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## Speeding up Mobile Text Entry

By [Keith Kirkpatrick](#)

**Eatoni Ergonomics** recently threw its hat into the mobile text-entry ring with the release of LetterWise and WordWise, software solutions that use linguistically predictive coding to speed the entry of data on a phone keypad. While the company claims its software permits faster text entry than better-known competitors such as **Tegic Communications'** T9 Text Input, analysts say the race to sign deals with handset manufacturers is more important. And that's a race in which Tegic holds a commanding lead.

As wireless handsets become more data-centric, the familiar method of repeatedly tapping a numeric key to select the desired letter—commonly referred to as "multitap"—has become tedious and slow. Tegic's T9 Text Input and **Motorola's** iTAP were developed to address this problem.

T9 Text Input provides a 60,000-word database, including proper names, and uses an algorithm to suggest a list of appropriate words

names, and uses an algorithm to suggest a list of appropriate words once the first few letters are entered.

In contrast, Eatoni's LetterWise and WordWise use a system based on tapping an auxiliary key—usually the numeral "1"—that acts as a kind of shift key. On phones designed for English-speaking countries, the special keys, highlighted in red, are C, E, H, L, N, S, T, and Y. Other letters are typed by pressing the key with the intended letter. To ensure that the correct letter appears, the application relies on linguistic rules specific to the language.

"We don't use a dictionary," explained Terry Jones, Eatoni's chief technology officer. "The premise of T9, iTap, and EasyText is that they keep a big dictionary of all the words you might possibly want to type. If you want to type anything else, such as URLs, things don't work at all."

Tegic executives and analysts dispute this claim, however, noting T9's ability to add new words to the dictionary and to switch to manual mode. Moreover, because WordWise and LetterWise users must occasionally check the display to ensure the correct letter is being entered, the input process is actually slower.

"We tested a similar system at Tegic several years ago, and found that in terms of keystrokes, it's almost as good as T9," said Don Davidge, vice president of sales and marketing with Tegic. "But in terms of speed, it's actually slower than multitap. That was because of the fact that [users] couldn't just focus on the keypad."

More important than tapping speed is the speed at which Tegic is acquiring customers. While Eatoni won't likely announce partners or customers until 2001, Tegic has already licensed its technology to 35 handset manufacturers, including Nokia, Benefon, and Ericsson.

"A lot of the way you measure success is how many agreements a company has with handset manufacturers," commented Callie Nelsen, a senior analyst with IDC. "It's going to be difficult for others to get manufacturers to sign on."

### ***Sound Off***

*Are mobile handsets too hard to enter messages on? Would you prefer a predictive text entry system? Send your opinions about mobile text entry to [ieletters@iw.com](mailto:ieletters@iw.com) and we'll include reader replies here.*

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