

Assistive Technology @ Work: Innovation and Creativity Make the Difference

Definition

Sierra's definition of Assistive Technology includes all of the traditional tools used by Rehabilitation Engineering professionals (speech input, speech output, customized keyboards, etc.). And Sierra's understanding of this topic goes a step beyond convention to include the following: software customization, IT infrastructure opportunities, and business enhancements.

Sierra also blends in a *Human Factors approach* (functional capacity and individual work style) to effectively demonstrate how simply 'the job can be done' when using assistive technology.

Customizing Software

Most of us use our software tools to only a fraction of their full potential. The following are examples of how assistive features in *common software programs* can have a tremendous accommodation benefit. THIS IS A VERY PARTIAL LIST.

What can happen	Imagine how it can be used...
Customized Drop Down Menus in MS Word	To automatically insert preformatted text directly into standard business letters enhancing typing speed and accuracy. To launch templates and initiate complicated file management requirements.
Label locations in MS Excel	Reduce navigational keying and visual tracking in large spreadsheets or database files.
MS Outlook 'Rules Wizard'	Automate the handling of email messages from co-workers. For example highlight, print, and file them automatically upon receipt into your INBOX.
Format, Kern, and Space Text	To dramatically increase reading speed and comprehension.

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Using IT and Technology Tools

In today’s business climate, assistive technology needs to work for both the person requiring the accommodation and the network administrator that supports the system. Understanding network architecture allows for a host of opportunities that can enhance workplace accommodations.

What can happen	Imagine how it can be used...
Multiple Monitor Displays	<p>To minimize repetitive hand movements/paper handling needs as online reference materials are viewed next to open processing applications.</p> <p>To extend work tolerances, because reading from accommodated computer displays supports an ergonomic seating strategy.</p>
Include a ‘software free’ USB macro keypad	<p>Perform multiple keystroke navigation or formatting commands via a single keystroke.</p> <p>Complete seldom used (or difficult to recall) tasks with minimal ‘cognitive load’.</p>

Enhance the Process

Assistive technology can accommodate the business process by providing effective tools to assist users with varied ability levels.

What can happen	Imagine how it can be used...
Use the ‘Readability Statistics’ tool in MS Word	<p>To make sure that completed documents and emails ‘read’ at the appropriate academic level. This feature (once enabled) will inform a typist of their written grade level equivalent.</p>
Use abbreviation-expansion tools in MS Outlook, Word, and Excel.	<p>Ensure that common phrases, procedures, or instructions are consistently generated with minimal keying in a minimal ‘cognitive load’ environment.</p>

For more information and examples of how innovation and creativity allow Assistive Technology to Work @ Work, call 800.973.7687 x10 or visit www.thesierragroup.com.

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