

## **Technology Radar: BusinessLab's review of technologies that are making the news, December 2009**

*An ActiveAge Report*

### **Samsonite and Micro Mobility roller bag and scooter**

Anyone who travels will be familiar with the difficulties of navigating an airport or train station with heavy luggage, attempting to use the bathroom, wonder around the duty free shops, get a bite to eat etc, without leaving your baggage 'unattended'.

As we get older we find this even more challenging and many people are put off travel all together because of such difficulties.

However, Samsonite in collaboration with Micro Mobility may have come up with something to make our lives easier. For those of us who find it hard to walk and carry our luggage at the same time, the trolley scooter may be a solution. The luggage bag is also a mini scooter, allowing you to scoot along with your luggage safely tucked away.

Although it is unclear whether this would be suitable for use by older people, it seems as though the scooter bag has been designed to make travel less stressful, and reduce the time & effort it takes to walk around an airport or train station with a heavy bag.

For more information visit:

<http://www.micro.ms/>

### **A magic stick instead of a remote control**

Between now and 2012 the traditional TV signal will be switched off, region by region, and replaced with free-to-air digital TV and radio.

This means that in order to keep your television service, you need to convert your TV to digital before the switchover happens in your region. Individuals who do not already have a freeview box will require one, and this includes an additional remote control to operate the new channels available via the freeview box.

For some people, especially those in the older age bracket, starting to use a new remote control (with more buttons) could be frustrating and confusing. However, ActiveAge have come across a new product, already available in the market, that could provide a good alternative.

The Kymera Wand, inspired by the wizard's wand in Harry Potter, is a fourteen-inch remote control device, which is programmed for thirteen different movements of the hand. The wand was designed, using similar movement control technology to the Nintendo Wii, and can communicate with any type of device, including a DVD player, television or iPod docking station. The wand runs on two standard batteries and preserves power by automatically going into sleep mode after 60 second of inactivity.

Instead of trying to work through clever touchscreen remote controls and a myriad of buttons, the user simply waves the wand up and down to change the channel, or in a clockwise motion to adjust the volume. Different movements can be assigned to different gadgets, allowing uncomplicated control over different devices.

For those who find it difficult to navigate the buttons on a standard remote control, the wand seems to provide a good alternative. Furthermore, the opportunity presented by the digital switchover scheme, to introduce new technologies such as the wand remote control, to individuals in their homes seem undeniable.

For more information visit:  
<http://www.kymerawand.com/>

## **Robovie-II shopping assistant**

Online shopping may be touted as one of the latest options for older people, who are Internet enabled, to get what they need brought to their homes and enhance independence. However, for many this option takes away the enjoyment of shopping, getting out of the house and meeting people. Ergo, a better option is for shops and supermarkets to become more age-friendly and make shopping a more enjoyable experience for older people.

One step in this direction may be a solution developed by the Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International (ATR) who recently introduced a robot assistant called Robovie-II to help with grocery shopping.

Robovie-II is designed to make shopping more convenient and entertaining for older people. ATR is testing the robot at a supermarket in the Kyoto-area until March 2010.

To use the system, shoppers create a shopping list at home, using a special mobile device. Later, when the customer arrives at the store, sensors automatically detect the mobile device. The user's data is wirelessly transmitted to a waiting robot, which greets the customer by name.

The robot carries the customer's shopping in a basket and guides him or her around the store, recommending different types of products and reminding the customer of anything he or she might have forgotten.

For more information visit:  
[http://translate.google.co.uk/translate?js=y&prev=\\_t&hl=en&ie=UTF-8&layout=1&eotf=1&u=http%3A%2F%2Frobot.watch.impress.co.jp%2Fdocs%2Fnews%2F20091214\\_335825.html&sl=ja&tl=en](http://translate.google.co.uk/translate?js=y&prev=_t&hl=en&ie=UTF-8&layout=1&eotf=1&u=http%3A%2F%2Frobot.watch.impress.co.jp%2Fdocs%2Fnews%2F20091214_335825.html&sl=ja&tl=en)

<http://pinktentacle.com/2009/12/robovie-ii-helps-with-the-grocery-shopping/>

## **Natural Reader: a solution to turn text into the spoken word**

Many people, young and old, suffer from strained eyesight and headaches due to looking at a computer screen for too long, especially if their job entails sitting on front of a monitor all day.

As we get older our eyesight gets weaker and reading text on a computer screen can get even more difficult.

One solution for people with poor eyesight is a text-to-speech programme, of which several now exist. One of the most common problems with these programmes is the disjointed voice, which can make it very difficult to understand what is being said.

However, a programme called Natural Reader, developed by a company called Natural Soft, is said to be one of the world's most natural voice conversion programmes available. Natural Reader can convert text in a word document, on a webpage, PDF file, or in an email, into the spoken word. The advantage of this programme is that the words are very smoothly spoken and easy to understand. Natural Reader can also convert any written text into audio files such as MP3 or WAV for your CD player or iPod.

Another advantage of this programme is that there are options for the type of voice the user would like to hear. There are a few alternative voice samples with a US accent and an English accent. There are also options for both male and female speakers, depending on what you prefer. Natural Reader is currently available in English, German, French, Spanish, Swedish, Arabic and Italian.

For more information visit:

<http://www.naturalreaders.com/index.htm>