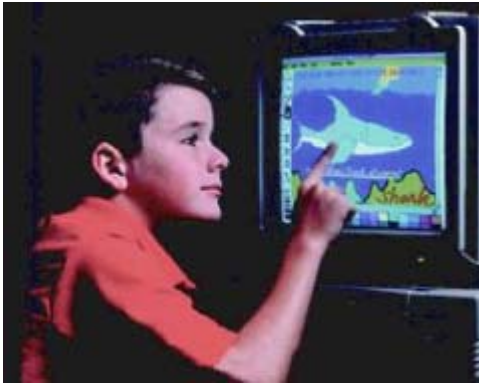


## **Assistive Technology - Autistic**

### **Computer Technology Review By Robert Eckert**

**Article written for the National Autism Newsletter**



When I bought my computer, I had high expectations that it would be a tool that vaulted my son to a higher level of capability. My son Bobby is a nonverbal seven year old with autism. After I became adept with the equipment myself, I was ready to introduce my son to the world of computing. He showed an interest in the computer because it resembled a television. I quickly discovered my son could not understand the relationship between the movement of the mouse and the placement of the cursor on the screen. It was too abstract for him to comprehend. I tried working with him placing the cursor where I wanted it and then instructing Bobby to "click the mouse." This worked somewhat, but it took away much of my son's spontaneous input. I quickly felt cheated by all the computer hype. Luckily, I remembered

that in his school they had something called "touch screens" that seemed as though they might help Bobby.

I contacted [the manufacturer], a company I located in a computer magazine, and began exploring options for financing this purchase. My wife Joanne suggested that I investigate the possibility of gaining a reimbursement for the purchase because their product may be considered adaptive technology. I contacted my son's caseworker at the county Mental Health Mental Retardation agency before the purchase and determined what steps I would need to follow in order to file the claim. As it turned out, the product did qualify as adaptive.

The touch screen produced by KEYTEC is available in Mac and Windows formats. The Mac version works with all Performas, Quadras, LCs, and Power Macs. The Windows version works on any model running Windows version 3.11 or higher, including Windows 95. [The] sales staff provide assistance on questions of compatibility and custom set ups. The systems are similar, but the Windows version has a universal DC power supply plug. The power for the Mac version comes from the ADB port on the back of the computer.

For me, the computer set up was fairly straightforward. The unit attaches firmly to the front of my monitor with two small brackets and Velcro. The installation of the software was also quite standard. You can use a finger or a soft tip pen, which is provided, on the screen. Following the instructions, I calibrated the screen and was ready to work with our programs.

The company guaranteed that the screen would work with all programs. In general, I found this to be true, although there are some exceptions. In my son's case, the touch screen makes my son's computer use more intuitive. Many children's titles have large areas to click on with the mouse or cursor. This translates into a large area for children to touch on the screen.

My son has low muscle tone and is imprecise with his fine motor movements, so for us, this is a favorable feature. Precise accuracy with the screen was possible with the felt pen, but I found this cumbersome for Bobby. Drag and drop and double clicking (double touching) are also functions that are available.

In my view, this product opens up the capabilities of the computer for early learning for all children. My 2 \_ year old daughter Julia also enjoys using the "comeputer" now. My two children can now set side by side and take turns. Try that with a mouse!

The Magic Touch touch screen is available in many different sizes. Prices range from \$199.00 to \$299.00. A touch monitor is also available that has the touch screen capabilities built into the monitor. Prices range from \$725.00 to \$1,290.00 for that product. Lastly, the company also manufactures Touch-Interactive Multimedia Systems that are complete Windows 95 O/S computers. Prices range from \$1,549.00 to \$2,699.00. Before buying the monitors or the complete systems, I caution you to inquire at your appropriate agency to find out whether these products qualify for reimbursement.