Special Needs Tech
News

A newsletter celebrating enabling technology, the people who use it and the companies that make it possible.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Creating a Connection

Technology is evolving at such a fast pace that it is important to create alliances in order to maximize access to the most up-to-date trends and applications for meeting the needs of the disabled.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY is a relatively new term. However, it is an important and rapidly developing field in education, health and vocational rehabilitation.

This newsletter is an attempt to create a connection among service providers in many disciplines, users of enabling technology, organizations and the corporations that make it possible.

I hope to receive your feedback on this first issue of SPECIAL NEEDS TECH NEWS. Content ideas and contributions are welcome. This is intended as a forum for anyone with an interest in special needs technology to connect with others. Together, we can communicate to reach our full technology potential.

Please feel free to make <u>complete</u> copies of this publication for anyone that you would like to share it with.

Send feedback to:

ASSISTIVE TECH EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING

PROVIDING CLIENT-FOCUSED INFORMATION AND TRAINING ON SPECIAL NEEDS TECHNOLOGY.

SPECIALIST IN COMPUTER APPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES AND LOW VISION

WEB RESOURCES

Mouse Tracks

Internet resources assist all of us in search of the most up-to-date tools to address special needs. Here are a few sites worth visiting.

Special Education

www.ldonline.org An excellent interactive site for educators, parents and students. The most comprehensive site on the topic of learning disabilities. Information is updated monthly and the technology link is great.

INSIDE

Speech

www.isaac-online.org

International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication

This organization is located in Toronto, Ontario. The Mission of ISAAC is to improve communication and the quality of life for people with severe communication impairments. ISAAC does this by advancing the field of AAC, facilitating information exchange and focusing attention on work in the field. People with an interest in AAC can join the list serve to connect with others in this field.

Hearing

www.wou.edu/education/sped/nwoc/demyst/index.htm

Demystifying Assistive Listening Devices

This informative site was created by Cheryl D. Davis, Ph.D of Western Oregon University. It is a well-organized overview of ALD's. There is a text version and a slide show version. It covers the advantages and disadvantages of FM systems, infrared systems and electromagnetic induction loop technology. This is a very good resource for service providers and consumers.
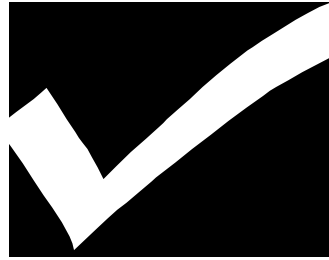
Vision

www.lowvisioninfo.org

This centre is located in Bethesda, Maryland. Their site provides general information on the causes of low vision, tips for the visually impaired and information on low vision strategies and technology. Links to related sites and low vision vendors are available here.

Physical Disability

www.makoa.org

This site has a very comprehensive collection of links to information resources that would be helpful to anyone with an interest in disability resources. The links are not limited to physical disabilities alone.

The site is maintained solely by Jim Lubin, who is a C2 quadriplegic, completely paralyzed from the neck down and dependent on a ventilator to breathe.

The word **"makoa"** is Hawaiian and means **courageous.**

Corporate Kudos

Parrot Software, a company that develops products for communication disorders, has been making its line of software available through Internet subscription. Individual subscribers pay a monthly fee of $24.95(US) to receive full access to over 60 different treatment programs for receptive and expressive language deficits. This is a reasonable way for consumers to have access to thousands of dollars worth of software to supplement the rehabilitation process. Populations that may benefit from these programs include: head injury, aphasia, alzheimer's learning and language disability, second language and cognitive impairment. Many of the programs have different user levels to choose from. Private clinics may subscribe to this service for $1000(US) per year.

This allows the clinic to use the software on any number of computers at the clinic address. **Parrot** has indicated that schools must pay a yearly enrollment of $299.40(US). A free seven day trial CD can be ordered from their website:

www.parrotsoftware.com

Techno Trade Off

Over the last few days I've been pondering how technology has changed the way I've worked as a teacher since 1981.

As I was culling the boxes of course files that have been gradually filling the storage space under my front stairs, I noticed an interesting thing. My older files contained a lot of hand written notes for students to copy from the board. The more recent file boxes had hardly any.

We don't require students to copy board notes very often these days. It's faster and easier to put everything on a handout sheet.

Does this reduction in note-taking at school have a positive or negative impact on student skill development?

Is the photocopier to blame for declining written language skills ? It certainly helps the teacher deliver a lot more information in class. It's a thorny issue. Technology implementation leads to many fascinating questions.

We can now access more information than ever before, but have we lost other important skills? Are we absorbing more but losing something in the process?

I'm sure some of you who have been at your jobs for many years

could share interesting stories about how new technology has changed the way you work.

Which "low tech" devices do you continue to rely on? What do they help you to accomplish?

Which "high tech" devices have been the most valuable contributions to your profession or life?

If you could only keep one "high tech" device that you regularly use, what would it be? Why is this item of such great value?

Please email your input about tech tools that help you the most. I'd enjoy putting together an article about these responses.

Defining Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) devices are mechanical aids. They can substitute for an area of disability. AT may also work to help compensate or enhance the function of some physical or mental ability that is impaired. Assistive technology can be anything homemade, purchased off the shelf, modified, or commercially available which is used to help an individual perform some task. AT may be employed to assist children, adults and the elderly.

The term assistive technology encompasses a broad range of devices from "low tech" (e.g., pencil grips, splints, paper stabilizers) to "high tech" (e.g., computers, powered mobility, voice synthesizers, Braille readers).

Assistive technology includes the wide range of supportive tools and equipment from adapted utensils to wheelchairs and computer systems for environmental control.

CORPORATE PROFILE

<u>Ai Squared</u>

Computer access doesn't have to be a struggle for people with low vision and reading disabilities. **Ai Squared** is a company that develops powerful software to deliver improved access, productivity and independence for print disabled computer users. **Ai Squared's** flagship products, **ZoomText Xtra** and **BigShot Magnifier** have been the choice of senior computer users, schools, universities, corporations, government agencies and eye care professionals in 50 countries worldwide.

BigShot Magnifier is an easy to use magnification utility that supports all Windows programs on desktop and laptop computers. Changing the magnification level is quickly accomplished with the **BigShot** on-screen toolbar. This allows computer users to customize their viewing needs without disrupting the preferred settings of others sharing the same computer. Image and text quality are retained through the 20 levels of magnification from 105% to 200%. This software also has benefits as a presentation tool. Educators and professionals who create computer presentations can use **BigShot Magnifier** to expand their content for an audience.
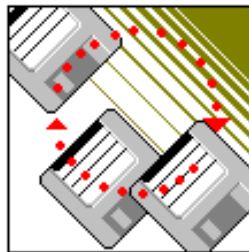
ZoomText Xtra is an advanced magnification and screen reading product. Installation of **ZoomText Xtra** is facilitated with a talking setup program. This software is accompanied by a large print user's guide as well as a quick reference guide. The current version 7.0 product allows consumers to purchase the Level 1 or Level 2 features. In addition to incredibly versatile screen reading and

magnification features, Level 2 includes a typing echo tool that provides auditory support while keyboarding. This feature is able to run with word prediction software to support individuals with keyboarding difficulties. High quality speech synthesis and document reading features help to open up the Internet for visually impaired and reading disabled computer users. Simultaneous speech synthesis and on-screen word tracking provide visual and auditory support for reading skill development and compensation for slow reading rates. The screen reading features can be individualized. Text and background colours are alterable. Font size and style are adjustable. Male and female reading voices can be selected. The qualities of these voices can be further customized to suit the user. Even the reading display allows the user to select from normal, prompter and ticker modes. There are many other features included in **ZoomText Xtra**. The flexibility of this product is evidence of **Ai Squared's** commitment to consumer choice. Free lifetime technical support is included.

Ai Squared has been upgrading this product with new features since it was first released in 1988. **ZoomText 7.0** is soon to be upgraded to **ZoomText 8.0**. New enhancements will extend **ZoomText's** magnification and screen reading abilities.

Ai Squared's commitment to continuous innovation has made the company a leading provider of accessibility software. To learn more about this company and their products, visit their website at **www.aisquared.com**

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