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### A Chording with EkaTetra

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It is not often an editor gets to say that a potentially revolutionary device has just been introduced, but it is entirely possible that the EkaPad product from EkaTetra in Portland, Oregon could revolutionize the way handhelds input text and data. And, perhaps, someday change the way we enter text into most computers.

After six years of development, the EkaPad - an ergonomic single-handed 12 key USB keypad - was formally introduced last month.

The company states that "EkaTetra's elegantly simple single-handed 12 key USB EkaPad does everything your computer keyboard can do, and much more - all with just 4 fingers. Whatever your text or data entry need, with our Cheat Sheet you'll be chording the EkaPad in 2 minutes and know letters, numerals and more in 2 hours. The EkaPad really is one-handed - it slides on your thumb via EkaHand or stands on your desk with EkaStand."

In addition, extensive on-screen materials are included which make the EkaPad easy to learn and easy to use.

EkaTetra's EkaPad isn't tied to a legacy technology or an adaptation of a desktop keyboard. It is a completely new approach to entering text (and all keyboard characters) into computers of all kinds.

Earlier attempts at making keyboards smaller included Graffiti I and II, MessagEase, Fitaly, T9, tiny Qwerty, half Qwerty, Twiddler, the BAT, Orbit, sliding Qwerty, tap-tap-tap, Qwerty on screen, SMS, voice recognition, FrogPad, Moltron and others. Even though many devices accepting data entry fit easily into one hand (cell phones for example), almost all of the above partial solutions require either two hands (often with stylus) to enter data, or a flat surface to support the device.

The EkaPad and its accompanying EkaHand form an ergonomic system which lets you use the EkaPad comfortably in one hand, with no stylus and no supporting structure. The EkaPad hangs effortlessly on your thumb, ready to accept key strokes and chords.

When working at your desk, the EkaPad can rest in the EkaStand, immediately available for use. The EkaPad with stand allows you to remove your bulky old-fashioned keyboard and recover your desk's top.

**After Six Years, the EkaPad is ready** "Six years ago, we decided the world might start to use a small, portable single-handed data entry device if the device worked well, was easy to use, and easy to learn. We thought we could do it. And we have - way better than our initial fumbblings. It's taken longer than we planned. We continually demanded the best possible solutions we could envision, and we got them. Now it's for you to decide," said George Forester, EkaTetra CEO.

The patented EkaPad underwent an extensive end user beta-test program to measure ergonomics, training material effectiveness, and chording/character designs. Data for future features is being gathered continuously.

The EkaPad's twelve keys and easy to learn one-finger, two-finger and three-finger "chords" make single-handed data entry a reality. All characters found within a standard operating system are supported, including alphas, special characters, commands, and numerals in both cell phone and 10-key layouts. The selection & placement of each character's chord was influenced by letter frequencies, traditional relationships, and easy mnemonics. Without the current on screen Cheat Sheet, most beta-test people and early users committed to memory the alphabet, numbers and punctuation in two to three hours.

Unlike other keyboards, you can store multiple ShortCuts and Text in the EkaPad - so just take it with you from one computer to another - it works perfectly on Macs and Windows.

**We Try One** The EkaPad combines one, two, or three finger chords that enable support of all characters, functions and controls found within a standard operation system. Impressive, but intimidating. Why? Because this editor is, shall we say, "musically challenged". The original inventor of the device that eventually evolved into the EkaPad is George Forester, who in the 1980's was working on developing a pocketable computer whose main feature would be a keypad on the outside, played with the eight fingers as the palms of the hands held the computer between them. As an amateur musician and recorder player, this was intuitively attractive and posed no overwhelming challenges. But - George is a musician and most of us are not. Chording? Twelve keys - 4 fingers enabling an entire 104 key keyboard (and more)? Riiiiight... Even though I can type at 50 words per minute on an ergonomic keyboard, I was intrigued but skeptical whether I could actually use the EkaPad.

The first time I slipped the device on my right hand, with the Velcro strap on the back around my thumb (or, should I say "front", since the actual keypad faces away from you so your fingers can wrap around and manipulate the keys), it did not seem natural at all. After fumbling for a few minutes just trying to match my three fingers with the appropriate keys, George suggested I change to my left hand just for something different. Most importantly, he showed me how to place my thumb on the device and wrap the Velcro around it in such a way that the fingers fell naturally into place on the pad. Voila! What a difference -- suddenly I was looking at letters on a page and typing them using one, two, and even (with a little hesitation) three finger "chords". In just a few moments it became readily apparent that this device -- with a little practice- could be usable by anyone. And, with more practice, could be a viable keyboard replacement.