



# Demise of the technophobe

**E**lectronic aids provide a flexible and user-friendly way of magnifying material to help those with a sight impairment. Even the simplest devices offer options such as reverse contrast, blue/yellow, contrast enhancement and zoom functions, while at the higher specification end of the range there are options including storage and manipulation of input, and character recognition and audio interface.

When I first started low vision assessment (1990 seems a long time ago now) I soon learned that presumptions about the elderly are dangerous. Assuming all are frail and of limited means is a dangerous policy, particularly nowadays when so many of our patients may have already scanned the internet to decide what particular appliance may be the one for them before they even see you.

The use of computers, and I extend this to most electronic gadgets, is linked to age. The recent RNIB Sight Loss UK 2012 report had an interesting section on technology. A high 87 per cent report television as important and an increasing number, 58 per cent, are aware of audio description facility. However, where 78 per cent of the sight impaired aged 18-74 use computers, in the over-75s this falls to just 12 per cent. Similarly with mobile phones, 82 per cent of the under-75s use them as compared with just 28 per cent in the over-75s.

Why is this relevant? Well it provides an obvious sign of what will happen with the electronic low vision aid market. As more of the electronic-familiar become aged, they will demand more elegant solutions than can be provided by simple optical aids. I was reminded of this very recently when I revisited a homebound patient for whom I had prescribed a simple hand magnifier five years ago. I remember at the time mentioning some electronic options to her – mainly because of the strength of feeling in her response which suggested she viewed modern gadgetry with more than expected disdain. It be the devil's work!

## The ColourMouse Zoom

Over the five intervening years, this patient has become used to FreeView television, receives photos from her

**Bill Harvey** finds that where once elderly sight impaired patients were wary of electronic aids, attitudes have changed



**Latest in the MonoMouse range, the ColourMouse Zoom for TV use**

children on DVD format for viewing on her DVD player, and has (though with little success it has to be admitted) attempted to keep in touch with more distant relatives either through Skype or email. My point is that even the most hardened technophobe can soften their view of electronic aids over time, usually driven by the more insidious evolution of modern life.

When she suggested she still wanted help with crossword clues, and that her current magnifiers were not really up to the task, I offered a MonoMouse as an alternative. To my surprise, she was interested. I recently had been sent the latest in the MonoMouse range, the ColourMouse Zoom for television use.

This has an in-built zoom function operated by a press of a button (the smaller ones on the left and right of the mouse control the magnification) and a range of views of the image. Pressing the central button allows the patient to scroll between full colour, grey scale, enhanced positive (to enhance the contrast on the text) and reverse contrast. I like the unit as it is simple to demonstrate, robust, and easy to use, both in terms of learning how to use it and the way in which the unit is designed, making it easy for those with weaker grips.

My patient, after initial scepticism, took to it immediately. She has a specific demand. She uses reverse contrast for viewing crossword clues



**The patient has taken to the MonoMouse which has replaced a simple hand magnifier (pictured inset)**



**This patient uses reverse contrast for viewing crossword clues on the TV**

on the TV which she has at 2m viewing distance; further than I would recommend but 'always listen to the patient'. She is able to happily flick from the Scart input of the Mouse back to the DVD input or TV input by one button on her handset, so can do the crossword while watching her favourite soaps – a good result.

There are many electronic aids out there (a CET article on their use will appear in *Optician* at the end of the year). My advice is keep an open mind and be ready for the increasing numbers of patients asking about them. ●

● Thanks to Bierley for loan of the MonoMouse. For further details see [www.bierley.com](http://www.bierley.com)