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The article I used for my review was “Enhancing Independent Internet Access for Individuals with Mental Retardation through Use of a Specialized Web Browser: A Pilot Study” The article was from the journal Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 2001, 36(1), 107-113.

The general purpose of the study was to determine if a web-browser specifically designed for individuals with mental retardation could be developed to increase the access and experience of Internet use for these individuals. The study was conducted using a prototype browser called Web Trek, and Microsoft Internet Explorer. The 12 subject used in the study were asked to perform web searches using both browsers and errors and problems that they experienced were recorded to determine which system allowed for the fewest errors for the subjects.

The article asserts that there would be several benefits to individuals with mental retardation if they had a better access to the Internet. These benefits were enhanced self esteem and self confidence, Increased independence, training and skill development, opportunities for self direction and self determination, and more efficient use of time. These five benefits were seen just as educational benefits. There were also the benefit of decreased exclusion of students with mental retardation in the regular classroom as well as increased opportunities for expanded leisure and recreational activities. Improving the access to things like email, and the ability to visit websites where these individuals could explore museums and places that they may never get the opportunity to visit in person. The article pointed out some common barriers that exist for individuals with mental retardation. These barriers include, but

are not limited to a lack of hardware for the target population. As well as a lack of Internet use among these individuals.

While this study was limited due to the small sample of individuals tested the results indicated that the subjects were more successful in their searches with the Web Trek browser. This was in large part to the use of voice prompts and picture prompts to aid in the individuals in getting to the information they were asked to search for. Other features of the Web Trek system were using reduced screen clutter, i.e. only the tabs most essential for searching were displayed. Some of the functions were grayed out, and only became available when they were necessary. Also the use of graphics or picture based searches allowed the individual to more successfully navigate the web. The Web Trek system also used the consistent placement of familiar buttons from screen to screen making it easier for the participants to find the proper buttons consistently.

This study while limited showed the importance of developing better, and more useful technology for individuals with disabilities. While the focus of this particular study was individuals with mental retardation, advancements in access to the Internet and to computers for all individuals with disabilities has unlimited possibilities. Due to the year of this study many of these advancements have already been developed. Some of the advancement include devices that individuals who do not speak can use to communicate, and the ability to use computers to help instruct students with disabilities in the classroom. Technology continues to advance for everyone, but those with disabilities may benefit the most from these advancements if the technology is developed that is compatible with their strengths.