

Try AT Products Before You Buy

Your Opinion Matters

- Are you confused about all of the different assistive technology (AT) products that are on the market?
- Have you found a product that seems like it would work for you, but you just aren't certain?
- Are you trying to figure out which of two products is easier to use?

Choosing the “best” AT device for you can be difficult, but you want to make the most informed decision possible before you purchase a product. Hands-on experience with AT products gives you, the buyer, important information to help make the right choice. Practitioners advocate for consumer participation in the selection process and research shows that when consumers with disabilities are involved in the decision-making process, they are ultimately more satisfied with the AT device selected. Trying out devices is a great way to become informed.



Hands-on experience can come in several forms: a demonstration at a center, a home trial period, or short-term loans. These opportunities help you:

- Learn about device features and functions;
- Compare the features and benefits of different devices;
- Operate the device independently;
- Test the device in your own environment; and
- Ask questions of an expert.

It is important to understand that trying out devices is not a substitute for a full, professional assessment. In some cases, you may need, or be required to, have such an assessment to

ensure you are purchasing the most appropriate product. It is also important to consider who is providing the demonstration. Vendors may have skilled trainers and evaluators on staff who are experts in those products, but remember that vendors are also selling those products.

“Where can I get this valuable hands-on experience?” you might ask. Every program does not have every device available for a demonstration, so be prepared to do some digging. However, there are several national and regional programs that offer device demonstration and loan services that are good places to start your search. So, go try before you buy!

State Assistive Technology Act Program

Every U.S. state and territory has a State AT Act Program. Most of these programs include centers that allow you to explore and learn more about AT products, consult with experts, find answers to questions, and test and try out different AT products. You can try them at the center and take products on loan to use at home, school, work, or in the community. Centers can also tell you about vendors, providers, and repair services. Some programs in rural areas, such as Alaska, North Dakota, and Colorado, are using distance demonstrations, conducted via videoconference, Skype, screen sharing, and virtual meeting software.

In 2013, 54 state programs conducted over 40,000 device demonstrations for over 60,000 people. These demonstrations covered a wide-range of assistive products, with computer-related devices being the most popular. Fifty-two programs provided short-term loans for over 34,000 people. Devices for speech communication were the most common AT devices loaned in FY 2013, followed by those for daily living. The Center for Assistive Technology Act Data Assistance (CATADA) shared some stories about the benefits of trying before buying. For example, the Iowa State AT Program provides the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) with AT devices for demonstration to their clients. Six VR clients tried out the reading pen. Five clients found it was not useful. However, one individual found it useful in his job as a janitor. He obtained a pen for himself and was able to maintain his job.

Join the thousands across the country who have used these valuable services that can help you choose the best device for you. To find your state’s AT Act Program, visit the Association of

AT Demonstration Centers for Federal Workers

Several Federal agencies operate AT resource centers designed to help employees find technology solutions for job accommodations. Most offer demonstrations, assessments and device loan services. Be sure to visit them before you buy any product for work.

- Department of Agriculture (USDA) Technology Accessible Resource Gives Employment Today (TARGET) Center: www.dm.usda.gov/oo/target
- Department of Defense (DoD) Computer Accommodations Program: www.cap.mil
- Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office of Accessible Systems & Technology: www.dhs.gov/about-office-accessible-systems-technology

Assistive Technology Acts Programs (ATAP) at www.ataporg.org/states.html, and select your state from the dropdown list provided.

Aging Programs

For many seniors, AT makes the difference between being able to live independently and having to get long-term nursing or home-health care. For others, AT is critical to the ability to perform simple activities of daily living such as bathing and going to the bathroom. For this reason, many aging-related programs provide information about AT and may have device demonstration or loan programs.

Some Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) have programs or link to services that help older people obtain low-cost assistive technology. You can call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit the website www.eldercare.gov to locate your local AAA.

Other Resources

The Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) is a national and international network of technology resource centers, community-based organizations, agencies, individuals, and companies. ATA aims to increase the use of technology by children and adults with disabilities and functional limitations to promote full community participation. Forty-one member resource centers provide assessments and education services. Some of these centers offer demonstration and loan services. You can find a program near you by visiting their website, www.ataccess.org, selecting the Resource HUB tab and then selecting Service Directory from the drop down menu.

The local Center for Independent Living (CIL) in your area may have demonstration programs or advisers who can provide information and referral for AT products. CILs often have peer mentors who have personal experience with various AT products. You can find a center near you by visiting www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html.

Many disability-specific advocacy organizations provide information about AT products. They may offer training, demonstrations or loans for some specific products; or be able to connect you with nearby resources. The ARC, Easter Seals, the American Federation of the Blind, and the National Foundation for the Blind are a few such organizations with a strong interest in technology.

References and Additional Resources

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RESNA Catalyst Project
<http://www.resnaprojects.org/>

Center for Aging Services Technologies
<http://www.leadingage.org/CAST.aspx>



This contents of this publication was developed by AbleData under a contract from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education (ED), contract number ED-OSE-13-C-0064, operated by New Editions Consulting, Inc. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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