Ability Newsletter

Small Joystick Option

In the old days joysticks came in many shapes and sizes. However one looks in vain nowadays for a PC joystick that is not the standard flightstick size and shape. Many of our clients are unable to manage a large joystick, with the result that they are denied access to joystick games options and also the possibility of using a joystick as a mouse device (through *Joystick to Mouse* software).

Our recent research efforts have come up with an innovative solution to this problem. It involves using a *PlayStation One* joystick in combination with a special USB adapter. This combination worked very well on Windows XP, with the joystick able to function as a games device or as a mouse. It worked less satisfactorily on a Windows 2000 computer, but further tests with follow.

Joystick mouse devices do exist, such as the excellent *Traxsys Roller Joystick*. However such devices are true mouse alternatives and cannot function as games joysticks. They are also expensive, starting at around $580. Our combination costs only $120.

New products

AlphaSmart Neo

A new AlphaSmart is always good news. The **Neo** sounds great. It has a larger screen than the 3000, with the ability to vary the font size, to show from 2 to 6 lines of text. It has a faster processor, more room for downloadable SmartApplets and 512k storage for documents (twice that of the 3000). It comes with AlphaWord Plus software, with spell checking and thesaurus, as well as supporting named files.

All the familiar 3000 benefits are present, such as light weight (0.9 kg), long battery life (700 hours) and IrDA port.

The Australian price has yet to be announced, but is expected to be closer to that of the 3000 than to that of the Dana.

TextAloud

This handy program enables any text copied to the Clipboard (which happens when you select Copy in any program) to be spoken aloud. The standard voices that come with the program are very good; the optional At&T 16 KHz Natural Voices are among the best we've heard.

You can download a trial version at nextup.com for US$24.95, while the AT&T Voices can be supplied on CD or downloaded, for an additional $25.

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New products

SmartNAV 3

A new version of the successful SmartNAV head-control is being released in mid-August. It is reportedly 50% faster, with a 67% higher resolution. Most importantly, it is resistent to sunlight - it can be used in virtually any lighting environment. The software has been completely rewritten, but still provides features such as dwell-clicking.

The cost of the new model is US$200 more than the old version, a significant increase over the SmartNav 2, but still remarkable value in comparison to similar head-control products (such as the Tracker and the HeadMouse Extreme). An Australian price of $800 is likely.

Omnipage Pro 14 Office

Optical character recognition (OCR) is very handy for converting printed text to computer format. Once such a conversion takes place, the text can either be used in other documents, enlarged for easier reading or else read aloud. It can also form the basis for a paperless office.

This latest version of Omnipage does a remarkable job of converting fully formatted text to computer format. It also allows PDF files to be converted into Word documents.

As part of the installation, Omnipage sets up a new command - "Acquire Text" - at the bottom of the File menu in Microsoft Word. This gives you one-click scanning of documents straight into Word. Omnpage Pro Office costs around $1000.

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Mouth Control

Integra Mouse

This device provides another mouse option for those without hand function. It may suit, in particular, those who rely on a respirator. It requires only 10grams of lip pressure to move the device, and very slight sipping or puffing (triggered by variations of air pressure in the oral cavity and in the mouth piece) for left and right clicks. The device costs US $2100.
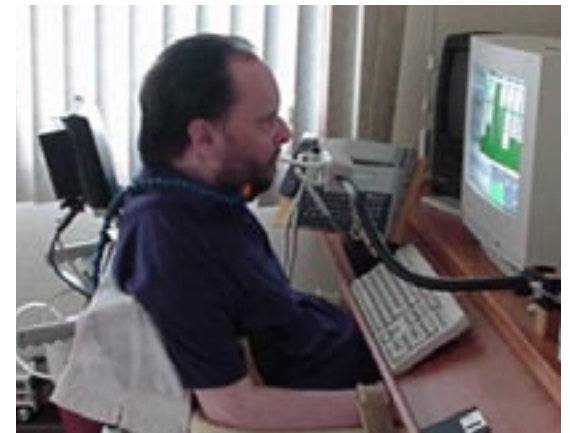
New QuadJoy

The QuadJoy is a great device. Nothing is attached to the user - not even a sticky dot - giving the user a high level of independence. Its unique mounting system gives considerable flexibility in setting up. No software is required - it is completely "plug and play".

The latest version supports both PS2 and USB. It has scroll functions and support for 5 buttons (with indicator LEDs). Switch jacks can be installed for a small extra cost (US$35).

Another exciting add-on is a facility to turn the QuadJoy into a games joystick (for an extra US$250).

The Quadjoy now costs US$750, but this is still very good value compared with other mouth control systems (such as the Jouse or the Integra Mouse). When ordering, contact Ability as we can assist with customs arrangements.

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New products

FreeBeam

The problem of students with disabilities taking notes in a classroom is one that keeps being brought to our attention. It is a problem that has lacked a technical solution - until now. The FreeBeam attaches to any whiteboard and offers wireless data transmission to a PC. That's right - it captures and distributes all whiteboard text and images electronically!

The capture area is up to 6' by 4'. A pod weighing just over 1 kg is attached to the whiteboard. A receiver (PS2 or serial) is attached to the computer - multiple computers are supported.

The cost in Australia is $1995.

Speech recognition for those with limited speech

It is no secret that many people with impaired speech did a lot better with the old "discrete speech" speech recognition systems than they have done with the newer "continuous speech" systems. Many people cannot even get through the basic training in new programs such as Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Some time back we mentioned the possibility of using a program like Dragon Naturally Speaking in its command mode, so that the letters of the alphabet (plus some basic punctuation and numbers) are spoken, instead of trying to speak full words. For many people this reduced form of speech recognition is still a lot better than trying to type by hand.

This issue has been developed further in a recent issue of "Closing the Gap" magazine. They add to our previous idea by suggesting that a word prediction program such as Co:Writer be used. This would speed up considerably the process of text entry, as the user would only need to "say" the number of the desired word in the list to have it inserted into the text document.

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Home Automation

Biometric Fingerprint Door Lock

Very - shall we say - handy! It has a slide-over cover, a capacity for 20 users (expandable to 95), LED and sound feedback, backlight for night use, zinc alloyed die-casting, and batteries that last a minimum of 6 months. The cost - only A$999.

Coffee Table Learning Remote

Be warned - this product may not be available for long. You can get it from Jaycar for $99. It is a large remote control device that can be trained to replace up to 7 other remotes. The buttons are nicely spaced and the range of the device is impressive.

Whole House RF Transceiver

This device receives all 256 house code addresses, as well as providing enhanced reception range and more custom control than the TM13. It can therefore replace a number of TM13s. It comes with an external antenna and costs A$169.

Door control via telephone

You can control access to your front door via your telephone. This device, the *Door Station,* in conjunction with a door phone, rings your phone when someone presses the Call Button. You can converse with them. An optional Lock Control device allows you to unlock the door or gate by telephone. The *Door Station* costs $249, the door phone between $99 and $139, while the Lock Control Option costs $50. Professional installation is required.

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Ability Services

Ability Training Seminars

For those who are interested in developing or updating their skills in and awareness of assistive technology, the **Ability Training Seminars** are worth your consideration.

We have two seminars coming up:

FRIDAY OCTOBER 15: Morning - **Computer Access - Text**

Afternoon - **Computer Access - Mouse**

FRIDAY OCTOBER 22: Morning - **Environmental Control**

Afternoon - **Literacy Software**

Registration for full or half days are available (full day attendees receive a lunch). The cost is $295 for a full day and $150 for a half day.

These seminars involve small groups (4-6), so that everyone is involved in what is going on. Your specific interests can be integrated into the sessions. The sessions are practical and interesting. All attendees receive notes and a CD of demo software and product information.

The seminars are held at Ability House, 29 Frenchs Forest Rd Seaforth NSW.

Please contact Ability if you require more information or if you would like to book.

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Ability News

Farewell Shannon...Welcome Susie

Our readers will be sad to learn that our admin stalwart, Shannon Schmidt, has moved on to quieter pastures. Shannon has been a vital part of Ability for over 6 years. Shannon squeezed a lot into her 3 days a week, but it has become apparent for quite a while that we need a full-time admin person. Shannon's place has been taken by **Susie**, who will undertake admin and sales work on a full-time basis.

Training Seminars

Places are filling fast for our Ability Training Days in assistive technology in **October 2004**. See more information on the previous page of the newsletter.

Roadtrip - Central West

We start with a workshop in **Young** on Thursday 16 September, then a few days at the Ideas Expo in **Dubbo** (18-21 September) and finishing up with a workshop in **Orange** on Tuesday 21 September.

Roadtrip - Southern Tablelands/Canberra

Not sure exactly when, but probably October 2004. Please register yout interest with us.

Computer Games for People with Brain Injury

We are currently involved in a project where various contemporary computer games are being evaluated for their suitability for people with brain injury. We will keep you informed.

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