The Conversation: iPad Gives Voice to the Autistic

ABC News' Sharyn Alfonsi Talks to a Man Helping People Communicate

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When the iPad was released earlier this month, reviewers were quick to tout its advantages for reading books, watching movies and browsing the Web. What they overlooked, though, was its potential to change the lives of people with autism.

For decades, the autistic have relied on bulky text-to-speech machines in schools and homes to help them communicate. Many of the devices had limited portability, and their cost -- anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 -- placed them out of the reach of families without insurance.

But Samuel Sennott's software, Proloquo2Go, offers comparable features as those older machines on an iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch at a fraction of the cost. A Ph.D. student and specialist in Augmentative Alternative Communication at Pennsylvania State University, Sennott co-developed the app, which people can download from the iTunes store just like thousands of other programs.

The program converts symbols and text into speech, which it then reads aloud on an iPad's speakers. Choosing from about 8,000 symbols, people with autism, Lou Gehrig's disease, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and others with trouble communicating can tap out a sentence and give their thoughts a voice.

Today on the Conversation, we talked with Sennott about his software and the difference it's making in people's lives. It's a Conversation about a new way to converse, and we hope you'll check it out.

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