



# Ability Newsletter

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## eeePC Portable Power by Asus

The eeePC is a lightweight portable computer option that sells for under \$500. It runs on Linux and comes with over 30 programs pre-installed, including OpenOffice. OpenOffice includes a suite of programs that offer file compatibility with Word, Excel and Powerpoint. It comes with 3 x USB 2.0 ports, WiFi, external monitor port and a 4 GB flash drive in place of a hard drive.

It also comes with a web cam and built-in speakers. It will support Windows XP if loaded.

Why use this device rather than one of the cheaper notebooks? The interface on the Asus is much simpler than that on a Windows computer. It also boots up much quicker and is much lighter. Sure, it won't run specialised software, but our testing showed that many alternative keyboards and mouse devices run happily on the Asus.

The EeePC has much to offer over notetakers such as the **AlphaSmart Neo**. While it lacks the latter's long battery life and full-size keyboard, it has a colour display, allows alternative input devices and provides internet access.



# Computer Access

## Large Cursors



There are various ways to enlarge the cursors on your computer. The simplest is to go to the Windows Control Panel and select **Personalize** then **Mouse Pointers**. Various options are available for cursor enlargement and visibility.

A program called **Biggy** (a **Biggy Light** is also available) offers large, coloured cursors, animated cursors and some other enhancements that facilitate mouse functions for people with a disability (such as moving the cursor to the default button in a Dialog Box). Both programs can be purchased on line from [www.rjcooper.com](http://www.rjcooper.com) - probably the Light version would suit most needs.

Free large cursors can also be downloaded from the ACE Centre in the UK:

<http://www.ace-centre.org.uk/index.cfm?pageid=F5F26649-3048-7290-FEA80B8B637BF760>

As they say: "Over 80 additional pointers and cursors for those with visual or perceptual difficulties. Icon styles include animated, coloured, large, I-beams and circles."

## Softboy on-screen keyboard

The Softboy on-screen keyboard works like most other similar keyboards, however it can be customised to user requirements:

*"If the current soft on-screen-keyboard can not fulfill your requirement, please mail to us: [support@softboy.net](mailto:support@softboy.net) with your requirement. We will design another one which will be fit for you."*



The standard keyboard comes with zoom in/zoom out, word prediction and transparency.

The cost is A\$79.95.95 from <http://softboy.net>



# Speech Recognition

## USB Buddy 6G

The Buddy USB adapter has an inbuilt high-quality sound card, which replaces a desktop or laptop computer's sound card for speech sound input and output. This can by-pass problems in a computer's sound system that may affect speech recognition accuracy.

Buddy USB 6G enables your speech recognition applications to perform equally well on all compatible computing platforms, since the sound card is included on it. Most PCs today have a built in sound card (or chipset), that are often placed close to high electrical noise circuitry like the power supply or other chips working at very high frequencies. This is a problem with most laptop computers. Buddy USB 6G has the unique advantage of being largely immune to those noises as it is external to the computer chassis.

The Buddy USB 6G can also be used in any application including VOIP that requires clear speech input. In general you can use it as a replacement sound card for practically any headset or for devices with headset like characteristics.

Its USB interface is 2.0 compliant with 12 mega bit transfer rate, and it can be used in any USB 2 or USB 1.1 slot in Windows or Macintosh computers. It offers full duplex operation for connection with microphone and speakers; it also includes a mute switch and indicator lights for power and mute status.

Buddy USB 6G is a Plug & Play device, which uses standard Windows and Macintosh drivers. It works with Windows 98SE, 2000, ME, XP, and Vista.

*Our brief testing indicated an improvement in speech recognition results on a notebook computer. Further tests will follow.*

The USB Buddy 6G sells for \$79.



# Page Turner

## Flip Page Turner

This device automatically turns the pages of books or magazines forward or backwards. The Flip is switch activated. Press the switch once to turn one page, or hold it down to turn a continuous string of 5 pages in a row. Access options include:

- Switch dwell time can be adjusted to meet a wide array of motor needs (from 1.2 to 2.5 seconds).
- Single switch automatic scanning is available, with adjustable scan rates (from 0.6 to 3.0 seconds).
- Flip's two additional switch jacks offer the option of direct operation with external switches: one switch moves forward, one switch moves backward. Auditory feedback is available for all controls.



Flip works with a variety of reading materials, such as magazines, paperback books, or hardcover books. Page Sizes Accepted: from 10.49cm x 14.80cm up to 22.02cm x 29.69cm. Maximum Spine Width: up to 2.99cm.

The device has a built in adjustable stand.

The Flip sells for \$5,950.



# Ability Resources

## Expanded Premises

Ability Technology has expanded its presence at 29 Frenchs Forest Rd Seaforth. Under new arrangements with the owner of the building, we will soon have an environmental control facility permanently in place, a larger space for copying and packing, plus a technical room. Our existing offices now have more elbow room as we spread out!

We have undertaken some painting and purchased some new furnishings. New network connections and power outlets have been installed. Other changes are planned over the next 12 months.

The result will be a more comfortable and productive work environment for all.



*A corner of the new Tech Room - the rest is too messy to show just yet!*



*The beginnings of our new environmental control facility. It includes remote controlled lights, door and curtains.*



## Resources

### Ability Car - our first!

The travel demands of our assessment and training work have finally led us to purchase our first Ability vehicle. We were offered a very good deal on a new **Subaru Impreza** by Bill Buckle Autos in Brookvale. The decision was difficult as most of the local dealers were keen to offer us favourable purchase arrangements - something that was a great encouragement to us.

Nearly all of our work is undertaken in clients' homes, schools and workplaces. Travel is an essential part of our work and this new resource will increase our capacity to meet the needs of our special clients.

Thank you once again to Subaru and Bill Buckle Autos!



*David Mace from Bill Buckle Autos handing Graeme Smith the keys to the new Subaru Impreza*



## Ability Activities

### OT Vacancy

We are currently seeking to increase our occupational therapy team in order to meet the demands of our expanding work. An attractive package will be offered to the right person. We will consider part-time or full-time applicants. Please contact Graeme or Gemma if you require more information.

### Postgraduate study option

Assistive technology is an exciting frontier for most occupational therapy roles. The postgraduate unit of study we are offering through the University of Sydney commences in 2nd semester this year. Study will take place on-line, apart from a 2 day workshop in Sydney. For further information please go to: <http://www.fhs.usyd.edu.au/ols/news/index.shtml>

### New Staff

We welcome Sandra Kulhan, who has recently joined Ability in an administrative role.

### Training - online

We are currently working with New Horizons, an online training provider, in order to evaluate the suitability of this method of training for some of our clients.

### Assistive Technology course for OT students

Ability staff are pleased again to be presenting a final year elective option in assistive technology for occupational therapy students at the University of Sydney. Lectures commence on 4 March 2008.

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