

New standard for enhancing independence for individuals with cognitive disabilities unveiled

New technology will enhance independence and self-support for people with cognitive disabilities

For Immediate Release
October 4, 2004

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COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO – After ten years of research and development in the area of prompting devices for individuals with intellectual and other cognitive disabilities, the world's first standard for *how* these prompts are structured is now available. AbleLink Technologies, Inc. of Colorado Springs developed the core technology through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and introduced this advance at the Coleman Institute's Fifth Annual Conference on Cognitive Technologies: "Enhancing the Quality of Life for People with Cognitive Disabilities through Technology."

Prompting devices are available from several manufacturers, and help people in home, work and school settings, by playing gentle reminders, or prompts in the form of pre-recorded messages or audiovisual information. These prompting devices range from simple digital audio record/playback units to portable or desktop devices that incorporate visual displays and step-by-step instructions to guide the individual through a task. Some, such as AbleLink's Pocket Compass, even include decision trees, which help individuals navigate through more complex activities. The goal of these prompting devices is to foster independence.

"The problem is" according to Bill Coleman, Founder of the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, "until now, each manufacturer used a proprietary method for how these prompts were created, and how the associated audio-visual information was stored. The result was that caregivers and job coaches often got bogged down in the complexities of creating prompts, and couldn't share this information with other individuals or organizations. It is therefore significant that AbleLink has taken a leadership position in creating this standard that both simplifies the creation of tasks and promotes leveraging of this effort to other individuals."

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This new standard, called the *AbleLink Instructional Media Standard (AIMS™)*, is a device independent, multimedia structure that will dramatically reduce the complexity and time required by caregivers in setting up prompting devices. A set of development tools, including the AIMS Task Builder, an easy to use program for creating instructional prompts, will be provided free to anyone who registers as a content developer (www.aimsxml.com). A companion project, just underway, will provide a complete set of task examples and multimedia content in a central repository on a dedicated website. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers utilizing prompting systems will be provided free access to contribute to or download from this library of sharable instructional media to support their family members or students with cognitive disabilities.

"Prompting systems have proven to be very effective at enhancing self-determination and independence for individuals with cognitive disabilities; however their widespread use has been slowed by the lack of standardized tools for caregivers to create and share prompting content. The AIMS protocol provides the opportunity for caregivers to more easily create shareable prompting content, thus leveraging efforts across caregivers and organizations," according to Dan Davies, President and founder of AbleLink.

The power behind AIMS is that it is based on a powerful computer technology standard called XML, which initially grew from the computer software industry's need to create a more flexible and adaptive means to identify and store information. AbleLink Senior Technologist Brian Brown explains, "Previously, our suite of prompting and scheduling systems stored the information in a Database, which made it difficult to leverage effort between handheld, notebook and desktop devices. We have now rolled our products to the AIMS structure, and developed tools to help other manufacturers to do the same. Simply put, because our core structure is XML, prompts, pictures and audio information stored in AIMS can be shared across any computing platform, running any operating system that supports the XML standard." Davies adds, "Just as JPG is the standard for pictures, or MP3 for music, the AIMS protocol provides the industry a standard for instructional media."

AbleLink Technologies, Inc. is committed to the research and development of assistive technologies for individuals with intellectual and other cognitive disabilities. To learn more, go to www.ablelinktech.com or contact AbleLink at 719-592-0347.

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