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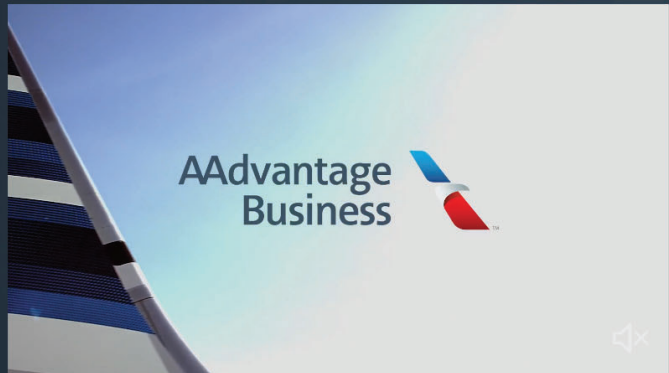
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This Smartwatch Keyboard Is The Second Coming Of T9

Remember how you used to text on that ancient cell phone? iType brings that same concept to smartwatches.

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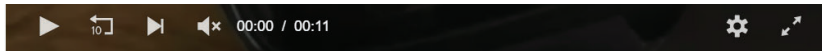


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Small steps,
big impact



BY KEVIN OHANNESSIAN

How does one turn a ballroom into a happening? By pressing one more letter. I watch as a single finger blazes through a sentence describing the meeting I am in. I can't type this fast on my phone. And Ryan Ghassabian is doing it on a watch. This is the whole point of iType, a new smartwatch from a company called **TypeTime**.

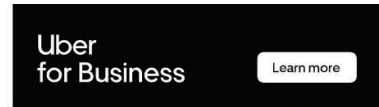
The iType's keyboard has the letters arranged like a standard QWERTY keyboard, but instead of each letter having its own key, letters are grouped together on only six keys. The result is a compact tool for easier typing, not unlike the way T9 predictive text made typing on early cell phones exponentially less arduous.



Snapkeys

"The one area where smartwatches were lacking was a keyboard. We saw that we had a great keyboard solution that could fit on all devices, whether it be phones, tablets, or smartwatches. So we started developing our keyboard to fit the small form factor of a smartwatch," says Ryan Ghassabian.

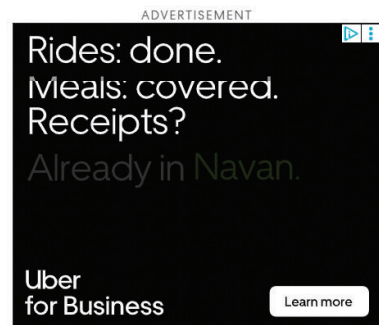
And it is a curious thing to watch an unintelligible jumble of letters like "bdttwkk" become "ballroom" with a press of a key and then another press transforming the word to "happening." For increased speed, you can even swipe between letters, rather than tapping. The company has seen users go as high as 80 words per minute, faster than the average person at typing on



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a normal keyboard.

To help users feel comfortable, there is a line that shows what you are typing, to catch any mistakes. Furthermore, displayed above the typing area is a list of suggested words, so you can stop a word halfway and just tap the full word. If you don't see the word you are looking for, add it to the dictionary. Like most smartphone keyboards these days, algorithms will even learn names and adjust for common spelling mistakes like transposing two letters, including the relocated L and O.



All of this functionality, including the surety from watching your letters being typed out, fits into the tiny 1.54" screen of the iType smartwatch. This enables you to actually respond to an email or hold a conversation via text message. This is what TypeTime believes is necessary to make smartwatches useful.

Most of today's smartwatches that run on Google's Android operating system actually use AndroidWear, a simplified version of the OS made for wearable devices. With the exception of the **Minuum keyboard** on some smartwatches, this means no keyboard.

Of course, typing on a smartwatch flies in the face of almost all fashionable design thinking surrounding wearables such as the Moto 360 and the Apple Watch, which favor ultra-streamlined UIs. When it comes to communication tools, that means pre-written text phrases, voice commands, emojis, and the like. It does not mean hunting and pecking on a watch face. But when it comes to TypeTime's keyboard, it isn't the byproduct of an oversight. It's an outright philosophical disagreement with the status quo in current wearables.

Ryan says, "Apple is pushing the fact that you can doodle on their smartwatches, write 'Hi' or use emojis or use pre-defined sentences that 90% of the time don't even cater to what you want to say. That's not what you want to say. You want to be personal with somebody. Our keyboard allows you to be personal in that you can really type on a smartwatch, rather than letting a manufacturer dictate what you have to say."

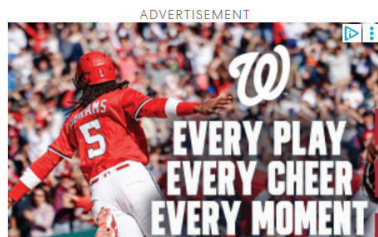


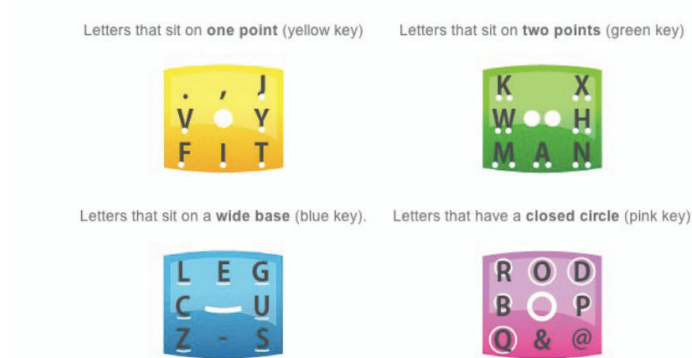
And a feature being less than optimal has never stopped consumers from liking what they like (i.e., **6-inch smartphones**). Much like T9 proved you could write coherently on a 0-9 cell-phone keyboard, iType at least makes an argument that typing on a smartwatch can be done competently.

Benjamin Ghassabian is the founder and CEO of Snapkeys, the parent company of TypeTime. Besides being Ryan's uncle, Benjamin is a UI expert that has been developing word processing software since 1979, working on a simplified keyboard since 2000, and founded Snapkeys in 2008. He developed this keyboard software, first for tablets and smartphones, and now for smartwatches. The company has over 200 patents filed globally.

Benjamin realized the simple keyboard interface Snapkeys developed is perfect for the small screen of a smartwatch, but it started as a keyboard for Android smartphones. Snapkey Zones was released in the Google Play store last year as a beta, with tens of thousands getting to try this new kind of keyboard. Benjamin took the feedback from that trial period to help improve the keyboard. Which then aided in the creation of the smartwatch version. (This trial version has been removed from Google Play since then.)

And that wasn't the first time Benjamin tested a new kind of keyboard. In 2011, the company had a different Snapkeys keyboard for Android out in beta. This one was colorful, a transparent overlay on top of existing apps. It had only four keys with three letters each, arranged for maximum accuracy by the algorithms. This keyboard was hard to learn so the company simplified it, arranging the letters on the four keys according to their shape: one for letters containing circles (BDOPQR), one for letters sitting on one leg (FIJTVY), another for sitting on two legs (AHKMNVX), and the last for those with a flat bottom (CEGLSUZ).





Though Snapkeys felt it had come up with the most logical solution, further user testing led to a shift back towards the familiar.

“There was a school in Florida that wanted our technology. They were teaching it to students at a young age, eight to 10 years old. One day, one of the children came to Ryan and said, ‘Can you change your interface to QWERTY because I want to send a text.’ Ryan told me this and I said it was time to change. If an eight-year-old comes and knows how QWERTY works, there’s nothing to do. We have to adapt it to QWERTY,” says Benjamin.

Which led them to a year of work adapting the keyboard to a QWERTY layout. The design on the smartphone keyboard was also changed from something colorful to something visually similar to the default Android keyboard. Its method of typing is now as familiar as possible to users. This one and all the previous keyboards were created to serve one purpose: finding a better way to type.

Benjamin says, “We can change the way we interact with the QWERTY keyboard. I don’t think we have to go to all the letters, travel our fingers back and forth, left and right, up and down. It’s too time consuming and cumbersome for small devices.”





So what's the best way to make its case for typing on a smartwatch? Because Android Wear won't support the keyboard, TypeTime decided to create its own hardware to show people the tech does bring full text functionality to tiny watches. Originally the company launched the iType on Kickstarter, but after only garnering \$21,000 of its \$100,000 goal in the first week, the campaign was cancelled. The company is **accepting preorders** for the watch itself, which starts at \$190.

TypeTime's goal is to license the keyboard to third-party smartwatch makers, and hopes the iType smartwatch can persuade Google to openly support keyboards on Android Wear. It is even developing a version for iPhone, expected to be finished in two months, to foster the popularity of the keyboard.

It remains to be seen whether or not iType convinces anyone that typing on a smartwatch is the future. But almost certainly there were once those who scoffed at the idea of using a cell phone to write. And for the more adventurous technophiles out there, iType's ambitious experiment lies in wait.

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His work has also been published by Kill Screen, Tom's Guide, Tech Times, MTV Geek, GameSpot, Gamasutra, Laptop Mag, Co.Create, and Co.Labs. Focusing on the creativity and business of gaming, he is always up for a good interview or an intriguing feature. [More](#)

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05-27-2025 | TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

How to inspire future generations of innovators

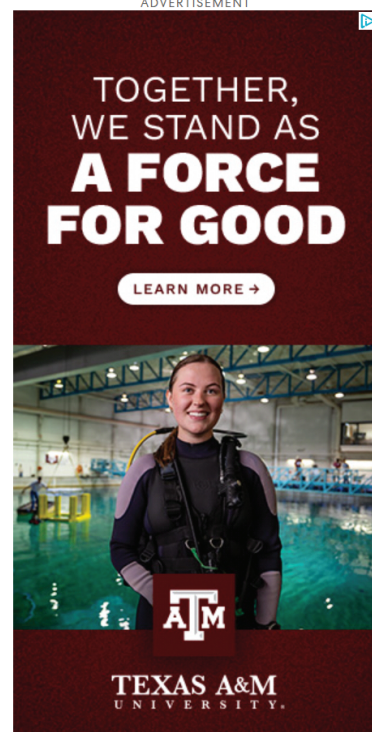
During a recent panel discussion, a renowned entrepreneur and key leaders from Texas A&M University revealed a game plan for cultivating groundbreaking thinkers

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Moderator Stephanie Mehta (from left) discussed the role of educators in inspiring the next generation of

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BY **FASTCO WORKS**

Technological innovation continues to change our lives in seismic ways. But what will the technological advances of the future bring us? That depends in large part on the people helping to drive technology forward. Will they have the math and science training they need? Will they have the values of cooperation and the drive to work toward the societal benefits that innovators truly need?

Recently, **Texas A&M University** sponsored a panel entitled “A Force for Good: Visionaries Redefining the Future” at the Fast Company Grill during SXSW in which industry leaders discussed ways to drive interest in STEM fields and create a fertile environment for problem-solving and innovation. Here are three takeaways from their conversation. (Scroll to the bottom to watch the entire panel discussion.)

1. Innovation begins with aspiration.

One of the major impediments to technological innovation is that many who might excel in science and engineering never seriously consider capitalizing on those skills. This challenge is particularly acute among girls and young people whose parents struggle financially. “The problem is that we have kids, particularly girls, that don’t believe science, technology, engineering, mathematics is fun, accessible, rewarding,” said **Dean Kamen**, an entrepreneur and inventor known for creating the Segway. “They need to start seeing the world of science and technology as part of their future.”

Texas A&M University, the nation’s largest land grant university, is helping to bridge that gap, which means working with kids early in their educational journey. “We used to target high schoolers,” said **Dr. Amy Waer**, dean of the Texas A&M University College of Medicine. “But data shows that for young girls and young boys to feel empowered to go into STEM fields, you’ve got to [target the] third grade.” This introduction to STEM can be simple. Texas A&M has a program that asks third graders to teach kindergarteners how to use a stethoscope. Providing young children with this basic medical tool—and asking them to teach younger kids about it—can be the spark that puts math and science on a child’s radar and eventually leads them to pursuing an education or career in those fields.

2. Strong values are critical.

Encouraging an interest in science may be the first step in creating the next generation of innovators, but instilling strong core values is equally important. “Part of our students’ education takes place in the classroom with world-class faculty and staff, but another part of it is learned in student organizations and student leadership,” said **Col. Michael E. Fossum**, chief operating officer of Texas A&M University at Galveston and a former astronaut. He added that students must be exposed to experiences



that further develop Texas A&M's Core Values: excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service.

Those skills are crucial for visionaries and creators in the real world. Kamen, for instance, sponsors a youth robotics competition involving 82,000 teams through his nonprofit organization **FIRST**. Each team is given a specific kit of parts and a set amount of time in which to build a robot. Organizers are careful to stress that winning the competition is not the same thing as succeeding, he said. Rather, participants succeed by learning together and collaborating. "Almost every robot will lose, but all the kids will win if they learn how to share, cooperate, and teach each other," Kamen said. During the competition, individuals regularly help competitors repair broken axles or make design changes that improve each other's robots for the next round. "Destroying your competition is not a way to improve the human condition," he continued. "In the real world, the public benefits when we get to see all the different good ideas that people have."

3. Innovators can be a force for good.

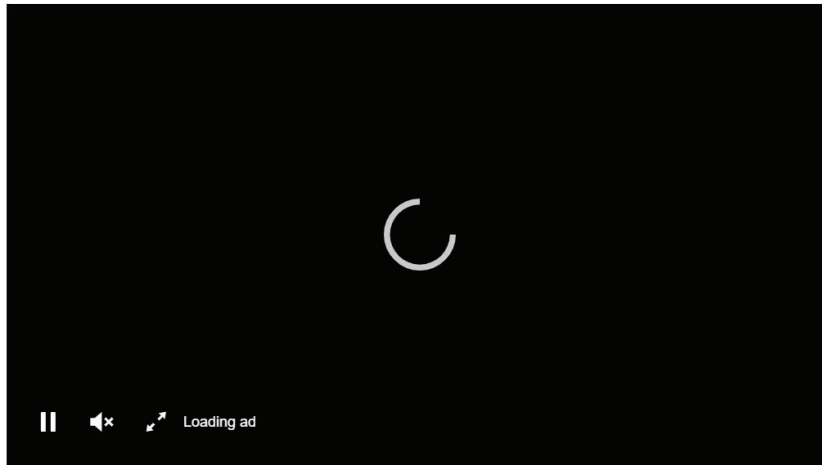
Educators have a responsibility to ensure that young people think about how their decisions, actions, and work can benefit communities and the world at large. Texas A&M encourages this type of introspection, for example, by requiring all new medical students to participate in a rural-medicine elective. This class gives students firsthand experience in resource-strapped communities that may not have good access to medical care.



"Not everyone's going to practice in rural Texas," Waer said. "[But] whether they're going to be practicing as a cardiothoracic surgeon in Dallas or elsewhere, they need to know what may not be there in terms of medical care."

Understanding this need can have a big impact on students' decisions when they graduate. In fact, the first three students who participated in the program—all from major cities—decided to concentrate on primary care in rural communities. "Service is important," Kamen said. "We need to inspire students. We need help them understand the value of serving your country, serving your community, serving your state in some way—the value of giving back."

Watch the full panel:



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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