Tech It Easy (Text only version. All pictures and special formatting has been removed)

Access Technologies, Inc

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Editor: Laurie Brooks

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Alexa … You Make My Life Easier!

(by George Hamilton, OSATP Advisory Council Member)

During a recent Advisory Council meeting for the Oregon Statewide Assistive Technology Program (OSATP), Laurie Brooks requested article topics for upcoming editions of Tech It Easy. Members were so engaged; offering suggestions such as built-in accessibility features of computers and iDevices, apps designed to assist Seniors, comparison of free and paid apps, … well you get the picture. Then, knowing the OSATP staff have an Amazon Echo in their Demonstration Library, I chimed in and suggested an article about that smart lady -- Alexa. And then, depending on your point of view, something “amazing” happened. Laurie asked if I would write the article from a consumer perspective. So here goes … When I first started to write this article, people said I should begin with a disclaimer, “I’m not a paid spokesman for Alexa, just a very big fan!”

Let me start by sharing an overview of the ways my friend and I have found the Amazon Echo to be most useful to those of us with disabilities. With the Amazon Echo and Alexa app on my smartphone, I can control a number of devices, while at home, or on the go.

 If you’re like me, and have difficulties using your hands, don’t worry — Alexa allows me to set alarms, and timers, create reminders and shopping lists and even conduct Internet searches almost hands-free.

I use Alexa for daily tasks. For example, she is my alarm clock, she reads aloud news flashes that are sent to my smartphone, as well as any news articles that I’m interested. She even plays my favorite music from iHeartRadio, and places phone calls to my friends who also have an Amazon Echo.

And talk about a great memory aid. If I’m uncertain if I fed the dog today, or if the dishes in the dishwasher are clean, I simply ask Alexa. But wait - THERE’S MORE.  (see Smart Home page 2)

NOTE: Shop the MarketPlace on TWO DOLLAR OFF Tuesdays, and save two dollars off your purchase.

Pages 2 and 11

Smart Home Technology

Alexa is amazing by herself, but add smart home technologies to her, and stand back! Let me share smart home technologies that I have found that work well with Alexa to further increase my independence around the home.

Smart Locks: I think a smart lock, such as the August Smart Lock, on your home is safer than a traditional keypad; especially if you need to provide a housekeeper, your nurses or therapists access to your home. The traditional keypad lock is not designed to provide you with details of who used it, and depending on the specific keypad, changing the combination code can be quite challenging. I even have a friend who had some people “beat” the combination to his keypad system more than once. However, August Smart Lock integrates with Alexa allowing you to lock or unlock your door using voice commands. The August Smart Lock app can also use your smartphone as the key; allowing you to assign a digital key to those other important people in your life, while at the same time allowing you to have complete control over the number of times and specific days they can have access, track who has entered your home, and when you decide to stop someone from coming in, quickly and easily remove their access.

Smart Doorbells: You have probably seen video doorbells advertised on TV. These smart doorbells work great when you are stuck in bed because of age issues or sickness, or if you can’t see out your window from your wheelchair. Smart doorbells, like Ring and SkyBell even include a motion-sensor camera to show you who is at the door; even if they don’t ring the bell. These smart doorbells let you decide whether or not to answer the door, because you can see who is there. Some smart doorbells let you have a two-way converstaion with the guest at your door; even if you are not home at the time. Want to see if the mail carrier left a package on your doorstep? Say “Alexa, show my front door camera.”

Smart Thermostats: For individuals who experience difficulties reaching their wall thermostat, a smart thermostat such as the Nest Learning Thermostat may be a great solution. Smart thermostats allow you to maintain a comfortable temperature in your home, with little to no input from you, and they allow you to change the temperature using a smartphone, even when you are out; ensuring you won’t come into a cold house.

Smart Lighting: Do you know lighting was one of the first types of smart home gadgets made compatible with Amazon’s Echo? Now there are a number of smart bulbs, switches, dimmers and outlets available that help Alexa to light your way; - simply by voice, including WeMo and Insteon Hub.

The Belkin WeMo Light Switch is one example of an on/off switch that works over WiFi, making it easy to connect to Alexa without the need of a separate hub. The WeMo Switch allows you to toggle plug-in appliances and lights on and off with a smartphone app, physical power button, or YES by voice with Alexa. If you’d like to monitor the energy usage of the device plugged into the switch, use a WeMo Insight Switch.

Smart Curtain Shades/Blinds: Operating curtains and shades can be really difficult for people with poor fine motor control in their hands, and/or restricted mobility. But now, with smart curtain shades and blinds Alexa can open and close the shades and blinds simply by your voice.

Smart Garage Door Opener: A newer line of smart home technologies include the ability to open or close your garage door with Alexa. Garageio is one example of a small, WiFi-enabled device that allows you to remotely open and close the door from your phone; without replacing your existing opener. Garageio will alert you if your garage door has been left open, and allow you to close it immediately, with a swipe on your smartphone or simply by asking Alexa.

Alexa—I am such a fan. Thank you for making my life easier!

NOTE: For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible.

Pages 3 – 7 of this edition of Tech It Easy contain listings of new durable medical and/or assistive technology devices that are available for sale through our Assistive Technology MarketPlace.

Page 8 - 10 of this edition of Tech It Easy contain our Bargain Basement. The Bargain Basement section is a listing of slightly used items which are also available for sale online in our Assistive Technology MarketPlace.

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Ask REMI!

Dear Remi,

My doctor said I’m experiencing eye-strain and eye-fatigue because of too much screen-time. At work I’m either using a computer or iPad tablet all day. I’m wondering if you have any suggestions. Tied Eyes.

Dear TE,

You are not alone. In today’s digital world we use computers throughout our workday, and when we get home, many of us watch a movie on our tablet devices. We check the news on our smartphone, read our favorite book electronically, and when we need directions or a telephone number yet again, we turn to a digital screen.

Many people who experience similar symptoms have found Blue Light Blocking eyewear, such as the *Polinelli Reading Glasses*, help reduce eye fatigue and eye strain caused by our digital technologies. The Polinelli lens are designed to block approximately 30% of potentially harmful blue light and also feature UV400 protection which eliminates glare for enhanced visual clarity.

The *Polinelli Reading Glasses* are available online or at Access Technologies, Inc. Come by our office to try a pair, or schedule time with one of our Assistive Technology Specialists to talk about other possible solutions. Don’t forget to say, “Remi sent you”. See you soon. ~ Remi.

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Learn about a FREE Equipment Program

iCanConnect—Oregon

If you have significant combined hearing and vision loss, you know first-hand that sending emails or chatting on the phone can be difficult.

iCanConnect offers free communication equipment and training so you can keep in touch . . . and be more independent.

Contact ATI to learn about the program’s income and disability guidelines. Refer someone you know or apply for the program yourself.

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