

Not Exactly Clackety-clack

The QWERTY layout is older than your grandfather—it goes back to 1868. Over the years, as people tried to untie themselves from the wrist-twisting limitations of QWERTY, they have contorted the standard bed of Chiclets into some very odd shapes. Here are just a few of the innovative attempts to escape the 19th Century technology.



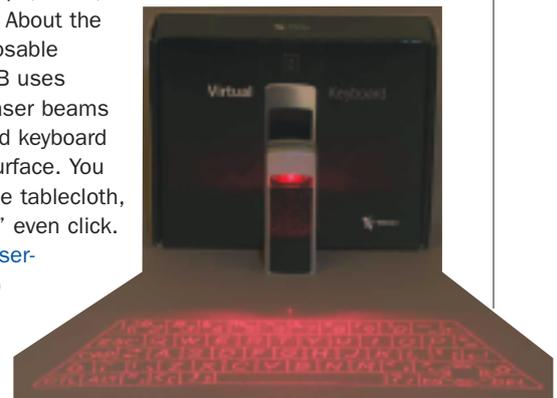
Sometimes half a keyboard makes more sense. For instance, you can use **Matias's halfkeyboard™** (left) to type with one hand as you tap directions on your PDA with the other—or draw on a graphics tablet. It will get you a lot of desk space back. **The FrogPad** (below) comes in left and right-hand configurations and it's really not that difficult to learn. (www.matias.ca/halfkeyboard and www.frogpad.com)



It looks like a model train transformer, but the **orbiTouch Keyless Keyboard** lets you type or mouse around without any finger or wrist motion. About the size of a regular keyboard, the two domes glide NSEW, giving you combinations for all 26 letters—left dome East + right dome West = the letter “e.” (www.keybowl.com)



Both of these colorful models are not real—but in different ways. The **Optimus** (right) with its colorful keys is still in beta. Every key on the Optimus keyboard is a stand-alone display showing what it's controlling. The keys can even be animated. The **VKB Virtual Keyboard** (below) is available now—so it's virtual and real. You can use it with PCs, laptops, PDAs, Smartphones. About the size of a disposable lighter, the VKB uses infrared and laser beams to project a red keyboard map on any surface. You can type on the tablecloth, and the “keys” even click. (www.virtual-laser-keyboard.com)



And if none of these alternatives appeals to you, get an **Ergodex**. Put the keys in any cockeyed configuration you want, assign functions to them, and see if you can do better than the interface engineers. You'll have your own totally customized macro board. To prevent anyone from clipping your design, move the keys around occasionally so no one else knows what they do. (www.ergodex.com)

