



The issue of price differentials between IT products (hardware and software) in Australia and overseas is an additional obstacle for children with disability, and further compound the issues they already face, of discrimination, inaccessibility and exclusion.

There is also the issue of economic stress that many families of a child with disability face. Quite often families have already lost an entire income and are struggling to afford even the most basic necessities on a single income, aside from the often very specialised equipment that their child may need - technology being just one of them.

The substantial price differentials between Australia and other developed countries exacerbate what is already the very serious issue of price gouging (across all aspects of disability equipment sales) and may make IT products unaffordable and out of reach for many families, putting their children at a greater disadvantage than children with disability in other countries.

Children with disability in Australia already face very poor education standards, and are afforded little more than a babysitting service during their years of schooling, compared to their overseas counterparts who receive much more intensive support. Denying them access to affordable technology only compounds this.

We hear many excuses for anti-competitive practice by disability equipment suppliers and IT retailers alike: a narrower market by nature of a smaller population; higher shipping costs; a virtually non-existent manufacturing industry. Price gouging of basic equipment, such as wheelchairs, is becoming increasingly recognized as a problem in the disability sector as individuals and funding bodies are starting to question the status quo. Price Gouging is being spoken about openly and consumers are, understandably, getting angry.

Recently two articles were published about this issue:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-07-16/companies-disabled-price-rises/2797208>

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/disabled-say-equipment-providers-profiteering-20120608-201db.html>.

It's a human rights issue that is finally gathering some traction as people are asking why a wheelchair can cost more than double in Australia as it costs to purchase in America, and why governments aren't acting on the issue. Now we are seeing the same price disparity between IT devices and software.

It's apparent that the excuses of 'shipping costs' and 'comparably small population' don't add up when you look at the price of downloadable software, iTunes songs and wirelessly delivered books purchased through iBooks compared to Amazon online.

The reason we are paying more is simply because no-one has done anything about it and legislated for these anti-competitive practices to end.

As technology improves many children with disability have become increasingly reliant on it in order to access the many aspects of daily living, and to lead more inclusive lives.

Children with particular disabilities (that may affect their ability to communicate) have become particularly reliant on technology - even for their most basic communication needs. Many children are using iPads to access games and the curriculum at school.

Children are now afforded the opportunity, sometimes for the first time ever, to communicate with their caregivers, make choices and talk to their peers using assistive technology. There are a multitude of apps available to assist kids with disabilities, to communicate, play and learn.

It is unethical that they should pay substantially more for the privilege.

It's important to mention that for some of us, technology isn't a desirable object, it's an absolute necessity. It promotes communication, inclusion and independence.

Australian IT prices should be brought in line with other countries such as the US. The situation where we are needlessly and inexcusably gouged by extortionate price disparities should be thoroughly investigated and the practice brought to an end through legislation.

For some in our community, it's an issue of human rights.

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