - no drawers.

■ Ability is gradually expanding the range of services we can offer via the internet, through Skype and similar systems. While face-to-face services are strongly preferred, we have been surprised how useful a videoconference interaction

can be, for advice, training and technical support.

■ There has been a fantastic response to our E-Book on environmental control options. We are continually adding to the number of devices we can include in the resource. The e-book sells for \$60 (\$120 for organisations and libraries) and is available from Ability.

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 has undertaken a share of our regular workshops and assessments in Canberra, as well as participating in our recent research project on Memory Aids. She will be presenting papers at the Occupational Therapy Australia National Conference in July in Adelaide.

ABILITY Services - Technical Support

Reliable technical support is essential to maintain continuity in the use of computer systems and related technology. People with a disability come to rely on these systems for all manner of activities, to give them greater independence and to be connected.

We have technical staff at Ability to assist. Initial contact is

by phone or email - we will try to ascertain the problem. For existing customers, we provide 30 minutes of free support. This is often sufficient to solve the problem. We use software to log on to a client's computer where possible.

One of the problems with tech support is that the problem may take a while to identify - it

could be software or OS related, a cable, a virus, an outdated driver or a faulty device. Yet clients cannot expose themselves to open-ended costs. To overcome this problem, for individuals, we guarantee a maximum of 2 hours chargeable support. So people know the maximum cost they are up for at the outset.

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

