



# Ability Newsletter

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## iPhone Accessibility revisited

The iPhone is a tantalising device for people with a disability. It is brilliant for those with vision impairment, excellent for people with hearing impairment, very good for some with cognitive impairment... but a frustration for those with physical disability, unless you are one of the few who can use a Pogo Stick or similar pointer. Standard access tools, like trackballs, joysticks, switches, special keyboards, head-mounted pointing devices and eye gaze systems are no use to you on the iPhone.

Yet Apple still publicises that the iPhone has features to enhance access for people with physical disabilities (<http://www.apple.com/au/accessibility/iphone/physical.html>). Somehow the fact that the iPhone has "Tactile Buttons" - and "includes several physical buttons: the sleep/wake button, located on the top edge the ring/silent switch and volume-control buttons, located on the upper, left edge of iPhone; and the Home button, centred at the bottom of the screen" - make it "more accessible to those with impaired physical and motor skills". It is these features, and the lack of alternatives, that **prevent** many people with physical disabilities from accessing the iPhone.

Take **Voice Dialling**, for instance. A great option and it works well... as long as you can hold down the physical Home button for a few seconds to activate the service. Many of our clients can't do this.



# Phones

## iPhone 3GS

### Accessibility revisited (cont'd)

What is needed? A "soft" Home button would be a start. I dream of a Bluetooth device that would enable switch scanning for each of the action points on the display, so that whatever is selectable by a finger touch could be also be selected in a scanned sequence through a switch. Audio feedback would also be good. Or perhaps a similar device could plug in to the iPhone's power connection socket. Readers may have other suggestions.

Meanwhile the usefulness of the iPhone continues to flower. It captures so much information in a compact package. For instance, my iPhone replaces a diary, address book, notepad, photo album, music player, calculator, camera (well, in part), transport timetables, clock, voice memo recorder, TV guide, dictionary, compass, radio, map, reading light, foreign language dictionary, White Pages and several reference books. Not to mention weather information, sports results, banking facilities, email, web browser... and, of course, it is also a phone.

For so many people with a disability this amazing device continues to shine. The forthcoming **iPhone OS4** promises folders and multitasking. The **iPad**, due in Australia at the end of May, also promises great things for people with a disability, especially for communication and environmental control.

We just need more physical access options. Please.



# Computer Bits

## MicFlex Microphone

### Goosneck aids positioning

The MicFlex USB Microphone has tested well by our staff on both Mac and Windows speech recognition platforms. Its main advantage is the flexible gooseneck cable, which allows easy positioning, even in difficult situations. The cable can also be detached from the base, and plugged in direct to the computer USB port, for further positioning options. Available for around A\$79.



## Zalman ZM-MIC1

### Tiny microphone

One of our clients uses a Zalman microphone attached to his QuadJoy pointing device (see picture). He reports that the input quality is very good for speech recognition.

It plugs into the Microphone jack on the computer (not USB). In our testing it required a USB adapter to operate effectively, with good results.

The good news is that the Zalman microphone costs around \$10.

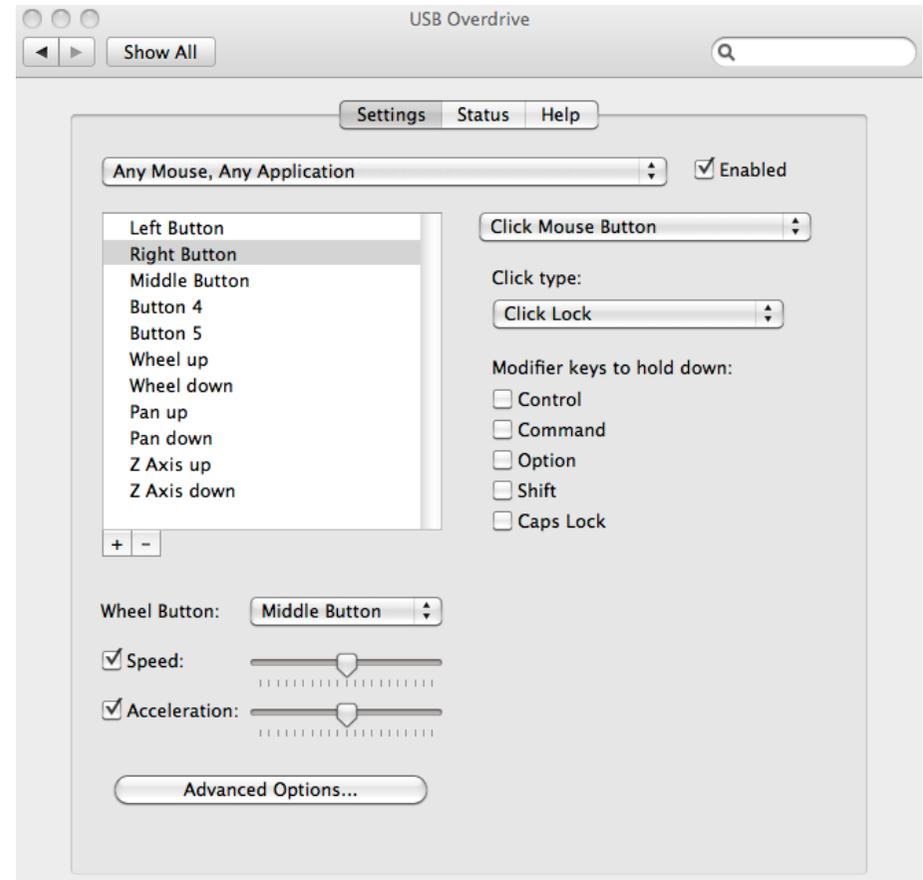


# USB Overdrive

## Programming buttons on Mac mouse devices

We recently set up a new Mac for a client who uses a Kensington SlimBlade trackball. As you may be aware, Kensington stopped making their Mouseworks software, so this client was unable to program one of the trackball buttons to be a drag/lock button.

A bit of research uncovered a Shareware program called USB Overdrive. This utility (which costs a very reasonable US\$20 to purchase) works really well. It enables the buttons on any mouse device to be programmed. In this client's case, the excellent Kensington SlimBlade Trackball (shown below) is now very usable for her.



## Environmental Control

# Environmental control on the cheap

## Simple options for control at home

Controlling the home environment is a high priority for many people with a disability. Having some independence in everyday tasks, such as using the telephone, turning on a light or controlling the TV, can be a boost to self esteem. In some cases it can reduce reliance on other people. Having control when in bed is a common request among our clients.

But cost can be an issue. Many people associate "environmental control" or "home automation" with high cost. They believe some systems will cost them thousand of dollars. However, inexpensive devices are available that will enable control over many key home functions. The **VoiceMe 4** is now only \$250. It is completely hands-free and can be programmed simply for up to 30 commands each for 4 users (although a "user" can be you in another room or with another suite of controls) which can give you up to 120 commands. Up to 10 operations can be activated by a single voice command. It runs on batteries or AC power (adapter optional).

If you need to use a switch rather than your voice, then the **Sicare Senior Pilot** is worth considering. Up to 15 commands can be controlled. It costs \$415.

Both devices control via infrared signals. However, with the addition of an **IR Mini Controller**, they can also control X-10 devices on the house wiring - such as lamps and lights. Cost is \$80.

Full door control is never an inexpensive endeavour, although you may only require to **unlock** the door, to let people in, rather than needing full control. This is much less expensive.

In the next issue we will look at cheap **phone** options.



## Web site

# Ability's new web site

## A fresh look

Ability has a new web site! The old site has served us well but with a changing emphasis in our work, we decided it was time to revamp our site. We hope you enjoy the new format and content. Feedback welcome!



## Services

# Assistive Technology Services

## Why they are important

Some funding bodies will fund equipment - and that's all. This overlooks the necessity and importance of specialised services. Let's look at these services and why they are needed:

**Assessment:** Selecting the right equipment is critical to the whole process. Without an assessment, how will the most appropriate equipment be determined with the client? This process is required before the equipment can be purchased.

**Customisation:** Some devices simply need to be plugged in, but most require careful positioning (in relation to hardware) and customisation (in relation to software). Settings may need to be adjusted.

**Setup:** Often the special equipment and software needs to be integrated with mainstream equipment. Incompatibilities need to be resolved, otherwise frustration can result.

**Training:** The person involved needs to achieve competence in using the specialised hardware and software supplied for them. There is little use in a box arriving at the door! Training builds confidence and gives the person the skills they need to achieve their desired goals. Training can also be required for carers, family members and support people.

**Support:** Computer technology is, as we all know, far from perfect. When people with a disability have problems, whatever the cause, they need more than the run around. They need support, by phone, email, remote log in or personal visit.

**Review:** A person's assistive technology needs are not static. People change, their preferences and capabilities change, new technology options emerge. These and other factors suggest that a review assessment of a person's needs should take place periodically.

Services are vital, for the successful implementation of assistive technology. Without them the person is likely to confront frustration and confusion. They are also more likely to abandon the technology and to exclude themselves from its potential benefits.



## General News

### ARATA Conference 2010

The biennial Australian Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association (ARATA) National Conference will be held in Hobart from 11-13 August 2010. The conference is entitled "Assistive Technology: The Tip of the Iceberg". Guest speakers include Dr Gerald Craddock and Dr Jeffrey Soar. It is a great opportunity for AT practitioners to meet and share experiences. Ability staff will give two presentations: Computer Games for People with Brain Injury and Low Cost Environmental Control Options. A third session will be the official release of our Assistive Technology User Videos, part of a project we are currently preparing.



A Conference Brochure can be downloaded from [www.arata.org.au](http://www.arata.org.au)

### Workplace Modifications

The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) provides assistance for employers of people with a disability and individuals, to modify physical work environments and purchase assistive technology. The revised scheme commenced on 1 March 2010. The scheme is accessed through [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au) and covers a wide range of modifications and technology. In some cases a Workplace Modifications Assessment will be required.

The staff at Ability Technology have been heavily involved in the scheme from its outset nearly four years ago, as Workplace Modifications Assessors. We have been impressed with the way in which it has been managed and with the significant outcomes that have been achieved.

Dr Graeme Smith from Ability has been appointed to an Expert Reference Group, to advise on the operation of the new scheme.



**JobAccess**

AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

# Ability Activities

## Current Projects

Current Ability projects include: Videos of Assistive Technology Users; A study of the assistive technology needs of people with Friedreich's Ataxia; and an evaluation of computer games for people with brain injury. Several other proposals are in the pipeline.

## Assistive Technology Workshops

Over the next 12 months Ability will be offering intensive workshops in Computer Access and Environmental Control. Numbers will be strictly limited, to enable a hands-on approach. If you are interested, please let us know as soon as possible. From past experience, these workshop places fill very quickly.

## Trips Coming Up

Forthcoming trips include **Canberra, Dubbo** and **Queensland (Brisbane, Maroochydore and Toowoomba)**. If you live or have clients in these areas, please contact us so we can offer some assistance. If you live in another area, it is still worth getting in touch with us, so that we can contact you when a trip near you arises.

## Ability Information

Our new web site will give us the opportunity to present information in different formats and with greater frequency. While the Newsletter will continue at present, you may soon find other information formats available on our web site. Your feedback, as always, will be welcome!

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