

TechnoTalk

The TASC Newsletter

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building futures



Editorial

by Jo Ford

Welcome to the first edition of TechnoTalk for 2005. We hope that you have had a safe and restful Christmas and are ready to face the exciting assistive technology "challenges" for the up coming year.

This month Paula has provided an update to our Note Takers Comparison Table. This is a task that the consultants regularly undertake as new products and updates to old favourites soon make the information that we have out of date. We have found this table provides an easy reference for reviewing features of various Note Takers.

The New Year has also seen us welcome a new staff member to the TASC team. Liza MacLean, occupational therapist, started with us this week. She is a warmly welcomed addition to TASC Consultative Service. You can look forward to seeing her introducing herself in next month's edition.

Finally you will notice that we have a "new look" for the newsletter. Special thanks to Judith Geppert our creative and very patient desktop publisher, who has spent many hours formatting this exciting new edition.

Happy reading until next month.

Jo Ford



Note Takers Comparisons

by
Paula-Jane Robinson

It seems that a question that is commonly asked of TASC is whether users should be utilising a Note Taker or a computer/laptop? There is no one easy answer. Some of the questions you may like to ask yourself when attempting to make a decision are:

Firstly, when looking at a device, can the user:

1. Manipulate a flip top screen display that comes with a laptop?
2. See the screen size, ie is larger font, spaces and colour contrast required? Note Takers generally have smaller screens and less contrast features.
3. Physically manipulate the keyboard, ie able to press the keys without hitting other keys or can they press a combination of keys at once? Some Note Takers don't have features such as Filter Keys (to ignore brief or repeated keystrokes or slow the repeat rate) or Sticky Keys (to assist with combination keystrokes), and is a keyguard required, eg to

avoid hitting unwanted keys and to rest the hand on. Keyguards can be commercially made to fit most devices.

4. Scroll the entire document with ease? Note Takers generally have a smaller screen to scroll.






5. Require a floppy and CD drive for their studies, especially as users progress through their education? Although most Note Takers don't have these drives, information and software can be easily transferred via the computer.

6. Control all the tasks required when working with a computer? Eg when word processing can the user save a document or file, edit, spell check and retrieve a document? Note Takers are generally considered less complex in regards to file management and are quicker to start up.

Are the following features required?

1. Portability and durability, ie Note Takers are generally lighter than laptops and less sophisticated therefore less prone to breakdown and easier to set-up / pack away.

2. Battery life and power
Continued back page.

Feature	Alpha Smart 3000IR	Alpha Smart Dana	Laser PC6	Writer Plus	AlphaSmart Neo
					
Power Supply	AC adapter 3 AA batteries: 700 hours Optional rechargeable battery pack providing to 200 hrs of typical use Hibernation mode Auto power off	AC adapter Rechargeable battery pack 3AA batteries Customised auto shut-off	AC adapter 4AA batteries (optional rechargeable battery) 36 hrs continuous use with batteries 20 hrs continuous use with rechargeable battery Adjustable auto shut-down feature	3 AA batteries: 300+ hours - The Writer is set to turn off after 4 minutes of non-use. Press the on key to re-start (no student data will be lost) - If the Writer has had rechargeable batteries installed, a Writer AC adaptor or Writer PowerHub recharger can be used e.g. a 6-8 hour period once per week i.e. dependant on use	3 AA batteries: 700 hrs - AC Adaptor to charge internal batteries - You can quickly check battery status through Neo control panel - Adjustable auto shut down feature
Weight	0.91kg	0.91kg	1.2kg	970g	0.91 kg
Display	LCD 4 lines by 40 characters Can't change font size	- 8 lines x 90 columns - LCD with backlighting Write pad, touch pad screen and stylus pen, on-screen keyboard and standard keyboard options included - Adjustable contrast Non-hinged display - Display can be changed between horizontal and vertical orientations	LCD You can choose between two screen layouts (by pressing the 40/80 key, located on the left bottom row) either displaying 4 lines by 40 characters, or 8 lines by 80 characters. When using the 4 line by 40 character display, the font size is approximately 30pt. Optional video expansion port to view display on TV screen	LCD 4 Lines 40 characters	LCD Screen can be configured to display 2 - 6 lines of text per screen
Keyboard Layout	QWERTY, right, left, DVORAK. Translucent keyboard case	QWERTY, DVORAK, right and left	QWERTY	QWERTY	QWERTY. DVORAK, right/left hand layouts also available

Feature	Alpha Smart 3000IR	Alpha Smart Dana	Laser PC6	Writer Plus	AlphaSmart Neo
Numeric Keys	Yes	Yes	Yes. Scientific calculator, access via main menu	Yes	Yes
On/off switch	Easy to reach key on the keyboard	Easy to reach key on keyboard. Option to select alternative keys to turn on/off	Small slide button on top left side panel of device	Yes: top left key on keyboard	Yes: top left key on keyboard
Word Processor	100 pages of text in 8 files Simple process to save and open files Includes cut, copy and paste	- 8 MB of memory. Digital and multimedia compatible slots allow addition of memory (16, 32 or 64MB) devices and backup of data - Can assign saved files to 8 separate function keys for easier access and customising - Simple process to save and open files. Incl cut, copy, paste - Formatting options of paragraph formatting, justify, bold, underline, italics, font selection available (additional fonts can be installed). - Variable fonts and sizes - Address Book, Date Book, To Do List, and Memo Pad	Up to 45 Word processor files available, 14 pages max of text per file and 100 pages max text overall - 2 databases - Telephone Directory - Spreadsheet - Text formatting: Cut & paste, Tab, Underline, Bold, Find, Margins, Header and Footer - Homework diary	The Writer word processor includes: - Creative Writing Prompt activities - Daily Journal - Formatted Printouts include: teacher name, student name, file name and date - Text Editing Checklist editing and revision checklists stored on the Writer to encourage students to check their own work -Each student can have his or her own personal work folder (up to 8 folders, accessed by pressing F1-F8 keys). Within each folder, students store their writing assignments by name	Alphaword Plus - 8 Files (activated by File keys located on keyboard) - Can name files - Use dictionary for adding additional words and terms - Spanish – English word lookup
Spell Checker	Yes - using a 70 000 word dictionary. Easy to access key on the keyboard Can disable the spell checker but can't add words to the existing dictionary	Yes. Thesaurus also available	Yes – 80 000 words Access through Main Menu or within word processor Easy to access the “ Spell-check” key on the right side of the keyboard	Yes: 80 000 word dictionary. Easy to access the “ Spell-check” key on the top row of the keyboard - Students see the misspelled word in context - Under the Applications function there is a “ Spell It “ function ie Spelling and vocabulary reinforcement Program. This program allows students to practice spelling, defining, placing words in sentences and	Yes; Spell check and Thesaurus - Spell check button accessed from keyboard

Feature	Alpha Smart 3000IR	Alpha Smart Dana	Laser PC6	Writer Plus	AlphaSmart Neo
				unscrambling their words - You can disable the spell checker	
Sticky Keys	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Key Repeat	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Text-to-Speech	No	No	Yes. Additional feature option	No	No
Rate Enhancement	Can add Co:Writer Smart Applet for word prediction or Writer Tools (includes Spell Check + Thesaurus)	Additional word prediction programs can be purchased and installed	Yes. In-built prompted word prediction. Option to choose prediction to appear after 1, 2, or 3 letters have been typed	The Writer can be preloaded with special word prediction software. Prediction software can be purchased and installed on all version 3.0 Writer units	No
Compatibility	Mac and PC and Mac	Mac and PC	Mac and PC	Mac and PC	Mac and PC
Exporting / Printing	Yes Print directly to USB printer with cable supplied in the pack OR via a computer. Very simple procedure. Has print and send keys on keyboard. Optional infrared interface for wireless transfer to a computer or printer.	Yes - Print directly to printer (with special parallel print cable) or via a computer - Simple 3-step procedure to print formatted text (via menu function). Also has send key but will only send plain print. - Optional wireless infra-red connection	Yes: Data from your word processor, spreadsheet etc can be downloaded to you computer The transfer is done using an infrared receiver which plugs into the USB port of your laptop or computer . No software is required for set up of the receiver. Just point the PC6 at the infrared receiver, press the Ir-Send key and watch text flow into the open document. Text can be sent into any application. Just plug in the Ir receiver into the USB or keyboard port of the host computer and start transmitting	- Yes. A writer “ receiver” is required. Plug the Writer receiver into your computer, open a blank document and press the “ Send to computer” key - Likewise for the printer ie you can print directly to the printer ie press the “Send to Printer” key, via the” Writer IR printer receiver” or print through your computer	- You can send text from the Neo to a computer using either a USB cable or Infrared beaming technology (your computer must be IR capable) - You can send text to any application that accepts text - Neo can print to many USB printers or via beaming text to an IR capable printer

Feature	Alpha Smart 3000IR	Alpha Smart Dana	Laser PC6	Writer Plus	AlphaSmart Neo
Importing Files	Yes, 'Get Utility' software required	Yes. Software required	Yes. Must be saved as a txt file for PC and Mac at least Word.2.0	With the Writer and computer connected to the Writer PowerHub, you now can send and receive files, quizzes, keyboard reports and more	The Neo can receive files from your computer (text) using the Neo AlphaSmart Manager (software)
Voice Output	No	No	No	Yes With the Text-to-Speech cartridge installed, you can directly chat using the "Text to speech" feature from within the main menu or the word processor can speak, either as the student types, or by playing back passages i.e. by pressing the "Play TTS" key. The word prediction and spell checker also speak. Headphones are included	No
Mounting Plate	No	No	No	No	No
Moisture Guard	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Keyguard	Yes	Can be made or bought off shelf	Can be made by different company	Could be made by a different company	Could be made by a different company
Other Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document protection with passwords - Keyboard timer for typing assessments - Smart Applet architecture allows mini software applications to be downloaded to extend the devices abilities (eg. Writers Tools, Inspiration, Keywords, Co:Writer, FormMate) - Able to share information with another Dana or Palm-powered device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document protection with passwords. - Keyboard timer for typing assessments - Smart Applet architecture allows mini software applications to be downloaded to extend the devices abilities (eg. Writers Tools, Inspiration, Keywords, Co:Writer, FormMate) - Able to share information with another Dana or Palm-powered device. "Slow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productivity pack provides software for integration with Microsoft Office. Word count Find and replace Thesaurus Calendar, address, "To Do", Memo and find functions included. Able to install other Palm OS Applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homework and daily calendar - Telephone Directory - Typing tutor - Thesaurus option (500,000 words) - Database - Spreadsheet - Foreign language accents - Able to view how much memory is available - Privacy code function i.e. to protect confidential information - Utilities (where you can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Password protection - The SmartApplet (software) allows you to install new programs eg typing exercises and quizzes etc control student access to them, and turn selected features on or off - Find/replace and word count - Help system eg quick access to command - Linked files for ruberics, homework instructions or

Feature	Alpha Smart 3000IR	Alpha Smart Dana	Laser PC6	Writer Plus	AlphaSmart Neo
				access various settings and options)	reference materials -Autosave - Control panel to access settings
Approx. Cost	\$399 (+ Additional extras eg. carry bag, cables etc)	\$895 (+ Additional extras eg. carry bag, cables etc)	\$635 (+ Additional extras eg. carry bag, cables etc)	\$399 (with Text to Speech Cartridge)	\$ 499 (+ Additional extras eg carry bag, cables etc)
Supplier	<p>- Battery Powered Computers PO Box 7451 Chatham NSW 2430 Ph 1800 688 770 www.batterypoweredcomputers.com</p> <p>- Spectronics PO Box 88, Rochedale QLD 4123 Ph 07 3808 683 www.spectronicsinoz.com</p>	<p>- Ability Technology Ph 02 9907 9736 www.abilitycorp.com.au</p> <p>- Battery Powered Computers Ph 1800 688 770 www.batterypoweredcomputers.com</p> <p>- Northcott Equipment Services Ph 02 9890 0195 www.northcott.com.au</p>	<p>- Ability Technology Ph 02 9907 9736 www.abilitycorp.com.au</p> <p>- Battery Powered Computers Ph 1800 688 770 www.batterypoweredcomputers.com</p> <p>- Northcott Equipment Service Ph 02 9890 0195 www.northcott.com.au</p> <p>- Novitatech PO Box 2438, Regency Park. South Australia 5942 Ph 1300 855 585 www.novitatech.org.au</p>	<p>- Ability Technology Ph 02 9907 9736 www.abilitycorp.com.au</p> <p>- Battery Powered Computers Ph 1800 688770 www.batterypoweredcomputers.com</p> <p>- Novitatech PO Box 2438, Regency Park. South Australia 5942 Ph 1300 855 585 www.novitatech.org.au</p> <p>- Northcott Equipment Ph 1800 506 071 www.northcott.com.au</p>	<p>- Battery Powered Computers Ph 1800 688 770 www.batterypoweredcomputers.com</p> <p>- Novitatech PO Box 2438, Regency Park. South Australia 5942 Ph 1300 855 585 www.novitatech.org.au</p> <p>- Spectronics PO Box 88, Rochedale QLD 4123 Ph 07 3808 6833 www.spectronicsinoz.com</p>



Polyana 3 with Persona Software

by Katherine Young

New to TASC is the Polyana 3 with Persona software. The Polyana is a commercially available handheld PC computer (NEC MobilePro 900) that has been modified to function as an augmentative communication device. The modification consists of an amplifier package and the Persona software.

The device is small and portable, weighing only 1.1kg. It consists of a small, colour LCD touch screen, which folds to close over a 78 key keyboard.

The Persona program is a text-based communication program, which enables typed text to be spoken, using DECTalk speech synthesisers. Other features that speed the rate of text production are:

- Phrase bank – users can store and quickly retrieve whole phrases that are used frequently
- Abbreviation expansions – whole phrases can be stored under a letter or combination of letters to be retrieved quickly
- Word completion – when one or more letters have been typed, the computer will suggest words that begin with those letters, for example 'mi' – might, miss, milk
- Word prediction – when a word has been completed and a space entered, the computer will suggest words that might follow, for example 'there...' – are, were, is

The word prediction dictionary actually LEARNS the specific words and phrases that the user creates, which speeds up text production considerably.

As well as being a functional voice output communication device, the Polyana 3 also provides the user access to MS Pocket Word and the other Microsoft applications (MS Access, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint and Internet Explorer). These are the Windows CE versions, not the fully-fledged PC versions. It is intended that documents produced in the Microsoft programs are transferred to a PC for formatting and so on.

Access to Persona is by the keyboard, the touch screen and by a switch through the on-screen keyboard. For switch users, various scanning arrays may be selected, for example, alphabetical, optimised (frequency of use) or QWERTY *(see sample below). Alternatively a scan array can be customised.

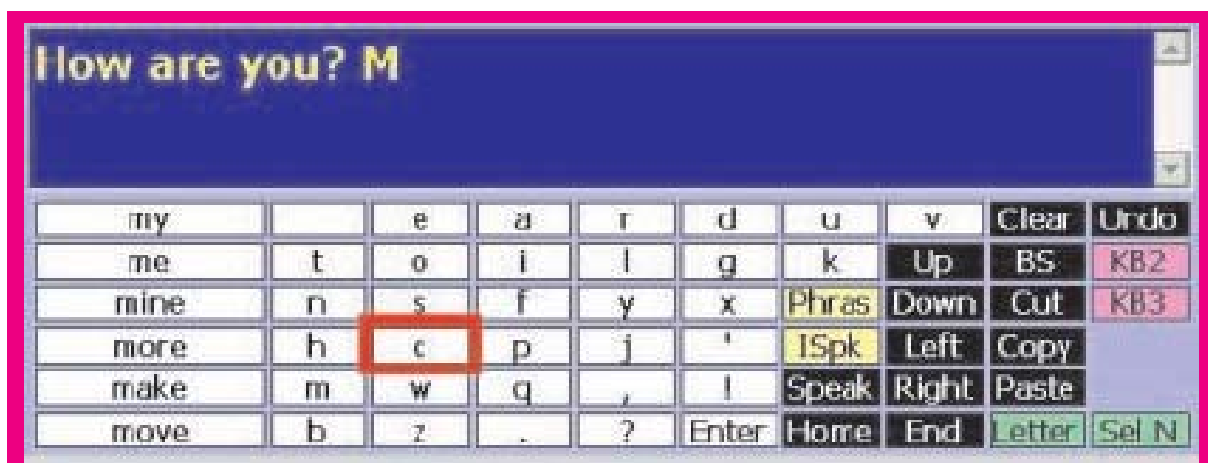
The Polyana 3 comes with 64 MB RAM and a 16MB Internal Flash ROM. It has a serial port (direct cable connection), infrared port, modem port and built-in switch jack. It weighs 1.1kg and has a good battery life of up to eight hours. Wheelchair mounting systems and a keyguard are available for the Polyana 3.

For more information on the Polyana 3, see the following websites:

<http://www.technability.com.au/>

<http://www.zygoaustralia.com.au>

<http://www.novitatech.org.au>



* Example of Scan Array

supply requirements should be considered, especially when in an educational environment. These features are applicable to both laptops and Note Takers, but generally a Note Taker has a significant longer battery life when compared to laptops.

3. Software needs to be considered, ie computers have a greater capacity for software, a consideration especially when a user progresses through their education or has the need for specialist software.

4. Printing abilities. Most laptops /computers and many of the more recent Note Takers can be directly linked to a printer. Wireless technology should also be a consideration.

5. Is text-to-speech required? Some Note Takers do not have the capacity for text-to-speech. Text-to-speech software is easily available for most laptops.

6. Is word prediction required? Some Note Takers do not have

the capacity for this software. Word prediction software is easily available for most laptops.

Secondly, what are the learning needs of the user within the educational or other settings - is it just taking notes down or are there further needs, eg Internet or specialised software?

What are the users access needs - can they take the Note Taker or laptop home with them? If not, how will the user bring their information home to complete their work? Generally speaking laptops / computers can utilise floppy disks, CDs and memory sticks to manoeuvre information, whereas Note Takers require the device to have direct access to a computer/laptop to transfer information.

Obviously if a user cannot access a keyboard a laptop will need to be considered to allow for mouse or switch access.

These are just some of the things that are worth considering when

you are trying to decide what to purchase. Let's now take a moment to review some of the Note Takers currently on the market.

References:

Novitatch www.novitatch.org.au
Battery Powered Computers: www.batterypoweredcomputer.com
Laser PC6 Manual. Tandex Technologies 1998
Writer Operation Guide. Advanced Keyboard Technologies 2004

Hence we hope we have shed a little light on helping you make a decision about Note Takers. Please contact TASC to further discuss any of the above issues.

We welcome any feedback, good or bad, that you have on our service. Please feel free to contact us by phone on 02 9972 8183, email at tasc@tscnsw.org.au or in writing at the address below.

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