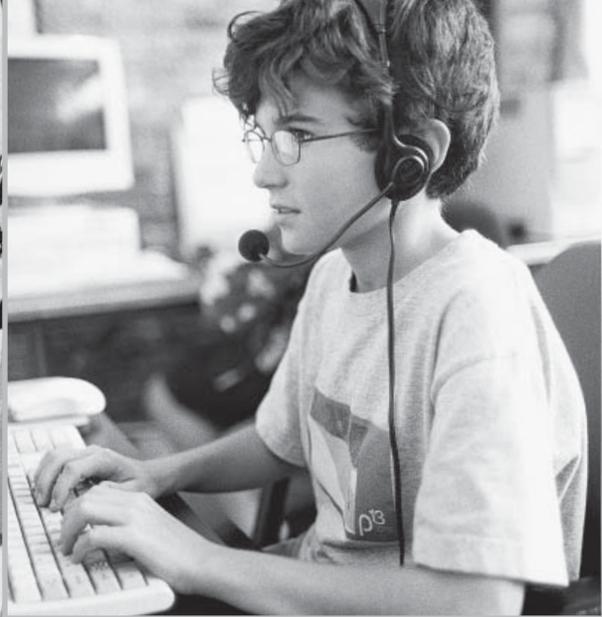


UNDERSTANDING CLIENT NEEDS  
(EVEN WHEN THE CLIENT MIGHT NOT)



Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) could rightly be described as a network of experts – groups who understand the needs of people with disabilities and offer education and technical support around assistive computer technologies. But when the organization began thinking about transferring its expertise into a fee-for-service consulting business, Fern Tiger Associates determined the organization's energies were better focused elsewhere.

Having researched the Americans with Disabilities Act and the compliance of businesses, FTA assessed the capacity of ATA's members to be competitive in offering consulting services. It soon became clear that ATA and its members lacked the infrastructure to move forward with the fee-for-service plan and faced other, more pressing challenges.

Halfway through the project for which FTA had been hired, the board of directors heeded a recommendation to shift gears and instead address issues such as organizational restructuring, fundraising, board development, outreach, and leadership transition plans. A strategic plan emerged, focused on issues which were much more timely and relevant to the future of ATA than what had first been envisioned. In the process of drafting the plan, FTA also identified a separate, more appropriate fee-for-service niche than compliance consulting; it was recommended that ATA explore options to assist software companies in testing their products' usability for disabled people.

*When FTA started working with the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA), it was called the Foundation for Technology Access, a name later changed after the consultants identified the misconceptions that the name triggered. ATA's board retreat was held in French Lick, Indiana – birthplace of basketball star Larry Bird. En route back from Indiana (via Louisville, Kentucky) two staff members almost missed the plane, not realizing that there was a time difference between the two states.*

*ALLIANCE FOR TECHNOLOGY ACCESS, a national nonprofit organization working to enhance the lives of people with disabilities by providing resources and education about assistive technologies to the disability community, is comprised of more than 100 member agencies.*