

# Teaching All Students

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## **OrbiTouch Keyless Keyboard: Breaking Barriers**

By Elizabeth Rissman, Originally Posted December 2, 2011

Devin Spangler was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome when he was 7 years old. When you sit down with Devin, now 13, it is evident he is an articulate and bright young man. In fact, he speaks more clearly and cogently than many adults. However, according to his mother Allie, self-expression hasn't always been easy.

Only years earlier, completing school work was a daily battle. Devin became increasingly reluctant to handwrite school assignments because his hands would fatigue quickly. Standard keyboards didn't go over much better--their QWERTY layout seemingly had no order, something individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder crave. OrbiTouch helped him break through communication barriers. This is Allie and Devin Spangler's orbiTouch story.



### **Questions For Devin:**

**Which features about orbiTouch did you like best? For example, alphabetical order, corresponding colors with characters, comfortable design, etc.?**

Well, personally my favorites, or my top three favorites, are alphabetical order, comfortable design, and I love the mouse. The fact that it has a mouse in it. It just makes it less cluttered. You have a desk and an orbiTouch. It makes it easier to have it all there.

**Did using orbiTouch make typing more comfortable?**

I think using the orbiTouch actually led me into typing more. Now, I'm writing five paragraph essays and the whole nine yards.

**Before orbiTouch, when you would sit down at a computer, what kind of feelings did you experience? After using orbiTouch?**

Well, before the orbiTouch, I would experience the feeling of discomfort, unhappiness. It was very tedious, like math. After the orbiTouch, it was better. I felt a little more comfortable approaching a keyboard, because I knew how it really worked, the basics of typing. The keyless keyboard led me into typing.

**Did using orbiTouch have any effect on your self-confidence when completing school work?**

In a way, I think it's just cool! I could show off. Back when I first started using it, they were hardly around. I could say that I have a keyless keyboard. I could type without keys. It was just fun to show it off. And yeah, I did feel complete about getting school work done.

**If you had to change something about orbiTouch, what would it be?**

One, I would make a portable version. Smaller, maybe foldable somehow, something you could carry with you. And I'm not saying the orbiTouch is bad in any way, but if I could change one thing it would be size and weight. If you could make it smaller or portable so it could fit in a backpack, it would be perfect. On the portability, I always think of those roll up keyboards. A very small thing you can have in your hand.

**We have a wireless orbiTouch coming out in early 2012. We also have software coming out for Android tablets in early 2012 and then iPad later on. You use the same sliding directions as with original orbiTouch but you use your thumbs on a tablet. Once we get that out, I'm sure we'd really like to have to try it out and give us some feedback. What other kinds of assistive tech tools do you like to use?**

I use touchscreen. I love touchscreen. I mean, talk about technology. I use it for games. If I can say one thing, it's hallelujah for technology!

**Questions For Allie:**

**What did you first think about orbiTouch when you were approached to try this product?**

When we were first approached, we were at [UCF CARD](#) [University of Central Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities] with Marilee Emerson and Teresa Daly. They wanted to put him in a pilot program for orbiTouch. When they first pulled the orbiTouch out of the box, I was like, "Oh, that's interesting looking." You know, it's not your typical looking keyboard. But when you have a child who's not wanting to communicate or to write, you use anything you can find. You start going outside of the box. You start thinking of different ways to get your kids to do what they need to be successful, in academics and in life in general.

So my first impression was, "OK, let's see how this goes." And Devin took right to it. He can see something once or twice and know right what to do. He just picked right up on it. I'll never forget. One of the first things he said is, "It's in alphabetical order." He saw how it went and he thought that was the best thing ever.

He liked the colors. He liked how it was organized. He liked how it fit his hands. I think that was important too, because he has a lot of sensitivities in touching things. Clothes, tags, belts, buckles, zippers, for example. To have something that was comfortable to touch was important. I think the orbiTouch did accomplish that.

He took to it right away and learned very quickly how to use it, which was a good thing. And it wasn't before long before long he was starting at a young age to make Power Point presentations with the orbiTouch. They were very basic because he was in the second or third grade. But it was the fact that he didn't want to use the regular keyboard at all. He didn't like the way it felt. It didn't make sense to him.

**Did you see Devin change the way he viewed computer use after using orbiTouch? What kind of emotions, as a parent, did you experience?**

Absolutely, I did. I immediately saw that spark and that love of learning come back. Because we were getting to the point where he was losing that zest for learning because it was becoming so tedious, having to sit there and type on a keyboard. Physically writing is very difficult for him. It still is til this day.

He has low muscle tone in his fingers so when he writes, everything gets tired. And it's painful. It gets up all the way up into his shoulders. So we had to find an alternative. His first grade teacher was fantastic. She was open to allowing him to use different forms of technology in the classroom.

He got that zest, that zeal for learning again. And that's so important. That spark in his eyes came back. And I have to tell you, that sealed the deal for us to continuing to use the orbiTouch. It brought him back. It got to the point where he didn't like school anymore. He didn't want to go to school. He didn't want to have to write papers because he wasn't looking forward to it at all. What a great thing it did for him. So absolutely it helped. The emotions were that he was happy to do school work. He was happy to get on there and do a Power Point presentation. But he was definitely inspired.

**Allie, you're an AT professional. Do you see orbiTouch fitting into a classroom setting? What other scenarios?**

I'm not really an AT professional. What I have experience in is using different technologies that Devin has used in the classroom and advocating for him in his IEP meetings to get different uses of technology in there. I absolutely see having alternate uses of different forms of technology in the classroom. I think you have to. Because you may have one child that can use this one, but another child can use a different form of technology. You might have one child using an [Alpha Smart](#), another child using the [iPod Touch](#) or [Proloquo](#), and then having an orbiTouch, and then several voice prompters.

**As we know, kids with ASD or Asperger Syndrome are incredibly gifted, talented, and anything but typical. However, what do you see as the typical profile of someone who would benefit from using orbiTouch?**

What I think is beautiful about the orbiTouch is that it is a broad spectrum keyboard. You can use it for the child who is first learning how to type, or if they don't take to the standard keyboard. I think the uses are for everybody, not just ASD. Our son has Asperger's, and he took to it finding what made the most logical sense for him, which is the alphabetical order. But, I think everybody can benefit from using the orbiTouch.

Devin: If you think about it, anybody who has low muscle tone, arthritis, autism. All the people who can't use a regular keyboard. You see the people who do the pecking. This is better. Frankly, you don't even have to memorize it. You can memorize it if you want to, but you don't have to. It works for just about everybody. I could not think of anybody on this earth who could not use an orbiTouch.

Allie and Elizabeth together: Well said, well said! [Laughing]

**Tell me about *Bright Feats*.**

[Bright Feats](#) is a magazine I started with a friend of mine. Actually, one of my best friends. Her and I were neighbors, and we lived across the street. And both of us have children who have special needs. We put together a community resource.

When my son was first diagnosed, finding resources that he needed was very difficult. The doctor gives you a diagnosis and says, "These are the things you need to do. Good luck." And you pretty much go out there. Rori [Becker] and I created a magazine that had a list of all of the community resources we started in Central Florida. So it lists all of the community resources that are available for families with children of any medical, educational, or special needs. It's a little magazine that fits in your purse and in the index portion it lists all of the resources: Doctors, dentists, therapists, support groups, therapy centers...you name it, its in there.

*For more information on orbiTouch, please visit our [website](#).*