An Introduction to Touchscreens: What are they? Why use them? What equipment do I need?

What is a touchscreen?

A touchscreen is a computer or tablet that is controlled by touch. The touchscreen display uses the recognition of finger or stylus gestures to replace the mouse and keyboard used with traditional computers.

Why use a touchscreen?

Touching the screen directly can be an intuitive way for a student to learn to use a tablet or computer. Some students with physical, sensory or cognitive difficulties may find learning to use a mouse and keyboard challenging. Touchscreens can offer access to games, educational activities, writing, communication and many other activities using direct touch.

Touchscreen Equipment

Types of touchscreens

Touchscreens include tablets, iPads, touchscreen computers, interactive whiteboards, smart phones and some AAC devices.

Accessories

Cases

There are a range of cases available for touchscreen tablets to help protect the device. They may feature a stand, handle or strap for transport or speakers to increase sound volume. Cases may also feature mounting plates to enable them to be attached to wheelchairs, desks or floor mounts.

An up to date list of available cases and covers can be found on NED (National Equipment Database) via this link: http://ilcaustralia.org.au/search_category_paths/967

Mounts

Touchscreens can be mounted to be held securely, so that the student or carer doesn't need to hold the device. Mounts are available to attach touchscreens to wheelchairs, desks or floor stands.

An up to date list of available mounts can be found on NED (National Equipment Database) via this link: http://ilcaustralia.org.au/search_category_paths/706

Styluses

A stylus is an accessory designed to activate a touch screen in place of your finger. They have conductive material on the tip, which enables it to activate a touchscreen. This may be useful if the student has difficulty with precision using their finger or has difficulties keeping the rest of their hand away from the touchscreen. Styluses can also be attached to splints or cuffs to assist with grasp and control. Alternatively, there are styluses designed to be held in the mouth or worn on the head.

An up to date list of available styluses can be found on NED (National Equipment Database) via this link: http://ilcaustralia.org.au/search_category_paths/695

Gloves

If the student has difficulty with precision on a touchscreen due to their hand resting on or touching the screen, use of a glove may be beneficial. Some gloves are designed with conductive material sewn into the fingertips so they can be used with a touchscreen but the material on the rest of the hand will not be conductive. Alternatively, you could use a pair of gloves and cut off the glove fingertips of the fingers you are wanting to use on the touchscreen.

External Keyboards

Although students may find navigating a touchscreen easier, typing on a physical keyboard may be easier than using the on-screen keyboard due to the tactile feedback it provides. There are a range of keyboards available that can connect to your touchscreen by Bluetooth or via the touchscreen charging port. There are also modified keyboards available such as keyboards with big keys and coloured keys. These keyboards may also have the option of a keyguard. A keyguard provides a barrier between the keys to reduce the likelihood of hitting multiple keys at once or an incorrect key.

An up to date list of available keyboards can be found on NED (National Equipment Database) via this link: http://ilcaustralia.org.au/search_category_paths/447

Unlocking Abilities: Developing touchscreen, switch and eye gaze skills for learning and beyond
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Touchscreen Keyguards

Keyguards can also be purchased for use with the onscreen keyboard or particular communication apps on a touchscreen. This creates a physical barrier between each key or button on the touchscreen to assist with touch precision.

Touchscreen Settings

There may be a range of settings in your touchscreen that can be used to make accessing it easier. Settings that may be useful to adjust include;

- Touch sensitivity
- Colours or brightness of the screen
- Magnification or size of icons on the screen

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