![abilitytech logo] COMPUTER SPECIAL NEEDS SOLUTIONS

Ability Newsletter

Privacy and security

Data protection options for people with a disability

Many people with disabilities use their computers for personal tasks. Yet a computer is a more public device than say a notebook or a filing cabinet. What steps can be taken to give both privacy and security for this data?

Let's look first at the document creation stage. One option here is a **privacy filter.** There are many kinds of monitor filters available. Many of you may have heard about Glare Reduction Filters, Anti Radiation Filters and Polarising Filters, but did you may not be aware that you can also get Privacy Filters. Privacy Filters work to block ambient light and to narrow the viewing angle of the screen so that you must be sitting directly in front of the monitor to be able to read information on the computer screen. These filters are available for standard monitors, LCD screens and notebook monitors.

When it comes to keeping documents away from prying eyes, you should make good use of **password protection**. These are available at the point of log on, but they also can be attached to Microsoft Office documents. In Word, for example, go to Tools/ Options/Security. Most money management programs have password protection options.

Finally, when it comes to storing documents, make sure you **back-up all your important data**. An internal back-up (to another part of your hard disk, or to another hard disk in your computer) may protect against corrupt files, but not against theft or fire. For that you need an external backup method, such as Zip or rewritable CD. For complete security, store the backups in another location.

Virtual CD

Running CDs from your hard drive

Much as CD (and now DVD) technology has been a boon for people with disabilities who cannot access printed material, the task of inserting and removing disks has always been a challenge for this group. It takes a lot of dexterity to open a CD, insert in to its loading bay and then to remove it again later. Copy protection on many disks meant the CD had to be present in the computer for the software to operate.

For those who could afford them, multiplay CD players were one solution. **The Pioneer Autochanger** allowed magaziners with six CDs to be pre-loaded. It was a clunky, troublesome SCSI device, but for a long time it was the only solution. Nowadays it is better to use a tower of CD/DVD drives, such as the **Verbatim** range (see picture). These are IDE drives but the overall device is SCSI. A basic configuration of seven drives costs around $2000.

Now there is a cheaper alternative available that seems to work well. It is a program called **Virtual CD**. It makes compressed images of CDs and DVDs on your hard drive. Up to 23 virtual CD/DVD drives can be setup. Access is up to 200 times faster than from the original CD. Even copy-protected CDs can be included. More good news is that the program can be purchased over the Internet for only US $39.95. Network and school licences are available.

Virtual CD means that for the cost of the program and perhaps a bigger hard drive, computer uses with disabilities can have significantly greater independence when using a computer.

Get the trial version and the full version on-line from: www.virtualcd-online.com

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WordQ
Writing enhancement tool

WordQ software is a writing tool used along with standard word processing software. It suggests words for you to use and provides spoken feedback. Users of all ages who have problems writing and editing can benefit.

We found WordQ software to be relatively simple and easy to use. Install it and begin using it immediately with any word processor.

One of its key features is **word prediction.** The word list presents predicted word choices as a visual prompt of possible words that might be appropriate. To help the user to review these choices, the user can browse the list by simply pressing the down arrow (with a vertical list; the right arrow with a horizontal list). Each word is highlighted and spoken emphasizing the *visual/auditory shape* associated with a word. This is important when the user has difficulty reading a word based on its component letters. (A mouse may also be used to highlight and speak a word.).

Text-to-speech feedback enhances writing and editing. Letter echo confirms typing a character. Word echo helps you self-identify spelling errors. Word echo also confirms your selection of a predicted word. Sentence echo helps you hear the word flow in a sentence to decide whether the right words and punctuation are used. The user can quickly move to other sentences with the up and down arrow keys. The user then begins reading the sentence by pressing the spacebar. The sentence is then spoken with each word highlighted word-by-word again emphasizing the visual/ auditory shape of each word. All of this is done directly in the word processor application. At the end of the sentence, the sentence is highlighted again so that the user does not lose their place. The user can repeat reading the sentence. At any time while reading, the user can pause with the spacebar. The user can also manually step through the sentence word-by-word by using the right and left arrow keys to help locate an error.

WordQ currently only supports Canadian and US spelling.

The cost is $300 in Australia, or $145 US if you buy direct from the USA.

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StarOffice

A cheaper alternative to the Big One

Challenging the ubiquitous Microsoft Office is almost sacrilege. Yet for those who find the Microsoft showpiece increasingly large and expensive, **StarOffice** by Sun Microsystems is a genuine alternative. For $199 one gets surprisingly full-featured word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, drawing and database applications. The file compatibility with the Microsoft alternatives is, at a quick glance, quite remarkable.

One enjoyable feature of StarOffice is that the various applications are integrated (much as they used to be under the old ClarisWorks). It also runs on Linux and Sun's Solaris operating systems, as well as Windows 95 onwards (including XP).

The program comes with a free Web-based course. It even comes with a 460 page manual (remember them?).

The word processor (called Writer) includes at least the following: auto correction, word completion, special characters, borders, shading, outlining, columns, styles, page numbers, templates, text frames, text animation, indexes, table of contents, tables (with calculations), headers, footers, footnotes, spell-checking, hyphenation, thesaurus, addres lables, newsletter layouts (using text frames and text flow) and envelopes! Quite impressive!

This is certainly an option for those who want to keep overheads down. Could it be that StarOffice was a factor in Microsoft's recent blitz, selling educational versions of Office for $249!

One button mouse

We recently trialled a one-button mouse with a client, to simplify her access to the computer. From where did we get a one-button mouse? We borrowed one from an iMac and used it on the PC - it worked fine! Mac mice cost between $80 and $125.

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From the Workshop - Tips and Tricks

Penny & Giles Technical Notes

Cursor drift after boot-up: It is important that the joystick is not deflected for about 5 seconds during power-up, as this will cause the cursor to be mis-aligned and result in cursor drift.

Windows XP: Windows XP tries to disable any USB devices that have not been working for a given time, as a powersaving feature. The result is that the Joystick will not move. The problem can be rectified by pressing any button on the trackball or joystick. For a more permanent fix, do as follows: Start/My Computer/ Hardware/Device Manager. Click on the Universal Serial Bus Controller branch to expand it; Right Click the USB Root Hub and then click Properties. Click Power Management and de-select the "Allow the computer to turn off this device to save power" check box. Click OK and thern close. Note: You will need to do this for each of your USB hubs (the USB ports on the front of your computer are a separate hub from those at the back). Please call us if you would like some assistance to go through this process.

Microspeed Trackballs

This issue concerns those who use Microspeed trackballs but who wish to reverse the left and right button functions. If you attempt this under the Windows control panel you lose the Drag button function.
The way around this is not to reverse the button functions under Windows, but to do it manually on the trcakball itself. Hold down the Drag button and click the left and right buttons simultaneously. This will reverse the left and right button functions, but retain the Drag button. Unfortunately you will need to repeat this each time you reboot.

By the way, the USB adapter supplied with Microspeed trackballs does not allow them to be used on a Mac. However, the PS2/USB cable that we supply does allow the Microspeed, other PC trackballs and PS2 keyboards to work happily on a USB Mac. It costs $40.

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News

Dr Graeme

At long last Graeme Smith has completed his PhD! His thesis, "The Impact of Computers on the Employment of People with Quadriplegia", was accepted without amendment.

Master Mat

Speaking of acievement, our technician, Matthew Stevenson, has achieved his A+ and Network + certifications, as well as his MCSA (Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator). Well done Matt!

Late Newsletter

There have been a few months without an Ability Newsletter, and our only excuse is that we have been flat-out! The first half of 2003 has been our busiest period yet. While we will try to maintain a monthly schedule, it is more likely that Newsletters will appear every second month. But rest assured - if something important comes up, you'll hear about it from us.

Trips

Graeme Smith has recently been to Armidale, Ballina, Wagga Wagga, Junee, Bathurst, Newcastle and Wollongong. If you live in a country area, and would like to avail yourself of our services, then please let us know. We can then arrange to visit you next time we are in your vicinity.

Conferences

We have been involved in the Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association NSW State Conference on 14 March 2003 and in a Technology and Education Conference at Gosford/Newcastle. Forthcoming involvements include: Computers in Education Conference (July), an Adaptive Technology Seminar run by the Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (August), a Catastrophic Injury Conference (August) and an Aussie Able Expo in Tamworth in September.