

Assistive Technology and Employment



This issue of our newsletter will focus on information about assistive technology tools for employment, and on some of the devices available in the AT Lending Library that can help employees with disabilities.

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS: LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT: NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS ADDRESS THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

This article is part of the Job Accommodation Network's (JAN) Accommodation Fact Sheet Series. (This and other articles can be found at www.jan.wvu.edu/media).

All employees need the right tools and work environment to effectively perform their jobs. Similarly, individuals with disabilities may need workplace adjustments—or accommodations—to maximize the value they can add to their employer. Employers accommodate workers everyday—with and without disabilities—to build a loyal, dedicated and productive workforce. A few examples include:

- *Flexible work schedules to accommodate family responsibilities;*
- *Software to allow efficient manipulation of data;*
- *Ergonomic chairs to alleviate back pain;*
- *Wrist supports to reduce the effects of repetitive stress disorders; and*
- *Telecommuting to reduce stress or other issues associated with commuting to work.*

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers must provide employees with disabilities

the “reasonable accommodations” they need to perform the essential functions of their jobs. In the 15 years since the ADA became law, many employers have expressed concerns about the potential costs of accommodations.

This concern often is accompanied by a reluctance to hire individuals with disabilities who may need accommodations. In fact, based on individual stories and media reports from businesses that actually have hired and retained employees with disabilities, these fears seem to have little foundation. In an effort to separate fact from fiction, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, is going beyond the anecdotal information and is more rigorously assessing the costs and benefits to employers of providing accommodations.

In total, the University of Iowa's Law, Health Policy, and Disability Center (LHPDC) interviewed 1,182 employers between January 2004 and December 2006 who contacted JAN. The employers represented a range of industry sectors and sizes.

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508 One-Handed and Two-Handed Keyboard

The 508 Keyboard is a standard desktop keyboard that has been enhanced to allow both one-handed and two-handed touch-typing. To type with one hand (either the right or the left), the user switches the one-hand capability on and places his/her fingers on the normal home keys. To type the letters found on the other half of the keyboard and generally accessed by a second hand, a user holds down the space bar with his/her thumb and uses the same stroke motions to access the rest of the alphabet. Dual sets of letters are printed on this alternative keyboard to show which keys correspond to which letters. If the one-hand feature is not activated, it can be used as a regular keyboard.

Inventory code: CA-508BOARD-F; Cost: \$99; Enablemart, 888-640-1999, www.enablemart.com

Keys-U-See Keyboard

The Keys-U-See Keyboard is a large print keyboard designed for use by individuals with low vision. This



alternative keyboard has yellow keys with large, bold, black letters in a black frame. It has a USB connection with PS2 adapter, and works with the following operating systems: Windows XP, ME, 2000, and 98.

Inventory code: CA-SEE-Y, Cost: \$40; Key Connection, 800-870-1369, www.customkeys.com. Note: A version with white letters on black keys is also available (CA-SEE-B).



AirObic 2 Ergonomic Mouse

This right-handed mouse has many names (Aerobic Mouse, Quill Mouse, AirO2bic Mouse). Its unique design means you do not drag the weight of your hand around and do not have to grip the

mouse. The special design cradles the hand and wrist to relieve pressure on the wrist. The mouse has 3 assignable buttons and a scroll wheel. It is compatible with Windows and Mac OS X.

Inventory code: HW-OBIC-RH; Cost: \$120; Enablemart, 888-640-1999, www.enablemart.com. This mouse is also available for the left hand (HW-OBIC-LH).

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS:

(Continued from front page)

Finding #1: Employers want to provide accommodations so they can retain valued and qualified employees.

Of the employers who called JAN for accommodation information and solutions, most were doing so to retain or promote (83%) a current employee. On average (including those persons who had just been given a job offer or who were newly hired), the employees had been with the company about seven years, with an average wage of \$13.70 for those paid by the hour, or an average annual salary of about \$47,000. In addition, the individuals tended to be fairly well-educated, with 53% having a college degree or higher.

Finding #2: Most employers report no cost or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.

Of the employers who gave cost information related to accommodations they had provided, 167 out of 366 (46%) said the accommodations needed by employees and job applicants with disabilities cost absolutely nothing. Another 165 (45%) experienced a one-time cost. Only 25 (7%) said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company and 9 (2%) said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs; however, too few of these employers provided cost data to report with accuracy. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the typical onetime expenditure by employers was \$500. When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, employers typically answered around \$300.

Talking Calculator

This full function talking calculator features an 8-digit display, buttons with 1/2 inch numbers, a set of headphones, and a clear, easy-to-understand female voice. Other features include: repeat, memory, auto power shut-off, and adjustable volume. It can be used by people with low vision.

Inventory code: ED-TLK-CAL; Cost: \$15; Independent Living Aids, 800-537-2118, www.independentliving.com

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Finding #3: Employers report accommodations are effective.

LHPDC asked employers who had implemented accommodations at the point they were interviewed to rank the effectiveness of the accommodations on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely effective. Of those responding, 75% reported the accommodations were either very effective or extremely effective.

Finding #4: Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.

Employers who had made accommodations for employees with disabilities reported multiple benefits as a result. The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were (1) the accommodation allowed the company to retain a qualified employee, (2) the accommodation increased the worker's productivity, and (3) the accommodation eliminated the costs of training a new employee. The most widely mentioned indirect benefits employers received were (1) providing the accommodation ultimately improved interactions with co-workers, (2) the accommodation increased overall company morale, and (3) the accommodation increased overall company productivity. In addition, a significant number of employers said the accommodation helped improve workplace safety. The following table gives the percentage of employers who reported experiencing direct and indirect benefits as a result of having made an accommodation.

Direct Benefits	%
Company retained a valued employee	86%
Company promoted an employee	10%
Company hired a qualified person with a disability	18%
Increased the employee's productivity	71%
Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee	56%
Increased the employee's attendance	49%
Saved worker's compensation or other insurance costs	39%
Increased diversity of the company	42%

Indirect Benefits	%
Improved interactions with co-workers	67%
Increased overall company morale	58%
Increased overall company productivity	56%
Improved interactions with customers	43%
Increased workplace safety	41%
Increased overall company attendance	34%
Increased profitability	32%
Increased customer base	16%

What's the Bottom Line?

The bottom line is that, according to the employers who participated in this study, the benefits of making accommodations for individuals in the workplace far outweigh the costs. Specifically, these employers found that on average, for every dollar they put into making an accommodation, they "got back" a little over \$10 in benefits. There probably are few other changes an employer can make that will result in such a return on the investment. Making accommodations just makes good business sense!

Writing/Typing Kit

This kit was put together by the Lending Library for individuals who need tools to assist them with writing or typing. It includes several versions of the Wanchik's Writer, Arm Supports, Writing Bird, Soft Flex Carpal Tunnel Relief, Slantboards, EvoPen, Writing Grips, Writing Guides, Desks, Ring-Pen, Light Touch Pen, Slip-On Typing Aids, Thumb Buddy and Arthwriter. Please note these devices can also be borrowed separately.

Inventory code: WR/TYPE-KIT; Cost: \$805; items in this kit are from various sources.

Dazor Weighted Base Magnifier

This magnifier lamp has a 12 pound base to avoid tipping and an 18-inch arm which provides a 30-inch reach. The magnifier is a 5-inch precision ground optical glass lens, designed for use by people with low vision.

Inventory code: RD-KIT1-DAZ; Cost: \$175; Maxi-Aids, 800-522-6294, www.maxiaids.com.
Note: This magnifier is part of the Light Kit with Magnification (RD-MAGLIGHT-KIT1).



Ameriphone In-Line Amplifier

Specifically designed for use by people who are hard of hearing, this device

connects easily between the handset and the phone base and amplifies incoming calls up to 40 dB. (It cannot be used with telephones that have dialing pads in the handset.) The tone selector amplifies specific frequencies for optimum speech clarity and distinction between similar sounding words.

Inventory code: TL-AMP; Cost: \$70; Clarity/Ameriphone, 800-874-3005, www.clarityproducts.com



Duett Listener

The Duett is a small, easy-to-use, rechargeable personal assistive listening device that resembles an MP3 player and is designed for use by people who are hard of hearing. When used with the included earphones, it amplifies conversations and sounds up to 60dB. The Duett also functions

as a t-coil induction receiver, picking up signals from a loop system. It is compatible with a neckloop, headphone/earphone and t-coil. It comes with two specialized kits which connect the Duett base charger to the source of sound. The television kit amplifies sound from a variety of sources, like the TV, CD player, radio, etc. The telephone kit also amplifies sound on most stationary phones. When the Duett is lifted from the base it automatically switches to communicator mode.

Inventory code: HH-DUETT; Cost: \$196; Comfort Audio, 310-945-3048, www.comfortaudio.com

Related Websites

www.jan.wvu.edu -The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

www.dli.state.pa.us/landi/lib/landi/ovr/ican/ican_application_form_package.pdf - The Independence Capital Access Network Fund (ICAN) provides grants to small businesses with 100 employees or fewer to enable them to make workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities.

www.dol.gov/odep - U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

www.design.ncsu.edu/cud - The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University

www.eeoc.gov/facts/accommodation.html - Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Small Employers and Reasonable Accommodation

PIAT IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE A NEW TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

for Pennsylvania's small business owners, human resources staff, and other employers—*AT in the Workplace: Tools for Accommodating Employees with Disabilities*. This training is specifically designed to help employers and business owners increase their awareness of how assistive technology can enhance employee commitment and productivity. This free, interactive training can be customized to fit the staff training needs of any business, and can be offered in 30-, 60- or 90- minute sessions.

For more information, please contact Ann Dolloff at adolloff@temple.edu or Amanda Reinsfelder at areins@temple.edu, or call 1-800-204-7428.

PENNSYLVANIA'S ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LENDING LIBRARY

Call toll-free: 877-PA AT LEND (VOICE/TTY)

EMAIL: atlend@temple.edu

WEB: <http://disabilities.temple.edu/atlend>

AT FOCUS—EDITOR: Sandra McNally

EMAIL: smcnally@temple.edu

TEL. 215-204-3370

PA's Assistive Technology Lending Library is funded by the Commonwealth of PA, with partial support from the U.S Dept. of Education (through PA's Initiative on Assistive Technology) and through the contributions of AT vendors, manufacturers, and users of the Lending Library.

Available in alternate formats, by request

