

Introduction

To use switch controlled software on your computer, you need a suitable interface box which has sockets for your switches (most switches have 3.5mm mini jack plugs). There are several switch interfaces available for different computers. The interface may let the switch:

- ◇ act as one or more mouse button(s);
- ◇ act as one or more keyboard keys (e.g. Spacebar, Enter, cursor keys);
- ◇ connect to a 'serial' or 'COM' port on the computer.

Mouse button switches

Some mice and pointing devices are available with switch sockets fitted to them, so that extra switches can be plugged in. The Mouser 3 interface (PC PS/2 and A7000/RiscPC) provides a switch interface, two sockets for connecting the mouse and another pointing device, and lets you switch off unwanted buttons. If you have access to technical support, it is fairly easy to take apart a mouse or other pointing device and fit switch sockets. Lastly, some of the interfaces that let you use switches to replace keyboard keys work for mouse buttons as well - with a Windows or Mac computer, by turning on MouseKeys (see the CALL Quick Guides on Windows Accessibility Options and Mac Easy Access), the numeric keypad keys can operate as mouse buttons. Mouse switch interfaces are usually fairly reliable: the disadvantage is that the teacher, parent or helper does not have full control of the mouse themselves when the user is operating the switches.

'Serial' switches

A lot of Acorn and PC software can use switches plugged into a serial switchbox. These are small interfaces which connect to the serial ('COM') port on the back of the computer. A few years ago serial switchboxes were unreliable and sometimes did not work on different computers. The suppliers claim that they now work with all serial switch software, but we have found that this is not the case, despite the manual and supplier claiming it does. For these reasons, we usually recommend a keyboard switch interface rather than a serial switchbox, even though they are more expensive. If you have a serial switchbox and are having difficulty with it (and can't afford a keyboard switch interface), you can use Paul Blenkhorn's Windows Serial Switch



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Driver. This is a program which makes the serial switches act like keyboard keys - usually Space and Enter, although you can set it to operate other keys. It can be downloaded free from the Inclusive Technology web site (see below).

Keyboard switches

Most switch-operated software can be controlled with one or more keys on the keyboard. The most common are the Spacebar, and Enter keys, although some software use number keys 0 through to 3 or the cursor arrow keys. Keyboard switch interfaces are generally very reliable and do not interfere much with other functions on the computer and so although they are more expensive, we recommend them.

Device	Description	Cost ex VAT	Supplier
MOUSE BUTTON SWITCH INTERFACES			
Acorn PS2 Mouse+	For connecting PS/2 mice to older Acorn computers. Has 3 switch sockets to replace mouse buttons	£39	Stuart Tyrrell Developments
Acorn & PC PS2 Mouser 3	Connects two mice into a PC or A7000/RiscPC; turns off unwanted mouse buttons; has 3 switch sockets to replace buttons	£49	Semerc
Acorn & PC PS2, USB Switch modified mice	Standard mouse fitted with a separate switch box with 2 switch sockets.	£39	Semerc, QED
Acorn & PC serial Switch modified trackballs	Orbit (QED), KidsBall (Semerc) and KidTrac (Inclusive) trackballs, with switch sockets to replace buttons	from £49	Semerc, QED, Inclusive
KEYBOARD SWITCH INTERFACES			
Acorn & PC PS2, Mac Don Johnston Switch Interface	Box with 5 switch sockets connects between the keyboard and the computer and lets the switch act as keyboard keys. or as mouse buttons	£73 to £98	Don Johnston, Inclusive Technology
PC SwitchBox	Switch interface with 8 programmable sockets to act as keyboard keys. Plugs into keyboard socket.	£69	Inclusive Technology
Acorn & PC PS2 & AT Switch Adaptive Keyboard	A standard PC keyboard with 16 switch sockets for keys 0-3, Backspace, Space, Enter, TAB, Cursor up, down, right, numeric keypad 2, 4, 6, 8, 5 (mouse click) Tagsearch version is programmable.	£89	TAGSEARCH, Inclusive Technology
Acorn & PC PS2 Keyswitch+	Switch interface with 8 programmable sockets to act as keyboard keys (or mouse buttons, with MouseKeys software)	£49	Stuart Tyrrell Developments
Mac & PC SwitchClick	TASH A large switch which connects to PC serial or PS2 or Mac ADB ports, and is programmable to act as any key.	£65	QED, Techcess
SERIAL SWITCH INTERFACES			
PC Serial Switch Box	Serial switch box with two sockets. Semerc box is claimed to work with all serial switch software	£25	Semerc, Crick, Inclusive Technology
PC Infra-red Serial Switch Box II	Infra-red version of the Semerc serial switchbox. Up to 16 transmitters can use one receiver. Useful for wheelchair users. £99 for receiver & transmitter; £59 for transmitter	£99 / £59	Semerc

Suppliers

Crick Software, 35 Charter Gate, Quarry Park Close, Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6QB. Tel. 01604 671691. <http://www.cricksoft.com>

Don Johnston Special Needs Ltd., 18 Clarendon Court, Calver Road, Winwick Quay, Warrington, WA2 8QP. Tel. 01925 241642. <http://www.donjohnston.com/uk/index.htm>

Inclusive Technology, Saddleworth Business Centre, Huddersfield Road, Oldham OL3 5DF, Tel. 01457 819790. <http://www.inclusive.co.uk>

QED 2000, 1 Prince Alfred Street, Gosport, Hampshire, PO12 1QH. Tel: 0870-78-78-850.

SEMERC, Granada Learning, Granada Television, Quay Street, Manchester M60 9EA. Tel. 0161 827 2927. <http://www.semerc.com>

Stuart Tyrrell Developments, PO Box 183, OLDHAM, OL2 8FB. Tel: 01706 848600
<http://www.stdevel.demon.co.uk/>

Tagsearch, 60 Hampe Lane, Hamble, Hampshire SO31 4JS. Tel. 01703 455004. <http://www.tagsearch.com>

Techcess, Unit 12, Willow Park Industrial Estate, Upton Lane, Stoke Golding, Nuneaton, Warwickshire CV13 6EU. Tel. 01455 213708