



## The State of Tech: Getting and Communicating Information

This is the second of a four-part series, [The State of Tech](#), as it applies to technology access for all Ohioans with developmental disabilities. In this article, we look at how people are getting and communicating information about technology. We hope you find this information helpful and invite you to [send us your comments](#) on this issue brief series.



### Technology today

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### Mainstream Technology and People with Disabilities

When talking about his Amazon smart speaker with Alexa, Robert Shuemak catches himself using human pronouns to describe the device. Like many Americans, he uses his speaker, laptop and cell phone every day. But Shuemak has been legally blind since birth and was diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy ataxia at the age of 20, and these tools weren't designed to assist him.

Off-the-shelf technology refers to devices or applications that were not created specifically as assistive technologies for people with developmental disabilities, but individuals like Shuemak use them to increase their productivity, get information and communicate daily. Without these technologies, he says, he wouldn't be able to be a part of society today.

"Anything you can do on a computer, I can do," said Shuemak, an advocacy support advisor for the [Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services](#). "And without the technology of a screen reader I would not be able to do it. That's how I got through college, is with assistive technology."

Shuemak reads his emails using JAWS, a text-to-speech converter, and he answers them by dictating a response, which he can do on his iPhone. Despite the variance in individual need and ability, many people with developmental disabilities can get value out of off-the-shelf technologies, especially with slight modifications or additional software.

In addition to being an avid user of technology, Shuemak is heavily involved in educating and informing others about technology and the needs of people with disabilities. In addition to his work at Hamilton County DD Services, he is a former member of the Ohio DD Council and served as the first chairperson for Council's Technology & Communication Committee. He was also named to the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities Technology First Council and provided valuable input to help shape the recommendations made to the Governor to increase technology access for everyone.

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of Tech

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### Getting & Communicating Information



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**Take Action!** Be a part of the technology movement! Find ways to become involved within your community to educate and inform about the importance of technology for people with developmental disabilities. Take a look at Robert's video series, [How I See It](#), for ideas about advocating for accessible technology.

### Discovering What Technology Can Do for You

"One girl is in her mid-20s," said Connie Hartman, an assistive technology specialist for the [Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities](#). "She had never had a device before, and she's nonverbal. Over the last two years, she's started using an iPad with communication software

on it, and she presents at board meetings, she engages with people, she's able to tell people that she likes The Hunger Games and that she's part of 4-H. And now people have found out she has this wicked, fun sense of humor, and she's really engaging."

The ability to use a laptop or tablet to communicate, as opposed to a clunky, older piece of assistive technology, allows people with disabilities to use the same technology as people without disabilities. Likewise, a growing effort in the technology industry to provide built-in accessibility features for devices, applications and websites indicates that a more inclusive digital world is possible. As the Internet continues to grow more integral to society, disability support specialists are working to make sure no one gets left behind.

"As society gets faster and faster with technology, I think there's a high potential that there could be a big gap with people with disabilities," said Hartman. "That's why now, before that gap is even bigger, we need to support and include, and we need to put technology in people's hands with disabilities. It's not optional anymore. It's like if they don't experience and get at least functional with some technology, they aren't going to be able to do doctor's appointments or check out books at the library. It's an absolute need that people with disabilities have to get their hands on it, or that gap will never be able to be filled."

**Take Action!** Learn more about you and others can learn how to use technology. Begin by looking at our [list of assistive and supportive technology resources](#). There you will find links to websites, smart technology applications (APPs), webinars, blogs, videos and more that provide online training and resources to help you become tech savvy!

## About This Article

"The State of Tech: Getting and Communicating Information" is the second in a four-part series that aims to educate and inform people about the impact of technology advances and the digital divide for Ohioans with developmental disabilities. This article was published in August 2019.

Clay Voytek of O'Neill Communications wrote the articles for this series. O'Neill Communications is the Ohio DD Council's [Public Awareness grantee](#). The articles in this series were funded by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act.

For more information about the series, including links to all articles, go to [The State of Tech](#).



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