



A Special Relationship: AT Manufacturers and Their Customers

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IN THIS ISSUE...

"In the so-called "real" world, where manufacturers of new products, especially consumer package goods, face vicious competitive pressures, the failure rate for new products has held steady at nearly 90% for many years. Manufacturers of assistive technology devices, however, confront a very different reality: the need, sometimes desperate, for their products by a customer base that consists of individuals with disabilities and their families. In that world, compassion, not competition, is the driving force behind new product decisions and product pricing as well.

Keeping their collective fingers on the pulse of their customers, AT manufacturers create products aimed at anticipating and meeting real needs in an all-too-real world where their customers are often financially hard-pressed and not informed about the AT products they may need. With this reality always in mind, AT manufacturers strive to enrich the lives of end-users while also avoiding device abandonment by the very individuals they seek to help. Yes, they create products with high costs, but scale, not gouging, is the reason. AT manufacturers are far less numerous and much smaller than their high tech cousins and individual use, not mass production, is the reality they live with and price by. The hope is that, as inclusive classrooms create a demand for technology devices that can benefit those with and without disabilities alike, prices will decline.

This issue examines assistive technology companies and the resources currently available to better appreciate their unique relationship with their customers.

David Dikter Speaks

David Dikter, Executive Director, Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA), began his professional life with a passion for teaching and technology that remains strong.

He fed his passion for teaching for 15 years following his graduation from Boston's Wheelock College by teaching elementary school students with disabilities in the Boston public school system and even overseas, at the Frankfurt International School in Germany. His passion for technology was touched off in college and came in the form of an Apple 2 computer. From the beginning, he recalls, "I inherently understood the power of technology as a tool that would enrich my life and the lives of others." Both passions have propelled him through two careers.

He left the classroom, but not teaching, when the city of Boston embarked on an ambitious program to place computers in classrooms. He signed on with Boston's Office of Instructional Technology to manage professional development for teachers experiencing the shock of their first-ever encounter with computers.

Desiring a career opportunity in the for-profit world – "my son had just been born" – he joined a high tech start-up company as a training manager in the waning days of the dot.com boom, a move, he says, "that gave me a broader understanding of the business world after all those years in a school system/city government environment." The boom quickly went bust, however, opening the way to his present position as head of the nation's premier trade group for AT manufacturers, providers and sellers.

Supporting our interview with Mr. Dikter are resources to assist parents and others in learning about AT vendors and their products. We also feature members of our Knowledge Network. The members spotlighted this month focus on various aspects of AT manufacturing. We invite you to contact these members for further information.

Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to contact us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.

A Special Relationship: AT Manufacturers and Their Customers

*An Interview with
David Dikter, Executive Director,
Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA)*

They are an odd coupling in today's business world: AT manufacturers and their customers, individuals with disabilities and their families – those who manufacture and sell, and those who must buy. Perhaps in other industries, where a captive customer base might be exploited to the customer's disadvantage, such a coupling might produce unsavory results. In the AT community, however, the results reflect a positive symbiotic relationship between those who make and those who need, according to David Dikter, Executive Director, Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA).



"There are, of course, similarities between AT manufacturers and other industries," Mr. Dikter concedes. Like companies in other industries, AT vendors are in business to earn a profit and, like all technology companies, they must remain abreast or ahead of state-of-the-art developments. Yet there are substantial differences.

Explains Mr. Dikter, "Among the most substantial differences is the breadth of products and disabilities and constituent groups and consumers that we focus on. Unlike most manufacturing industries, ours is not a single-product or single-market focus because of the scope of the marketplace we serve."

A Believer in the Cause

Unlike other industries, where much of the marketing effort is aimed directly at potential end-users, the AT industry focuses much of its marketing effort at third-party purchasers -- practitioners and professionals, as well as consumers. Within that effort are multiple sub-segments, each with its own set of requirements. "For example, the blindness and low vision community is a very different community than, say, individuals with multiple handicaps. The way we access those communities and the technologies that are involved in serving those communities differs accordingly."

While the bottom line is important to the AT industry, he notes, "serving individuals with disabilities and their families, making their world a bit better, is at least as important." Those ethical and moral considerations, he states, "make our industry different from almost any other."

"I was a special ed teacher for 15 years before I entered the vendor side [of the AT community]. I worked with kids with disabilities. There's urgency to that. That's what it is still about for me. On a

personal level, that's why I do what I do. I'm here not just because I run an industry association but because I believe deeply in the cause."

Enhancing AT Awareness

ATIA's role in this complex relationship "is to broaden the market overall, helping consumers, practitioners, professionals, the business community and the government understand the power of AT for consumers and to help our industry constituents optimize their



marketing." In short, "ATIA's role is to enhance awareness of AT."

ATIA, he says, also seeks to strengthen the relationships between the AT industry and the government, research, and academic communities. In the past, he notes, "there was not a compelling voice for AT vendors. Currently, however, there's a significant opportunity – and a necessity – for the research and government communities to understand that working with the AT industry and the business community is important so that research dollars go where consumers need them to go and, in turn, businesses can bring to the market products that are viable and appropriate for individuals with disabilities."

Bringing consumers, practitioners and professionals together

ATIA helps achieve its awareness and access mission by bringing consumers together with practitioners and professionals at the organization's well-attended annual conference held each January in Orlando, FL. According to Mr. Dikter, this year's conference is slated to attract more than 2,000 attendees, the majority of whom are practitioners and professionals with a dollop of consumers. Explains, Mr. Dikter, "Along with awareness, education and enhancing knowledge of technologies -- and the best ways to employ those technologies – are areas in which we are especially effective."

Individual AT consumers need assistance from trained, skilled and informed professionals, he notes. "We provide one of the major avenues for that education."

The conference, he adds, also helps consumers by bringing together constituents



and stakeholder groups that might not otherwise have the opportunity to directly interact. These groups address several vital topics, including NIMAS (National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard). New within the reauthorized IDEA, NIMAS sets the standard for electronic accessible textbooks and will accelerate their development for K-12 students.



The ATIA conference hosts the annual meeting of the NIMAS development committee and also provides educational information to the

broader AT community about NIMAS, information that is valued for its timeliness. "We're hosting meetings like this throughout our conference, which attract a diverse group of practitioners and professionals as well as consumer representation," Mr. Dikter says.

Other organizations, he notes, choose to conduct their own meetings at the ATIA event. "One of the things I'm very proud of is the goal of our conference, which is to be broad in our partnerships so that other organizations can join us." These organizations, he adds, "not only get the benefit of the educational aspect of the meeting but also the benefit of networking on topics that relate to their needs."

ATIA, he states, provides space for organizations, including those that are non-profit and consumer-based. "These organizations include AT Act programs, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) and the National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAAE), among others. We tend to have more professionals and practitioners at the conference. We believe that part of our role in educating them enables them to go back to educate and work with consumers."

The conference features close to 300 educational sessions. Says Mr. Dikter, "I'm often asked, 'Don't many of the attendees just go to Disneyworld?' And I reply, 'Thursday, Friday and even Saturday morning at 8 a.m. are crazy with activity. Attendees are so hungry for knowledge and education. They believe – and they are correct – that their jobs are really important because they are responsible for educating individuals with disabilities. They feel they have a moral and ethical obligation to do their jobs well and conscientiously.'"

He hopes to see a steady increase in the number of individual consumers who attend the annual ATIA event. "I know that it's economically difficult for consumers to get to Orlando for a conference on AT. We have a free Saturday for the exhibit hall. That's the big consumer day. We have families and individuals in attendance. People come from all around the Orlando area. For me, it's the best part of the entire conference, because that's what we are all there for. While we work a lot with professionals, we in this industry, all of us, are about working to solve major problems for consumers. That's the mission of this entire industry, all parts of it."

A Focus on Outcomes and Benefits

To help build awareness, ATIA publishes the Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits Journal, which is available free on the organization's website.

"The publication focuses on evidence-based research as it pertains to education products, which is a very important issue in the U.S. Department of Education and state education departments as well." He adds, "We strive to be at the forefront, not in actual research, but in helping the research community disseminate knowledge to a much broader audience."



Externally, he explains, the organization's policy and legislative efforts at the federal and state level help ensure that government understands the role that the AT industry plays in the overall development of AT. "Internally, within the industry, we help our members develop relationships and partnerships among themselves." The end result of this effort, he adds, "is the formulation of solutions around product interoperability issues."

Within the business-to-business community, he notes, "the partnerships our members forge help the consumer because the consumer gets the best of breed in individual products or in products that work together." In the past year alone, he continues, "There's been a great deal of partnership activity via mergers and general partnerships, even among competitors." The result: "These combinations are producing some very powerful AT products."

Two Major Industry Challenges: Funding and Awareness

According to Mr. Dikter, the AT industry faces two current and future challenges: funding and awareness. "There's not enough federal or state funding for AT products that too many consumers find difficult to afford." Because many adult consumers with disabilities remain chronically under- or unemployed, "our society needs to provide access tools so that these individuals can gain employment and make choices about the technologies they need by themselves."

Despite the ongoing proliferation of AT devices, there remains insufficient awareness among consumers that such devices exist, according to Mr. Dikter. "If someone is unable to walk in our society, or in most societies, we understand there is a device, a wheelchair, for example, that can help them. If an individual has a communication disorder, there is a very low level of knowledge and awareness that there are technology tools that can help that person communicate."

The same is true, albeit a little less so, in the blindness and low vision field as well as in the learning and physical disabilities fields, he insists. "There are many, many people who would be shocked if they were told that an individual with cerebral palsy was fully capable of full computer use and that there was technology available to help that individual access and use computers." He adds, "The entire AT community – all of its components and stakeholders – have a responsibility to continue to build awareness, not only for children with disabilities and their families but also for students without disabilities and for adults undergoing the aging process."

Bringing an AT Product to Market

In other industries, conceiving a new product and then bringing it to market is a formal step-by-step process. Among AT manufacturers, the process, including product conception, is often less formal, Mr. Dikter says. "Many AT products emerged because an engineer, a group of engineers or software developers either had a child or a parent or a relative or a connection to an individual with a disability, saw a need and set out to meet it."

Some assistive technologies are products of formal research, he concedes, but more often new AT products are created to meet an individual's need. For example, he explains, a blind or vision-impaired individual may require access to a computer. "A first step would be to develop a computer that talks, because a blind person cannot read the screen."

In terms of how a creation goes to market, he explains, most AT companies have a distinct internal process. "Most companies have many, many more ideas than they can fund." Some, he notes, make use of small amounts of federal seed funding to conduct initial research and development via FDIR (fault detection, isolation and recovery) programs. Others conduct technology transfer for the federal government. Most, however, "fund R&D on their own and then bring the product to market."

Not the Same Long Odds

Outside of the AT marketplace, new products, especially consumer packaged goods, annually fail at an alarmingly high rate, about 90%. For AT vendors, however, the new product odds aren't as long. Explains, Mr. Dikter, "The development of AT products is much more strategic and sometimes much less competitive than in the packaged goods arena, which causes them to be more successful."



The smaller scale of the AT marketplace also plays a role in the lower failure rate – but also creates a marketplace where products cost more. "For a big company that's looking to sell millions of a

piece of software, or hundreds of thousands at least, the development time is, let's say, 1,000 hours." For an AT company, he adds, "the same development time may be required but that company is not looking to sell hundreds of thousands of units of that product." Consequently, he concludes, "the only way for AT companies to remain in business is to price their products so that these companies can continue to develop more products."

Device abandonment, not new product failure, is the major concern of AT manufacturers. AT vendors deal with several issues related to abandonment, he explains. One issue is the lack of professional support available for individuals looking to use a newly acquired AT device. "Sometimes AT users need training before they can effectively use their product," Mr. Dikter remarks. "It's not like plugging in your standard mouse and it just works." For many AT products, he adds, skill training is necessary if the product's utility is to be maximized by the user. A communication system, for instance, requires mastery of several skill levels, he points out. "The speech and language pathologist, the family and whoever else supports the user of the device need to be educated on how the product is used. When that support is not present, there's an excellent chance that abandonment will occur."

To minimize abandonment, even in the AT selection process, "it is important for consumers to obtain good support from those professionals who ought to be providing it for them. Consumers need to know that the technology being purchased is right for them." Furthermore, he adds, "Consumers need to research the product's manufacturer to see if that manufacturer has a good track record of product success."

Government Funding Aid? Yes

Given its unique status compared with most for-profit industries, should the AT industry receive support from the federal government or state governments? David Dikter believes such funding is justified and necessary. "This support is directly tied to our societal ideals. We have legislation, like the ADA and IDEA, and that legislation ought to result in funding support for the individuals and families with disabilities who need it. This support also makes economic sense, because it helps place individuals, who might not be employed, in the workplace."



As an industry, he adds, "we do not need that much additional support from the federal government. However, as an industry, we do deserve what other industries receive in terms of federal government support. We need a commitment around regulation, not over-regulation. I think we need continuing support for research and development efforts and a commitment from federal and state government to AT manufacturers that form productive partnerships that result in new, relevant AT products."

Currently, he claims the bulk of that funding goes to academic and university research-based organizations. Until recently, he points out, there was not a very strong connection between the research being funded and the business community. The end result: "A lot of money was going into research but the researchers do not move products to market, and the business community does. We can come up with a lot of ideas, but if they do not fit in line with a concept that can work in the business world, there's something lost. Righting that situation is the core of the ATIA's efforts with all levels of government."

Not Like Buying a DVD Player at Best Buy

When selecting and learning to use AT devices, parents should rely on the advice of skilled professionals and practitioners. "For most parents and for many consumers, the initial AT purchase is their first exposure to



AT, so it's critical that they be equipped with good advice from knowledgeable individuals. When it comes to the products themselves, recommendations tend to come from those professionals and practitioners who understand the learning curve for various technologies, including what kind of service is available from a specific company."

It's important to recognize that often an AT product is decided on specifically for the needs of an individual, Mr. Dikter says. "It's not like going to Best Buy, for example, and getting a DVD player from a selection of 50 that may range in price from \$50 to \$1,000 and you pick out the bells and whistles that you want and pay the price for them."

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT OFTEN AN AT PRODUCT IS DECIDED ON SPECIFICALLY FOR THE NEEDS OF AN INDIVIDUAL, MR. DIKTER SAYS. "IT'S NOT LIKE GOING TO BEST BUY, FOR EXAMPLE, AND GETTING A DVD PLAYER FROM A SELECTION OF 50 THAT MAY RANGE IN PRICE FROM \$50 TO \$1,000 AND YOU PICK OUT THE BELLS AND WHISTLES THAT YOU WANT AND PAY THE PRICE FOR THEM."

When matching an individual's needs to a product, "it's vital to make sure that the product will serve the user well over time," he adds. Next, he notes, it's advisable to make contact with the AT manufacturer and keep the company informed about the device's utility.

Contact

"The consumer should feel empowered to make contact with the manufacturer," Mr. Dikter declares. "Even though the consumer may go through a practitioner or professional, the companies that I work with value consumer input. In fact, it's critical to them to hear directly from consumers." Consumers, he continues "need to know that the AT manufacturer is not just a company looking to take consumers' money and then forget them." AT vendors, he emphasizes, want to know who is using their products, how they are being used and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Parents won't be rebuffed when they approach an AT manufacturer, he insists. "This feedback provides information that can result not only in the improvement of a current product but also in the creation of a next generation product."

Like their packaged goods cousins, some AT vendors use focus groups to gain consumer feedback prior to a product's launch. In terms of testing and learning about their current and future products, many vendors also work through various organizations that have access to individuals with disabilities.

Some AT companies go directly to their consumers. "Different segments market differently, Mr. Dikter explains. Some market directly to consumers. "In the low-vision field, for example, most marketing is direct to consumers. It's different in augmentative communication. In order to have insurance pay for AAC devices, a speech and language pathologist must conduct an evaluation. For consumers, there must be a process in place to help access the right kind of AAC device. AAC devices are complex. They must be programmed correctly."

Future Trends: Interoperability, Miniaturization and Convergence

The current movement toward standardization in the overall technology marketplace, as well as in the AT industry, will accelerate the interoperability of AT devices, Mr. Dikter predicts. "AT vendors work off of those standards. Internally, companies are investigating how AT products can work together and are considering partnerships."

Emerging inclusive education, he notes, "is pushing the envelope socially in terms of access to AT. When we talk about inclusive education in schools, we are talking about a much broader constituency of students with disabilities.



The social ramifications of AT, and its convergence with educational technology, will ultimately push AT into the mainstream. As a result, AT products will not be restricted to special needs

students. That process is already well underway.”

In terms of the technical trends, including miniaturization, “it’s clear that general electronics and technology, like hand-held, mobile and wireless technology, will continue to proliferate and its utility will be crossover.” Companies are already looking into how these technologies might be incorporated into AT, he reveals. “There are examples of hand held technologies that are being utilized to serve a variety of disability areas, from cognitive, to blindness/low-vision, to augmentative communication. We see this on our convention floor every year.”



The wireless technologies, he remarks, “are pretty cool.” Individuals who use switches and other devices, that often require a proliferation of wires, will increasingly rely on. Blue Tooth and other wireless solutions that can be integrated into cell phone, wi-fi and computer technology. This technology, he says, “may be exactly what an individual with disabilities needs.”

Because of their smaller size and better agility, he expects AT manufacturers to be quicker to incorporate innovations into their devices.

Any difficulty they experience in incorporating innovations, he comments, derives from the higher expense of new technologies. “AT vendors may have the ability to incorporate cool technology but lack the financial platform to afford it, which acts as an impediment to quickly bringing innovative AT to market. This is a real economic issue. This goes back to the major difference between AT vendors and their larger cousins: How many devices for a specific disability or a specific need can be sold? Again, the issue is scale.”

Convergence Is a Passion

According to Mr. Dikter, there are many emerging learning-focused assistive technologies in K-12 “that would be wonderfully positive in the lives of many students, including those without disabilities.”



In the future, he expects to see converging technologies that will be boons to students with disabilities. This convergence, he says, “is a passion of mine.” When he ceased classroom teaching, as part of his career transition, “I worked for several

years in an instructional technology group within a large urban school system. One of the reasons I was brought in to do professional development around education technology was to deter-

mine which technologies best serve the student with disabilities in the digital divide. I was able to bring assistive technologies into regular classrooms and did not have to categorize the AT devices as anything other than technologies that can address classroom issues.”

To make convergence work, he says, “many individuals and groups must be brought together that represent numerous relevant stakeholder groups in school systems and within the business world.” Whether it’s universal design or using an AT product for a broader purpose, “it’s all acceptable if we’re reaching a greater population that might be made more successful and productive in our society. This is our contribution. Our industry cannot compare to the computer industry, for example, in scale, in number and size of companies, but our importance to those who need us is, and will continue to be, immeasurable.”

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• The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 places significantly more emphasis on mediation between schools and families when there is disagreement on an aspect of a child’s education. Access to assistive technology (AT) devices and services is one area in which schools, school systems, and families sometimes find themselves at odds.
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• PLEASE JOIN US THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY, FOR AN ONLINE DISCUSSION OF:

Effective Assistive Technology Mediation

MODERATED BY MEDIATION EXPERTS
JEANNE BOWMAN
JAN SERAK
NISSAN BAR-LEV

• Bring your questions, comments, anecdotes and experiences to this very important discussion. Learn about the new emphasis placed by IDEA on mediation and discuss with others throughout the country the impact this may have on a child’s access to AT.
.....

• There is no cost, no registration, no prior knowledge required. Simply log on to www.fctd.info and click on the link to the discussion.
.....

February 1 - 28, 2006

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

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RESOURCES

Articles

Adults Are from Earth; Children Are from the Moon Designing for Children: A Complex Challenge

By Randy White

White Hutchinson Leisure and Learning Group - 2004

Offering a perspective on designing learning tools for children, the article explores in detail the elements of design required to achieve the following four goals: movement, because the environment needs to offer children an invitation to move within safe and tolerable limits; comfort, because a feeling of comfort is important to children's use and exploration of the environment; competence, because children need to feel successful in negotiating the environment; and control, because children need the ability to exercise control over the environment and acquire increased levels of autonomy. Concludes the author, "Positive outcomes for children's behavior in a leisure or education setting will be produced only when the environments have been designed with a thorough knowledge of child development, play, anthropometrics, ergonomics, environmental factors, wayfinding, environmental psychology and universal design."

<http://whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/earthmoon.shtml>

Selecting, Buying and Maintaining Adaptive Equipment, or What to Do Before You Buy

By Cindy Alberding

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services - 2004

Writes the author, "Just like childhood games of 20 questions, you can never ask too many questions before you purchase an expensive item." She provides the following questions purchasers of assistive technology ought to ask of a vendor before buying:

- What breaks most often and how easy is it to fix?
- How often does it break?
- Is it worth the price?
- How long will it last?
- How does it have to be put together?
- How is it maintained?
- Does it do what the manufacturer claims?
- Are there any options on the item?
- Is it available anywhere else?
- Is it hard to learn to use?
- Is it comfortable?
- Is it safe?
- Can it be easily stolen?
- Is it portable?
- Can it be repaired locally?
- Does the manufacturer have the desired color, size and weight?

http://www.arsinfo.net/ican/fs_adeqp.html

Addressing the Special Needs Student Through Technology

By Diane Forte Barfield

TechLearning - 2003

To provide cognitive assistance to students with disabilities, the author advocates combining software available for problem solving and stimulation with the instructional curriculum in order to improve thinking and problem-solving skills. By using the tools offered by computers and other technology, educators can adapt the appearance of work to address special needs students. Concludes the author, "Color schemes can be changed to accommodate children with attention deficit. The size of items is flexible using operating systems such as Windows. Auditory signals and visual cues are available under the control panels of most PC units and many offer a special icon entitled 'accessibility options' that allows for the setting of special features. By using this option, teachers can tell the computer to ignore slight keystrokes and only accept the firm ones."

http://techlearning.com/db_area/archives/WCE/archives/di-ansn1.html

Selecting and Obtaining AT

Iowa Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT); InfoTech - 2004

The two organizations have combined to produce a consumer guide to selecting and purchasing AT. The authors write that selecting AT is more complex than choosing a more familiar technology, like a telephone. They suggest the following steps in AT selection:

- Define your goal; what do you want to accomplish?
- Determine the assessment team
- Assess the prospective consumer
- Assess the environment
- Assess the technology

In selecting a vendor, the authors recommend answering the following questions:

- How long has the dealer been in business?
- What is his/her knowledge of particular disabilities, of the equipment being sold? How did the dealer come by that knowledge?
- Does the dealer participate in continuing AT education?
- How long has the dealer supplied the device you're interested in?
- What is the dealer's responsibility should an error occur in measuring, ordering, assembling or delivering the equipment?
- Does the dealer provide training or refer to training sources?
- Is the dealer willing to provide the names of previous customers using similar equipment, as references?

<http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/SelectAT.htm>

Best Practices for Vendors of Assistive Technology

Iowa Program for Assistive Technology – InfoTech - 2004

The article is a bill of responsibilities for AT manufacturers. AT vendor qualifications include:

- A sound knowledge of anatomy, physiology, disabling conditions, and disease processes relevant to the technical aspects of the equipment they provide
- In order to gain and maintain this knowledge, vendors will regularly engage in self-guided study and/or attend courses, seminars, trade shows, and other continuing education activities
- Vendors support and participate in the efforts of habilitation organizations to improve vendor services
- Vendors recognize the need for, and actively pursue, communication and interaction with other vendors.

The goals of these interactions are to:

- Maintain the standards of professionalism necessary for continued participation as respected team members
- Increase the awareness of services and products, improve overall product quality, and enhance product and service development in the field
- Communicate with and educate local funding agencies and insurance carriers

<http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/Vendors.htm>

Blogs

HearingMojo.com

David Copithorne

The blogger contracted Meunier's disease, which resulting in an 80% hearing loss in his right ear and 60% in his left, two years ago. Since then, he has, by his own account, spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars researching his condition and other forms of hearing impairment. His blog brings together research professionals, educators, disability advocates, families and AT equipment manufacturers in a continuing forum. A former journalist, Mr. Copithorne was CEO of Porter Novelli International, one of the world's foremost public relations firms.

<http://aquarius.typepad.com/about.html>

Publications

Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits

Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA), Special Education Assistive Technology Center (SEAT)

This quarterly, focusing on lifespan AT benefits and outcomes, is a collaborative publication of two respected AT organizations. Downloadable from the ATIA website at no cost, the publication is a peer-reviewed, cross-disability, transdisciplinary journal aimed at fostering communication among AT vendors, specialists, consultants and other professionals.

<http://www.atia.org/atob/ATOWeb/index.htm>

Don Johnston Leader Link

Don Johnston, Inc.

The AT manufacturer publishes three newsletters that are available on the company's website:

- Leader Link, which provides updates on the company's products and AT industry news, including new product announcements, shipping dates and trade show activities
- TRLD News, which is the e-newsletter of the Technology, Reading and Learning Difficulties (TRLD) Conference held annually in San Francisco in late January
- Technology in Literacy Resources (TIL), a practical resource containing articles from leading educators that feature classroom-based experiences and strategies on implementing technology solutions that enhance student reading and writing abilities

<http://www.donjohnston.com/newsletters/newsletters.htm>

Special Needs Tech News

By Janet Hopkins

Assistive Tech Educational Consulting; AT Canada

A Canadian print publication edited by British Columbia teacher and RESNA-certified AT practitioner Janet Hopkins that covers many aspects of assistive technology, including new products. The publication, a quarterly, which maintains a selective circulation of just 500-750 copies, is also distributed electronically to 400 recipients.

<http://ca.geocities.com/janethopkinsbc/newsletters.html>

Websites

Access and Productivity Tools

Synapse Adaptive

The site is maintained by Synapse Adaptive, which offers two major products: the Synapse TAP Workstation that provides speech recognition on any computer platform, and the Synapse ADA Workstation, which provides universal access to all users regardless of their disability. The Synapse homepage provides a wide range of AT resources on its homepage.

<http://www.synapseadaptive.com/>

Vendors Specializing in Technology for the Blind

New York Institute for Special Education (NYISE)

This website is a source for links to many vendors specializing in AT for the blind and visually impaired.

<http://www.nyise.org/vendors.htm>

Assistive Technology Solutions

AT Solutions is a company that specializes in AT applications; the company's website features a comprehensive list of AT vendors and descriptions of their products and services.

<http://www.assistivetechsolutions.com/productlinks.htm>

Alliance for Technology Access (ATA)

The ATA website spotlights 36 AT vendors with lengthy and specific descriptions of their products and services, plus contact information.

<http://www.ataccess.org/community/vendors.lasso>



**Family Center
on Technology
and Disability**

www.fctd.info

Looking for information about assistive technology?
Interested in product reviews?
Research results?
Training material?

Check out the Family Center on Technology & Disability's

AT RESOURCES

There are more than 600 reviews of and links to AT articles, products, training guides, and much more!

You can search the FCTD's AT Resources database by category, disability, and type of material.

It's free, easy and up-to-date!
Reviews are provided by experienced AT professionals.
Links take you directly to the material -
no wandering around a website, hunting for an article.

Just click on **AT RESOURCES** on the FCTD's homepage.

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS

Prentke Romich Company (PRC)

Prentke Romich Company (PRC) develops and augmentative communication devices, computer access products, and other assistive technology.

PRC has produced multiple AT products since its inception in 1964. In 1995, the company developed strategies for standardizing the vocabulary, which evolved into the development of Unity, the foundation for vocabulary in all PRC products.



PRC-produced AAC devices include Pathfinder, Vanguard, Vantage and Springboard. The company offers an extensive product support program which includes on-line information as well as phone technical support. The PRC website includes customer success stories.

For more information on PRC, please contact:

1022 Heyl Road
Wooster, OH 44691
Toll-free: (800) 262-1984
Voice: (330) 262-1984
Fax: (330) 263-4829
Sales: (800) 262-1933
Service: (800) 262-1990

<http://www.prentrom.com>

Email: info@prentrom.com

Advanced Multimedia Devices, Inc. (AMDi)

Advanced Multimedia Devices, Inc. (AMDi) designs, engineers, manufactures, and distributes high quality communication devices and related products for special needs consumers. AMDi is headquartered in Hicksville, NY with manufacturing facilities in Hong Kong.



Stressing quality control, the company also offers a stream of new products backed by customer service.

For more information on AMDi, please contact:

200 Frank Road
Hicksville, NY 11801

Toll-free: (888) 353-2634

Voice: (516) 822-0808

Fax: (516) 822-6611

<http://www.amdi.net>

Email: Info@amdi.net

Adaptivation, Inc.

Adaptivation, Inc. designs, manufactures, and distributes AT. New products are developed to meet specific customer needs.

To help ensure device utility, the company educates customers on product use via workshops and seminars and assists with customized device set-up. Adaptivation also collaborates closely with families through therapists and educators. The company's repair service is responsive to customer use imperatives.



For more information on Adaptivation, Inc., please contact:

2225 W. 50th Street, Suite 100

Sioux Falls, SD 57105

Toll-free: (800) 723-2783

Voice: (605) 335-4445

Fax: (605) 335-4446

<http://www.adaptivation.com>

Contact: Amy Koch, Director of Marketing

Email: info@adaptivation.com

Attainment Company, Inc.



Founded in 1979 when Public Law 94-142 was a new

concept, Attainment, which is staffed by many special needs employees, has intentionally remained small enough to continue creating tailored AT products

Device information is available on the company's website and via a toll-free customer service line. Attainment also provides product support, free catalogs and free software demos.

For more information on the Attainment Company, Inc., please contact:

P.O. Box 930160

Verona, WI 53593-0160

Toll-free: (800) 327-4269

Fax: (800) 942-3865

<http://www.AttainmentCompany.com>

Email: info@AttainmentCompany.com

Laureate Learning Systems

Laureate Learning Systems (LLS) publishes software designed for children and adults with special needs. Multimedia programs combine instructional design with digital speech, graphics and animation. LLS programs are designed mainly for students with Autism/PDD.



Two Phase II Small Business Innovation Research grants from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) support the development and clinical testing of two new product series.

Rather than creating less expensive 'home' versions of its products, LLS offers its software to parents and families at a 50% discount.

Laureate provides several customer feedback vehicles via its website but has learned many parents prefer to call its 800 number to speak directly to Laureate's co-founders.

For more information on Laureate Learning Systems, please contact:

110 East Spring Street

Winooski, VT 05404-1898

Toll-free: (800) 562-6801

Voice: (802) 655-4755

Fax: (802) 655-4757

<http://www.laureatelearning.com/professionals602/index.html>

Contact: Mary S. Wilson, co-founder

Email: maryw@LaureateLearning.com

Mayer-Johnson, LLC

Mayer-Johnson (M-J) creates symbol-based products, training and services products aimed at enhancing both learning and expression.



Products are generally geared to assist people with autism, developmental delays, cerebral palsy, stroke, and ALS. Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) and the Boardmaker are major products.

Today, approximately 10,000 PCS symbols are available in 40 languages worldwide. The Boardmaker is a symbol-based desktop publishing software used in the creation of printed materials and is offered on Windows and Mac in 11 languages.

The company also offers additional software, add-on applications, animated symbols, sign language symbols, digital photo

sets, access switches, touch screens, AAC devices, books and ready-made materials. Mayer-Johnson is a division of DynaVox Technologies LLC and is based in San Diego, CA. M-J offers tech support on all products to ensure customer usability.

For more information on Mayer-Johnson, please contact:

P.O. Box 1579

Solana Beach, CA 92075-7579

Toll-free: (800) 588-4548

Voice: (858) 550-0084

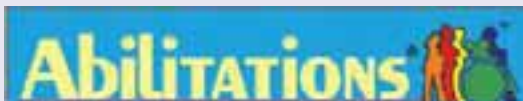
Fax: (858) 550-0449

<http://www.mayer-johnson.com/>

Email: mayerj@mayer-johnson.com

Abilitations

Abilitations is a catalog for children



with special needs. The company offers therapist-selected products for children's therapy, special education and special needs. Catalogs, products, and information provide solutions for professionals and parents of children with special needs. Products are used in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, special education, adapted physical education, home, and school.

Many Abilitations products are customer-generated. Consequently, the company provides an inventor royalty program enabling consumers to submit product ideas.

For more information about Abilitations, please contact:

3155 Northwoods Pkwy

Norcross GA 30071-1539

Toll-free: (800) 850-8602

Fax: (800) 845-1535

<http://www.abilitations.com>

Contact: Ilana Danneman, Director

Email: idanneman@sportime.com

Assistive Technology Industry Association

The Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) is a non-profit membership organization of manufacturers, sellers or providers of technology based assistive devices and/or services. ATIA sponsors AT conferences on the east coast of the U.S. These conferences provide a forum for education and communication to profes-



sional practitioners serving individuals with disabilities. In addition to conferences, ATIA collaborates with the AT industry and federal and state government to address special education issues.

For more information about ATIA, please contact:

401 North Michigan Avenue

MC: 2200-1

Chicago, IL 60611-4267

Toll-free: (877) 687-2842

Voice: (312) 321-5172

Fax: (312) 673-6659

<http://www.atia.org>

Contact: David Dikter, President

Email: Info@ATIA.org

AbleNet, Inc.

AbleNet, Inc. produces AT products and educational programs that aid individuals with complex physical and cognitive disabilities, including on-line resources for educators that enable teachers to download and use current information about AbleNet products and classroom teaching techniques.



For more information about AbleNet, Inc., please contact:

2808 Fairview Avenue North

Roseville, MN 55113-1308

Toll-free: (800) 322-0956

<http://www.ablenetinc.com>

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