

Developing a Global Mindset

Welcome to the Global Edition of *Friends of ATIA*. We're excited to provide our readership with this collection of articles from ATIA's broader community, each concerned with improving the integration of technology into the lives of persons with disabilities. Represented here are reports from an international field of colleagues, views from the UK, India, Germany, Australia and Qatar--perspectives that include advocacy as well as industry. I hope you will read them with interest and feel encouraged by this effort that reaches across continents. Most importantly, I hope this edition helps expand your understanding of the global context for what you do.



David Dikter,
CEO ATIA

Why do I think this is so important? Why consider a global perspective?

Because while there is good news to report on the adoption of assistive technology around the world (see Axel Leblois's piece on "New Opportunities for AT" below), we know we also have a very long way to go. As an AT community we understand how assistive technology can promote community integration of, and leadership from, persons of all abilities. But as I often point out, technology alone won't get us there. A healthy ecosystem for AT requires more than just technology. A healthy AT ecosystem requires education, policy development, services and supports, as well as industry--the very efforts that our readership is knee-deep at work to create, and the very efforts that many inside and outside of the developing world are newly looking to navigate.

Indeed, this is an interesting historical moment. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, coupled with the global adoption of mobile technology, has brought about a new awareness of what technology

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ATIA Orlando Draws an International Crowd

has to offer and a growing resolve that with, and for the benefit of, individuals with disabilities, it's time to learn and work together. I mean collaboration, of course, not just among individuals with different life perspectives, but among organizations, countries, and whole regions for whom reinventing the wheel should not be necessary when existing and effective systems, policies, curricula, and, yes, technologies, may be shared and localized for their benefit. From Brazil to the Middle East to China and India we are seeing this at ATIA, this new imperative to collaborate, and have been fortunate to play a role.

So why is it important to understand what's going on globally? In short, because we need to work together so that countries can adopt the technologies their citizens desperately need as quickly as possible. And so they can understand their infrastructure needs, and begin to figure out how to put it in place. There is little point in localizing AAC devices when there are no programs offering speech and language pathology within a nation's borders.

Have doubts about your role? Read David Banes's article on the work of Mada in Qatar to get a picture of how influential our work can be in the larger (yet small global AT) context. (See, too, the [Mada press release](#) on their recent investment to localize AT). Also don't miss contributions from Michael O'Leary, Martin Littler, Shilpi Kapoor, and Christoph Jo Mueller. They shed light on our industry's history, how it has impacted different corners of the globe, and the opportunities and challenges our members now face moving forward. Finally, learn about the upcoming TechShare (India) and M-Enabling (Washington D.C.) conferences; each offers opportunities to learn about AT (and, at M-Enabling, the work of ATIA) in our broader global community.

--[David Dikter](#), CEO ATIA

My Global Business Perspective

A Message from ATIA Board President, Jennifer Thalhuber



ATiA 2012 Orlando

Join us, January 25-28, 2012 at the Caribe Royale Orlando All-Suite Hotel and Convention Center in Orlando, Florida

[\(Register by December 19th, 2011 for discounts\)](#)

ATIA Orlando is an annual assistive technology conference of global interest and participation. There were 100+ international attendees at the last Orlando Conference showing that assistive technology is truly of global interest. Countries represented by attendees, exhibitors and speakers included: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, S. Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Togo, Uganda and the United Kingdom.

Attendees come to:

- * Network with an anticipated audience of 2,500+ consumers and professionals serving people with disabilities.
- * Learn about technology updates, new releases and innovations at 100+ booths from exhibitors across the globe.
- * Choose from over 200 educational sessions. (Check out the [Mini Guides](#) with selected sessions for Educators, SLPs, OTs and VI Specialists.)

* Hear from an all-star speaker line-up including the following international presenters:

-David Banes from the Qatar

The needs of persons with disabilities transcend borders. As such, I see it as our responsibility--as innovators to this global marketplace--to effectively understand the unique needs of each country, both culturally and logistically. Of course we benefit as an industry when the healthcare and educational infrastructure supports the delivery of our technology solutions. However, it is also critical to our success and growth as an industry that we explore and understand emerging markets where the professionals and systems may not be as mature. Those new global markets are key to our continued growth.

Jennifer
Thalhuber, ATIA
Board President

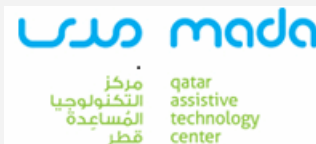
Indeed, ensuring our place in new global markets is a good reason to make sure we cultivate a global perspective in all of our organizations, and I challenge members to use ATIA's forums to better share that information with each other (after all, what we all learn, we all benefit from). But in the end, it really all comes down to our mission as a company and our mission as an industry. We are in this to transform and improve the lives of persons with disabilities - no matter where they might be in the world.

--Jennifer Thalhuber

Nurturing Qatar's AT Ecosystem... for the Global Community

David Banes reflects on developing a global mindset for building access to AT

There's a new word that has gained a lot of exposure in the world of assistive technology recently. The buzzword seems to be "ecosystem." Now an ecosystem, to me, has always been about rainforests or tundra. But the word is being used these days to help us frame a new understanding, and I think it's useful. It's about the environment needed for the effective use of technology by people with disabilities; it's about the interdependent relationship of a range of AT products, services, and policies, and how important they each are for the successful adoption of AT (and as there are many "bugs" in the AT ecosystem, really it's an appropriate coinage!) And it's a term that speaks directly to work underway in the Middle East, and Qatar in particular.



Assistive Technology Center. (Session P2P-14: "It's More Than Giving Out Kit," a seminar exploring the practical experience of building an AT ecosystem in Qatar. Also see his article this edition.)

-Evert-Jan Hoogerwerf, AIAS Projects Office coordinator, Bologna, Italy. (Session RPD-30: "User involvement in AT research; the TOBI BCI project," a seminar addressing the user evaluation activities in a Brain Computer Interaction development project--[the TOBI project](#)--funded by the European Commission.

* Take advantage of [Pre-Conference Seminars](#). These are full-day trainings facilitated by the industry's most knowledgeable professionals.

* [Earn CEUs](#). All sessions are approved for CEUs from ATIA partner, The AAC Institute, an approved I.A.C.E.T. provider. Special CEUs available include ACVREP and ASHA CEUs. NEW: ATIA can now offer AOTA CEUs (an administration fee applies).

Also in Orlando this year-- all in one location! (Additional registration fees apply):



Assistive Technology Research Symposium

Wednesday, January 25, 2012, co-hosted by ATIA and RESNA, featuring researchers and manufacturers from around the world.

The AT Research Symposium is

In Qatar, "Mada"--the Qatar Assistive Technology center-- has been charged with building a national ecosystem for access to technology, and has been working with national and international partners to increase access for people with disabilities across the Middle East. Mada provides a fascinating microcosm for exploring the issues that need to be addressed to increase adoption of, and inclusion through, technology. And what emerges is not surprising; it is impossible to maintain a national ecosystem separate and alone from the global network that exists. AT provision cannot operate in silos.

In Qatar, that ecosystem has encompassed providing needs assessments, advice, AT training (for both professionals and AT users), IT training, funding for technologies, the development of eAccessibility policy and practice as well as research and development of solutions for Arabic speakers. Such a breadth of remit has demanded that Mada seek out international partners across the globe and across ages, disabilities and settings.

In navigating these relationships, it is clear that to some extent the ecosystem is by its nature chaotic. As an emerging group, AT professionals across the world emerge from a range of backgrounds connected only loosely by mutual interest and, in practice, through mailing lists and internet groups. However, we can identify some key issues that are common across borders:

* **Localization and mother tongue**

Too many AT solutions are not designed to be localized. In the past, software and hardware has been developed to meet the needs of a single regional community, usually tied to a single language. The experience of open source software demonstrates an alternative approach which is valuable. With open source software the idea of localizing and adapting code for communities is built into the software design. There is much to be learned from this methodology.

* **Migration**

We live in a world where workers and their families are geographically mobile. This is as true in Europe as it is in the Middle East and even the United States. As result, the language and culture of communities is becoming increasingly diverse, and the experience of countries such as India and Qatar suggests that services and products

designed specifically to bring together leading AT manufacturers, service providers and researchers to discuss strategic issues, learn about successful practices, network and maybe forge new partnerships. Download brochure with more details, including schedule, speakers and fees: [Symposium brochure in WORD](#) | [Symposium brochure as a PDF](#)

[Accessing Higher Ground Meeting](#)

Wednesday, January 25, 2012 (of interest to educators).

**ATIA Webinar Series
News**



Coming in December:

Introduction to Implementing Accessible Instructional Materials in a K-12 Setting: Law and Practice. This live webinar will take place Thursday, December 1st, 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm E.T.

Join members of the Assistive Technology team at the Austin Independent School District in this session as they provide participants with a clear path of navigation through the maze of Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) and the related terminology. For additional

need to accommodate such diversity more transparently.

* **Development of communities**

Assistive technology is a global issue. Since the drafting, signing and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability is complete, we now have a global legal framework within which this work needs to evolve. The communities across borders that are now emerging suggest that successful adoption of assistive technology is not under the control of any one body, be that government or agency, but rather that a community of interest-which may include trainers, therapists and parents-act together to support the use of AT.

* **Networks and the sharing of resources**

Increasingly AT professionals are looking to reduce the lead time in the development of resources through sharing and gaining permission to use and reuse materials. In developing materials to serve people with disabilities in Qatar, the Mada center drew upon resources created in other countries, including the U.S., India and Ireland (among others). These materials were collated, edited, translated and then published under a Creative Commons license. Such a license allows other Arabic-speaking AT service entities to reuse the materials without permission (but with attribution), and also allows other AT service entities that are emerging globally to use and localize materials for their own use. To help with this, Mada is editing documents with an appendix that recommends the content that needs to be localized (such as specific solutions, legal frameworks and sources of equipment).

* **The need for AT hubs**

This experience suggests that there is an ongoing need to build a small network of regional AT centers with the capacity and resources to support and sustain new services within their region as well as nurture emerging ones. In the Middle East, increasingly Mada is looked to as a regional hub, which includes helping ensure the flow of information from across the world into the region. This can be a very positive contribution for building the Arabic ecosystem that Mada is mandated to create.

To summarize, the global AT ecosystem is both vibrant and chaotic. As such, the challenge now is--to paraphrase Tom Phillips--how we make sure that accessible technology provision can "thrive" on such chaos. Meeting this challenge, I believe, requires new

details or to register, [view the webinar abstract](#) or use our [online registration form](#).

Coming in 2012:

Visit [ATIA's Online Webinars page](#) for the 2012 schedule of live webinars! Topics range from cognitive support technologies to apps to computer access for physical impairments and MUCH, MUCH more! Registration opens in December.

Now Archived:

Most 2011 webinars are now available as archived webinars. Visit [ATIA's Education On-Demand page](#) to view the library, and to address your professional development needs. Archives offer an easy and convenient solution--review a webinar when it fits into your schedule!

NEW Webinar Subscription Program - An Ideal Solution to Provide AT Training for Your Staff!

ATIA now has an **annual subscription option** which gives access to all the live broadcasts and archived webinars in ATIA's Webinar Series and Education On-Demand library at a very affordable cost! We offer multiple subscription levels so you can pick the level that best suits your training needs. Your teachers, administrators, therapists, AT Specialists, and staff can individually choose topics. ATIA delivers a **broad base of topics related to assistive technology across all disabilities**. Webinars are **presented by leading practitioners in their field** who share insights on technology and

thinking about the global market and the audience for products and resources. By thinking about diversity, including language and culture, we open opportunities for all.

[David Banes](#) is deputy chief executive of Mada, the Qatar assistive technology and accessibility center. A former teacher and headteacher, David has over 20 years background in supporting people with a disability through technology in Europe, Middle East and Africa.

New Opportunities for Assistive Technologies

Axel Leblois provides insight on how the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is energizing the agenda of the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict)



The idea that international treaties or the United Nations could have a positive impact on access to assistive technologies would seem bizarre at best... yet this is exactly what has happened on a global scale since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the United Nations General Assembly. No one could predict this outcome, but the Convention has been signed, to-date, by 153 countries - including the United States - and ratified by 106, which means that it is legally enforceable in countries representing more than 75% of the world population: a stunning success and one of the fastest rates of adoption of any international treaty in history.

So what's in it for AT users and vendors?

First, the CRPD establishes the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in a thorough and unprecedented manner. It establishes the same level of obligation to make information and communication technologies accessible on par with the built environment and transportation. In short, it is now just as much a legal requirement in 106 countries that Web sites and ATMs be accessible, as it is for public buildings to include ramps.

Second, the CRPD makes "Reasonable Accommodation" a corner stone of disability rights, and the failure to provide it an act of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

best practices.

For more details, go to our [Webinar Subscription page](#) or email webinarsubscription@atia.org to be contacted for assistance.

Webinar on AAC Research Coming in January

Don't miss this webinar with Janice Light, Ph.D.!

Designing Effective AAC Technologies for Beginning Communicators

PRESENTER: Janice Light, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Penn State University

DATE: Tues., January 10, 2012

TIME: 12:00 - 1:30 PM E.T.

SESSION FEE: No Charge

OVERVIEW: To date there are few guidelines to support clinicians and manufacturers on the design of effective AAC systems for beginning communicators. When AAC systems are well designed they may enhance communication and language outcomes for beginning communicators with complex communication needs. This webinar will present research results from recent studies that address the design of AAC technologies, and will suggest clinical guidelines to improve design based on this research. Each study will be presented briefly with a focus on research results and their implications for beginning communicators. Examples will be used to illustrate key points.

Third, the CRPD (article 4, g-h-i) specifically supports Assistive Technologies and requires that ratifying countries implement policies and programs to:

- "Undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost;
- Provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, including new technologies, as well as other forms of assistance, support services and facilities;
- Promote the training of professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities in the rights recognized in this Convention so as to better provide the assistance and services guaranteed by those rights."

Obviously, anyone in the assistive technology profession will read these lines with skepticism. So much legislation remains ineffective, underfunded or simply not implemented!

Yet, major industry players have taken up the opportunity to proactively support the implementation of the Convention: IBM, Microsoft, AT&T, Sprint, Time Warner Cable, Deque Systems, Code Factory or SSB BART Group, to name a few, are companies whose thought leadership is helping policy makers, service providers and organizations of persons with disabilities around the world define new approaches to promote and lobby for assistive technologies and services. And ATIA's David Dikter has been a vocal advocate for the AT industry in all G3ict's activities from Brazil to Europe to Qatar.

So what is G3ict working to see accomplished?

1. Research & Development Funding: government funding of R&D, as suggested by the CRPD, should fully leverage the expertise of the AT industry. In many countries, this requires creating the conditions for better public-private R&D partnerships. Key to such an approach is to make sure that all tax payer dollars are helping marketable innovations which can actually benefit persons with disabilities.
2. Human Resources: compulsory courses on accessibility should be criteria for the accreditation of computer engineering schools,

For more information on this webinar, you can review the [complete abstract](#). Or [register now for this free webinar](#).

In case you missed them...

The [Research Matters Webinars](#) are now also archived and available for viewing.

And be sure to check out the **AT Research Primer** and **Research Tools** at this [ATIA research Web page](#).

Accessibility Forum:

Taking Accessibility
Mainstream--
Making the Case for
an International
Society of Accessibility
Professionals



Join us for an Accessibility Forum intended to bring focus to the needs of the development community in achieving accessible technology.

Results of the *Developer's Survey on Accessibility* conducted in late 2010 highlighted an industry and profession in the midst of a fragmented landscape of partial

similar to what is in place in many countries for schools of architecture. You can hold a master in computer engineering without having ever heard about accessibility, but cannot be an architect and not know about accessibility! Also, the AT profession would greatly benefit from having its own certification program in place.

3. Public procurement of Assistive Technologies and subsidies for persons with disabilities: Various countries have experienced success with different channels such as education, workplace, rehabilitation centers, medical insurance policies, community centers. Benchmarks and good practices must be shared including monitoring ROI for all stakeholders and orienting subsidies in the most effective way, including supporting innovative and more economical technologies.
4. Mobilizing Universal Services Funds: 125 countries have laws on universal access for telecom services, and many include Universal Services Funds. Initially focused on subsidizing telecom services for underserved rural areas, those funds generate billions of dollars which can go unspent as wireless infrastructure now covers most rural areas around the world. A logical extension of their mission to ensure universal access would be supporting accessible and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities. In fact, 17 countries already fund AT programs with their Universal Service Funds, some related to telecom, some to education. More countries can and need to include persons with disabilities and ATs in their Universal Services Funds charters and programs.

With the advent of the CRPD and the dynamics of globalized markets, there is no reason for the AT industry not to benefit from greater support and economies of scale. Fostering international cooperation and lobbying to leverage the dispositions of the CRPD can only help realize such objectives.

[Axel Leblais](#) is the founder and executive director of [G3ict](#), the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs, an Advocacy Initiative of the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development. G3ict is exclusively funded by private sector and charitable organizations and works primarily with governments, organizations of persons with disabilities and industry to promote the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of

solutions and serious obstacles to the attainment of more uniform, universally accessible technology.

The objective of this forum is to allow for discussion of critical issues facing the industry and advancement of the concept of an International Accessibility Professional Society with an infrastructure to support it. The goal is for those within the business and development communities to be the driving force for change in the accessible technology environment.

DATE: Tues., Feb 28, 2012

TIME: 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

LOCATION: 2012 CSUN Conference, Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Diego, CA

HOST: The Accessibility Interoperability Alliance (AIA) - the technical & engineering division of the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA)

For more information, including agenda topics, see the [program overview](#) or submit this form to be put on the [Forum distribution list](#) to receive agenda and registration specifics as they become available.

INDATA Podcast Highlights ATIA



"Assistive Technology Update" is a

Persons with Disabilities.

Apps and Cuts--The Perfect Storm!

Martin Littler reflects on rough seas for the AT industry in the UK and beyond

A perfect storm is brewing for everyone in the AT industry. It is far from over in the UK and my guess is it is brewing up nicely for American members of ATIA too.

Governments on both sides of the Atlantic have maxed out their credit cards. Education technology sales have "dropped by 40%" according to RM the UK's biggest education computer supplier. RM shed their CEO this month, their American subsidiary last month, and 78% of shareholder value in the last year. American "Stimulus Money" may mean spending cuts in the United States are 18 months later, but even worse!

Lesley Stahl's Apps and Autism report on CBS's 60 Minutes confirms the other major challenge (and opportunity) to the existing assistive technology industry. Touch technology and large clear finger-friendly on-screen menus have been around for fifteen years in assistive technology. Last year Steve Jobs took all of this mainstream. Whether you are into VOCAs, autism or, like my company, simple software for complex needs, then touch tablets, iPads and Apps are going to impact your world.

We have been here before. And Steve Jobs was involved last time 'round too! The mouse was actually invented in California in the early sixties--but its first real impact on our world was with the "graphic user interface" on the Apple Macintosh in the 80's. This initially caused havoc in the disability world which had learned to harness keyboard short cuts and wasn't at all sure about analogue movements on screen.

Enter Intellitools with IntelliKeys; Don Johnston with Ke:nx; Penny and Giles with track balls and joy sticks and, ironically, companies with early touch screens too. Once mouse alternatives were established we had Mayer-Johnson's PCS symbols making it all work for pre-text readers and Crick Software allowing onscreen text entry from switch access or mouse clicks. Text-to-speech and speech-to-text became mainstream while



Martin Littler
Chairman
BATA

weekly show that includes the latest news in the field of assistive technology, questions and answers, and interviews. News stories range from research projects that will impact the field of assistive technology, new versions of popular assistive technology products, and stories about real people who rely on assistive technology for independence. Hosted by Wade Winger of the INDATA Project at Easter Seals Crossroads in Indianapolis, Assistive Technology Update runs 30 minutes and is released each week to a global audience. In October, Winger interviewed ATIA's David Dikter and Caroline Van Howe to discuss ATIA's history, partnerships, and professional development offerings. To listen, search iTunes for "Assistive Technology Update" or visit www.EasterSealsTech.com, click on "podcasts" and play episode ATU22.

Mada Invests to Localize AT

مدا mada

مركز
التكنولوجيا
المساعدة
قطر

qatar
assistive
technology
center

Mada, the Qatar Assistive Technology Center, has made a significant investment to localize assistive technology for the Arab speaking world. The center--located in Doha, Qatar--is partnering with AT manufacturers and research institutes to fill the gap of information and communication technology-related AT in the Arabic language. Learn more from [Mada's October press release](#).

literacy aids like Co:Writer and textHELP increased productivity, accuracy, and creativity however the text was entered.

The Macintosh, and the new challenges and opportunities it offered, led directly and indirectly to dozens of new products and AT companies which improved the life chances of learners with special needs.

It is happening again now. As I write, two colleagues are watching planes circle LAX and Newark Liberty airports on "Plane Finder HD" on their iPads. Last night my grandson, who can't yet really talk, was loading up and playing his favourite Apps too. The iPad has led to an astonishing burst of creativity and user engagement. Software Apps are now being written in bedrooms and kitchens again, just as they were in the 80's.

There are problems. AT Applications which sold for \$69 are competing with similar (often poor quality) Apps at 69 cents (and Apple takes 30% of that!). CDs and DVDs are giving way to online subscriptions, in-app purchases and micro-billing. Apple won't do "Flash," switch access is awkward, porn can't be turned off.

Some of these issues will disappear as Amazon's Android Kindle Fire gives iPad a real competitor. The remaining issues are an opportunity and a real challenge to all of us in the assistive technology industry.

For some years visitors to ATIA in Orlando and BETT in London have been heard to complain "There is nothing new here!" I'm guessing that you won't be hearing that too much in the next couple of years.

[Martin Littler](#) is founding chairman of the [British Assistive Technology Association](#) (BATA) which was established in 2009 (and modeled on ATIA). He is CEO and an owner of Inclusive Technology (an original Charter Member of ATIA) and set up its American franchise, Inclusive TLC Inc., in 2001. Martin is a past Board Member of ATIA and has been involved in AT for 30 years.

Twitter: @MartinLittler

AT in Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia

Upcoming International Conferences



The [M-Enabling Summit and Conference](#) will be held December 5-6, 2011 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center at National Harbor, Washington, D.C.

The Summit is hosted by the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict) and E.J.Krause and Associates (EJK). M-Enabling is the first mobile industry event exclusively dedicated to accessibility and assistive applications and services for seniors and persons with disabilities. The international visitors program of M-Enabling 2011 is being developed in cooperation with the [Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC), international organizations of telecom regulators including the [International Telecommunication Union](#) (ITU), as well as mobile service providers and organizations of persons with disabilities.

M-Enabling will co-locate with the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health's 2011 [mHealth Summit](#), which will focus on the Policy, Research, Business and Technology perspectives of mobile health. Learn more at the [M-Enabling Web site](#).

Michael O'Leary looks back to understand the present moment for AT "down under"



It has been an incredible journey. In the mid-80's I worked in Australia as an occupational therapist for children and adults with cerebral palsy using just a handful of emerging assistive technology devices. Today we have multiple technology platforms (cloud computing, apps, and touch screens to name but a few), a plethora of products to choose from, a growing body of professional service providers, and important government programs for purchasing support. It's taken many years and a host of people to make this happen. I am fortunate to have been involved with many of the leaders in assistive technology in my capacity as managing director of [Spectronics](#), a leading provider of assistive technology for Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia.

Spectronics has been in business since 1986 when we sourced the Adaptive Firmware Card to offer switch access to the Apple II series of computers. With help from numerous other overseas AT manufacturers, Apple Computer Australia, the World Wide Disability Solutions Group, the Microsoft Accessibility Group and IBM Special Needs, together with many dedicated staff, Spectronics has grown from those humble beginnings, to be the major supplier of assistive technologies in this region of the Pacific Rim.

The combined population of Australia and New Zealand is just 27 million, which is considerably smaller than the UK (62.5 million) and the US (300 million). We have, therefore, focused on localising AT products developed overseas to suit local language, geographical, iconic and cultural differences, and assisted some local developers to market their products internationally.

We have also successfully ridden the waves of change: IT platforms and operating systems (Apple, IBM, Commodore, Plessey, BBC, Acorn, Archimedes, Macintosh and Microsoft); transport media from tape cartridges, 5¼ and 3½ inch floppy disks, CDs and DVDs; and various technological fads: GUI (Graphical User Interface), email, multi-media, Web accessibility, voice recognition, interactive white boards, and of course the latest mobile technologies, IP devices, and social media. I am proud of the international AT industry for doggedly maintaining accessibility to the ever-changing IT



TechShare India will be held on February 6-7, 2012 in New Delhi. The conference is hosted by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) and BarrierBreak Technologies. Its purpose is to build awareness, identify needs, and provide solutions and implementation strategies to create an inclusive environment for people with disabilities. In 2010, TechShare India welcomed 500 delegates from across the globe and 2000 visitors. Learn more at the [TechShare India Web site](#).



The [Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference](#) 2012 will be held May 22-25th at the Jupiters Gold Coast Convention Centre in Queensland, Australia.

Hosted by Spectronics, the conference focuses specifically on technologies designed to advance independent achievement for individuals with disabilities and/or students with learning difficulties. It includes sessions looking at these technologies in the following three interest streams.

- Struggling Students*

technologies, while at the same time taking advantage of the improvements in performance each change has offered.

As everywhere, limited funding for AT remains an issue down under. New Zealand has their Accident Compensation Commission (ACC) insurance scheme which assists persons acquiring a disability, but offers no funding for people born with a disability. In Australia, we anxiously await the much talked about NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) to replace the inequities inherent in separate state and territory funding schemes.

The annual pilgrimage to the ATIA Conference in Orlando has proven to be of immense benefit as a source of information and inspiration for Spectronics. On a smaller scale, Spectronics invites overseas and local AT experts to share their experiences (successes and failures) with ATs at the biennial Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference on the Gold Coast. Attendance has increased steadily from around 200 in 2004 to an expected 1000 in 2012, necessitating two changes in venue.

Cloud-based software and universally designed mobile technologies may well make redundant the more traditional reseller function of Spectronics. However, demand for consulting services for assessments, as well as selection, configuration, implementation and training in ATs is increasing. Webinars and social media are serving to overcome the tyranny of distance from which we have always suffered in the Pacific Rim, and enable us to work in a global community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many colleagues, friends and recipients of Spectronics' services for their inspiration, guidance, assistance and persistence over the years. And I look forward to continuing our journey together through the amazing world of assistive technology.

[Michael O'Leary](#) is managing director of Spectronics: Inclusive Learning Technologies in Queensland, Australia.

- People with Complex Communication Needs
- People with Disabilities

The 2010 conference was attended by over 700 delegates, but 2012 will be larger and hosted at a larger conference venue. Learn more at this [Spectronics conference Web page](#).

AT Reuse in the US Territories



Trish Redmon of the Pass It On Center notes the challenge of providing reuse programs in the far-flung "almost international" US

The reutilization of assistive technology (AT) is a challenge under the best of circumstances. But suppose those without insurance, with inadequate coverage, or waiting on a list for a much-needed device, were thousands of miles from a sister state or in a place frequently subjected to natural disasters? That's the case for some residents of the American territories of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. All U.S. states and territories have federally-funded Assistive Technology Programs, but access to lightly-used affordable AT presents an even bigger challenge to far-flung island territories.

The Pass It On Center (PIOC) provides technical assistance for

The Assistive Technology Industry in Germany

Christoph Jo. Mueller, president of BEH (the German AT industry association), provides the view from Germany



The assistive technology (AT) industry in Germany is traditionally very heterogeneous, just as it is in the US, with both very small and very large companies with different organizational structures. Here the industry began in the 1970s with the development of German manufacturers in the Blind/Low Vision (BLV) field, after which came companies in the augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) field. It took a while for the German AT marketplace to become a professional managed industry.

The German AT industry association, BEH (Bundesfachverband Elektronische Hilfsmittel für Behinderte) was founded in 1997 as a small association to create a single platform for German AT companies to have one voice. The first members were all from the AAC field; BLV companies followed in subsequent years. Currently the BEH represents 90% of the AT industry in Germany.

Germany is the biggest AT market in Europe and has a good funding system to acquire AT compared with many other countries. The funding is provided mainly through public health insurance, which is mandated by government legislation. There are over 220 statutory health insurance providers which provide the financial support for the majority of AAC and BLV products. Private insurance is also available. In addition, there are other government programs that provide financial support if the product is considered required for employment or reemployment purposes.

I know this is very different to the situation in the US and other parts of the world. This may sound wonderful, but there are many large issues with contract negotiations, regulations and applications that often take time and require dedicated specialists. In Germany, for a number of reasons, including geographical proximity and the funding model, it is the norm that AT companies provide local support and consultations with end-users at home, in hospitals or at work. This local support is usually included in the product price, so US products are priced

the efforts of reuse programs in all American states and territories. The Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Guam, for example, have been active participants in PIOC-sponsored AT Reuse Conferences during the past five years. Puerto Rico and Guam have AT exchange programs (online classified-ad like listings) that offer opportunities to acquire "previously owned" AT for prices lower than retail, but exchange programs do not experience the same level of success as refurbishing programs.

According to Vivian Santos, program coordinator for the Puerto Rico Assistive Technology Program (PRATP), success of the exchange program is limited by poverty, low levels of Internet access and a cultural preference for personal interaction. To expand reuse, PRATP has launched a new program to refurbish mobility devices in a correctional facility. PRATP will be working with the facility to provide training in appropriate policies and procedures, and to provide professional assessments for the new users. Santos reports she is also working with local municipalities to promote cooperation with donation and refurbishing programs.

Disparities in social programs also limit access to AT. Although residents of the territories are U.S. citizens, they do not have access to Supplemental Security Income (SSI, except in the District of Columbia and Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas). Occupational therapists with the U.S. Virgin Islands' AT Program report major challenges for citizens with disabilities attempting to realize their potential in

and delivered very differently in Germany. This model may also change as new technologies, e. g. iPads and Apps, drive prices down and provide support over the internet.

Because of the European Community, the German market cannot be seen only as a separate market. EEC regulations require that products available in one country are equally available in other countries within the community. However, with 15 different languages and many more different product acquisition infrastructures, this is only partially true. In reality there are some very protected markets (e.g. France and Spain). But products do need to be made equally available in each EC country.

As the world is coming closer together, we, in the German AT industry association, are happy to be an important part of the international AT network that helps individuals with disabilities access AT.

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Assistive Technology--The Indian Market Perspective

Shilpi Kapoor provides insight for penetrating the Indian market



Until recently, the assistive technology market in India was largely unorganized. Yet with an estimated 70 million persons with disabilities in India, it cannot be ignored. India has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As many have observed, India's market is worth exploring.

Opportunities

Indeed, there is a case to be made for strong, emerging, Indian AT market opportunities. India's laws and policies now include persons with disabilities. In education, the Right to Education Act acknowledges the need to provide persons with disabilities an inclusive education. There are also schemes that education institutes,

educational settings and the workplace.

Disasters exacerbate the reuse challenge. In September 2009, American Samoa was hit by a tsunami. Efforts to aid those in need highlighted the challenges of delivering donated AT to a destination in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Friends of Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC), a reuse program in Georgia, and Temple University's Institute on Disabilities were among the organizations prepared to donate equipment. An effective emergency response to these territories requires planning for entirely different distribution logistics.

Beyond the issues of availability and physical distribution are cultural and language barriers. In American Samoa, effective distribution was hampered by a lack of understanding of tribal cultures. In addition, information had to be disseminated in multiple languages in several of the territories. Still AT reuse remains a vital part of the solution for some individuals with disabilities.

The [Pass It On Center \(PIOC\)](#) provides technical assistance for the efforts of reuse programs in all American states and territories. Trish Redmon is a consultant to the PIOC.

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colleges and universities can use to setup resource centers for persons with disabilities.

With regards to employment, the usage of ICT has increased in the workplace, leading employers to begin providing assistive technology to their employees. In government there is a 3% reservation for the hiring of persons with disabilities. And the private sector has also started to employ persons with disabilities. Indeed, numerous companies are now providing support through their Corporate Social Responsibility programs to NGOs and Education Institutes that work to empower persons with disabilities.

In accessibility, the government is ensuring that the National IT Policy also focuses on accessibility. The government has released the [Guideline for Indian Government Websites](#) which adopts Web Content Accessibility Guideline 2.0 Level A. These actions raise awareness, as well, for the need for assistive technology.

Last but not the least, the Indian household has seen an increase in family income and spending power. The penetration of technology like mobiles, TV, computers, has grown tremendously. India now has over 865 million mobile users and over a 100 million Internet users.

Challenges

India is a vast country and a principal challenge is the ability to reach persons with disabilities. Many individuals live in isolated semi-urban and rural environments. India is also a country with 22 official languages. Strategies need to be developed for how to provide support and training for AT.

Solutions

AT vendors must be ready to invest in India for the long term. The landscape is changing rapidly. Companies need to have a local presence, ensuring a plan for support and training. Localization can start with providing support in Indian English and Hindi, and then move into other languages based on market needs.

AT vendors can learn more about the Indian market by attending [Techshare India](#). This is the pan disability conference and expo founded in 2008 by BarrierBreak Technologies and the Royal National Institute of the

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--Eliza Anderson, managing editor
Friends of ATIA newsletter

Blind, UK. Its purpose is to highlight ICT and assistive technology. (I helped found Techshare after attending ATIA and CSUN). Held in 2008 and 2010, Techshare has been a venue for sowing the seeds for policy, laws and implementation strategies. It has also helped AT vendors understand and enter the Indian market.

Companies are beginning to invest in India. They are weighing the opportunities and challenges. And they are having an impact here on the lives of persons with disabilities.

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