Project Report

A Skills Victoria initiative

Project title
Adaptive Technology EXPOs - 2006 Victorian Equity Project

Organisation/lead agency
RMIT University — Disability Coordination Office’s Project

Contact details
Contact the above for further details

Project summary
The RMIT Adaptive Technology EXPO/forums were designed to bring together a range of common assistive technology solutions to a regional audience who would not easily have access to such knowledge. Five EXPOs were run throughout 2006, within each of the Regional Disability Liaison Offices (RDLO)/Disability Coordination Offices (DCO) regions of Victoria.

The learners
The RMIT Adaptive Technology EXPOs were designed to be accessible for anyone who had an interest in, or would benefit from adaptive technologies. The EXPOs were free for anyone to attend and some also included seminars and hands-on workshops. This resulted in attracting a large demographic of attendees. Altogether, there were around 400-500 attendees for all five EXPOs. From the evaluations, it was evident that around 90% of the attendees were professionals within the VET sector including: Teachers/Trainers, Disability Support Workers, Disability Liaison Officers and Librarians. There were also a small number of individuals with disabilities, parents and VET students undertaking studies relevant to the field of disability in attendance. The five EXPOs were held in: Albury, Pakenham, Warnambool, Lilydale and Broadmeadows.

The challenge
The project aimed to address the lack of knowledge (amongst both professionals and individuals) in regard to the types of adaptive technologies that are currently available, to assist people with disabilities in their studies and to later gain employment. These devices serve as important aides that can put people with disabilities on a level playing field with their able-bodied peers.

There are currently a large number of current, new and developing technologies that are labeled under the “adaptive technology” umbrella. It can be difficult to keep up with the developments or to find products that can really assist with study and employment. This project aimed to find the most reputable providers and well-known products to ensure that the attendees were able to go away with high quality knowledge, skills and resources.

An expected challenge was being able to involve the most reputable providers, outside of Victoria, at all the EXPOs. This was overcome by providing static displays of catalogues and information from providers who were not able to attend in person.

RMIT’s approach
The five EXPOs were divided into the five regions in Victoria and each Regional Disability Liaison Officers were invited to participate and be involved in the planning and design of the EXPO in their region; allowing for more freedom and enabled each EXPO to be customised to better reflect the
needs of each region. This also opened up opportunities for topical presenters, workshops and seminars etc to be held in conjunction with the EXPO.

The coordination of the stalls and exhibits was organized centrally through the RMIT University DCO Project. This ensured that there was a consistent quality of exhibits and also streamlined communication channels between the DCO/ RDLOs and the adaptive technology providers.

All the EXPO locations, with the exception of Pakenham, were held in a TAFE setting. This also helped to emphasize the education aspect of the EXPOs and maximise ease of access to the venue for TAFE providers.

**The results**

Over the five EXPOs, the project was successful and achieved its targets by providing the attendees with a brief overview of the major adaptive technology products currently available. The most successful elements of the EXPOs were the different seminars, hands-on workshops and presentations held throughout most of the EXPOs.

As one attendee stated on their evaluation form, “I was very impressed with the speakers and have been encouraged and inspired by the whole day. Well done.” Other attendees have come away with practical skills in the use of new technology and are now sharing this among other TAFE practitioners.

The evaluation forms were useful in determining the level of interest in the specific disability groups: vision impairment/blindness, hearing impairment/deafness, learning disability, physical disability and intellectual disability (please see graph below for details). Although many attendees ticked more than one disability group, it is interesting to note that there is a greater interest towards vision impairment/blindness and learning disabilities.

There was positive feedback from both the stall holders and attendees throughout the five EXPOs. The attendees referred to the stall holders as “very knowledgeable” and of a “high quality” and most were very satisfied with the EXPO that they attended. The stallholders also provided feedback along the lines of: “it’s about time someone did this so we can share our products with TAFEs” and “I think it’s a great idea and opportunity for people in the rural regions to see our products”.

Equity Projects: Report
Overall Interest in Specific Disability Groups

Note: The above graph represents a sample of evaluations across the 5 EXPOs.

Lessons learned

One aspect that stood out in this series of EXPOs is the amount of information that is available in regard to the variety of adaptive technology providers and how difficult it must be for the target audience to source technology options independent of any external professional support. Out of all of the EXPOs the attendees appeared to respond most positively to the hands-on workshops and the seminars that looked at particular products in depth. This allowed for a greater understanding of the application of the adaptive technology. It may be useful for future projects to include more hands-on and informative sessions in order to guide the audience through particular products rather than one or two stallholders at each exhibit explaining the features of each product repeatedly.

The DCO Project would like to thank OTTE for the opportunity to coordinate and present these 5 adaptive technology EXPO/Forums throughout Victoria.

Disclaimer

Skills Victoria accepts no responsibility for the content of the Equity Project Reports or any opinions expressed in the reports as the reports are owned by the project lead organisation or agency and they do not necessarily reflect the official position of Skills Victoria.
Resources

Title Disability Coordination Offices Low Cost No Cost Resource Guide

This is a small guide that lists a number of low cost and no cost resources that is available online. It also details ideas that anyone can implement to make computers/reading and writing tools more accessible. This is a useful guide for anyone with a disability to look through for downloadable software or search for ideas that can assist with daily access issues. It is also useful for professionals working in the disability area or for parents of someone with a disability. Product found at www.rmit.edu.au/ssg/dco

Title Adaptive Technology Overview

On line recorded sessions from the EXPOs on the use of technology for people with disabilities. Found at www.rmit.edu.au/ssg/dco