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In Search of a Seamless Interface

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People who rely on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) often have a desire or need to connect their devices with Information Technology (IT) equipment, such as a computer. Devices are designed to be useful and easily usable. However, various obstacles in setting up and maintaining the interface between AAC and IT limit the potential of what they can do together. People who use AAC devices in conjunction with a computer may relate to this dilemma and experience the snags that a project within the AAC-RERC aims to alleviate. Principal Investigator, Kevin Caves of Duke University, along with colleague, Jeff Higginbotham of the University of Buffalo, are currently conducting this study, "Improving Interface Performance Efficiency between AAC/IT Systems".

The researchers are collecting the data for this study through their online survey, geared to adults who use AAC. The purpose of the survey is to determine what tasks are most important to these device users. Based on the results, the researchers will identify interface solutions for the tasks given most priority. Mr. Caves says on behalf of the team, "We are hoping to document the most important computer based tasks done or desired to be done by people who use AAC".

The survey obtains information about the person's computer skills, AAC device and computer system, and AAC/IT interface. Questions in the survey also invite feedback about specific problems that individuals might have with their AAC/IT interface. Then the questions concentrate on the activities the individuals already perform and what they would like to perform. Examples of activities include: e-mail, chatting, instant messaging, and shopping. After the survey phase, the project team will assess which activities have value and which are hard to accomplish.

The research team will develop interface prototypes that address the obstacles identified in the survey. In this phase direct observations will be made of people using computer interfaces. Direct observations and the analysis of existing technology will help further the prototype development. Mr. Caves and his team expect that the outcome from the study will improve overall AAC/IT interfacing by employing a user-centered design process. He goes on to say, "I'm hoping we can impact both current and future software design to make integration more seamless".

If you are interested in taking the survey you can do so at
http://www.aac-rerc.com/pages/projects/r3-aac-survey.htm

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