

## THE FUTURE IS HERE— THE CHOICE IS YOURS

The devices and programs mentioned in this report reflect years of planning and development by libraries, adaptive technology (AT) advocates, patrons, and businesses. Libraries are ready for another quantum leap in the technology due to the increase of digital books. Libraries need to prepare for their growth as well as advocate for the technology to be both accessible and usable for all.

### The digital library

The digital book is yet to sort itself out as it tries to decide how to deliver itself to the reader. Nevertheless digital books are part of today's library as both public and academic libraries add titles to their collections.

Contrary to popular opinion not all formats are accessible to patrons with visual impairments. Action buttons and screen reader conflicts abound. Likewise, many seniors who have tried to use today's digital books find some of the mechanisms (such as page turning) confusing. These problems will no doubt be solved soon since money is to be made.

Digital books promise to give users who have print disabilities the same opportunity as those who do not have a disability. Users will be able to make print large and will be able to translate it into Braille, audio formats, and different languages. Digital books' greatest promise is to allow all people to acquire the same book, at the same time, at the same price.

### What is happening on the digital frontiers?

#### *The Daisy format*

The Daisy format was developed by an international group of people (engineers, librarians, advocates, and potential users) who formed the Daisy consortium. Their mission was to "establish the International Standard and implementation strategies for the production and exchange of digital documents."

The group also focused on ways to integrate the product with mainstream technology and to ensure access to information for people with vision or reading (print) disabilities.

The resultant Daisy format offers users unique flexibility and options. The reader can listen to a Daisy book on a computer while reading the text with a Braille display. The text also can be downloaded to be used with a special stand-alone player at home or when traveling.

Producing Braille from a full-text Daisy book is even possible. The FNB Library in the Netherlands plans to convert its entire collection to this format.

Daisy projects,  
[www.daisy.org/about\\_us/  
brochure.asp](http://www.daisy.org/about_us/brochure.asp)

FNB is working on many  
electronic programs,  
[www.gnb.nl/sub\\_home/  
english.html](http://www.gnb.nl/sub_home/english.html).

## **Canadian National Institute for the Blind Library Launches Digital Library**

Launched in November 2003, the Canadian Library for the Blind already boasts a bilingual library of more than 10,000 titles. This venture affects 105,000 Canadians who are blind or visually impaired, giving them the ability to access thousands of books, 40 daily newspapers, and magazines.

The online library is the most advanced library of alternative formats in the world and a model for libraries producing alternative-format information. The website is accessible and usable. The digital library also contains The Children's Discovery Portal, the world's first cyberspace of its kind for children who are blind.

## **The National Library Service's Web-Braille**

Web-Braille is an Internet, Web-based service that provides, in an electronic format, many Braille books, some music scores, and all Braille magazines produced by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). The service also includes a growing collection of titles transcribed locally for cooperating network libraries.<sup>1</sup>

Libraries with patrons who qualify for service from the NLS may subscribe to the service. Titles may be read online or downloaded to be used with a personal Braille notetaker or embossed (embosser required).

## **The future of the NLS program**

NLS wants to assure that readers are not disfranchised by lack of a steady delivery system for books. It is developing a system that is not dependent on the Internet. NLS has been developing its digital collection since fiscal year 2002.

Starting in fiscal year 2004, NLS began to produce all recorded book titles in digital format and has goals to produce 10,000 new titles in digital format by 2008, convert another 10,000 existing analog titles to digital format by 2008, and continue to produce an average of 2,000 titles per year during 2008 and in future years. The medium to be used for digital books is expected to be a high-density 128 MB flash memory cartridge, or card.<sup>2</sup>

## **Take stock of what the library is doing**

Several checklists are available to help administrators and their staffs access what the library is doing to help special populations use the library. Use these lists as a starting point.

Take a few minutes over a period of a month to observe the population using the library. That population should mirror the community. If the library has made itself accessible, and people with disabilities or seniors are still not using the library, then meet with social organizations and community groups to find out why. The extra effort will bring personal satisfaction and improve the lives of all patrons.

Experience the digital library of the future by visiting the CNIB site. Visitor logins are allowed, <http://webcluster.cnib.ca/AuthFiles/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fDefault.aspx>.

**NLS's Digital Books and Magazines,** [www.loc.gov/nls/digital.html](http://www.loc.gov/nls/digital.html)

Self assessments checklists are available from:

**University of Texas: Library Internet Access for People With Disabilities,** <http://tatp.edb.utexas.edu/library/library1.html> and

**Technology: Self-Assessment; Alliance for Technology Access Starting Points v1.1,** [www.ataccess.org/resources/acaw/startingpoints.pdf](http://www.ataccess.org/resources/acaw/startingpoints.pdf).

Available July 2005 is the ALAction 2005 brochure that includes a self-examination checklist for assessing a library's commitment toward full equity of access for its users. The checklist will be available at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org).

## Four patrons tell why libraries should make the effort

### From Max

"I didn't think it was possible to teach an old dog new tricks, but it is. I didn't want to hurt the librarian's feelings so I sat down at the computer and the young man patiently started explaining things to me. Even though he was talking in English, it didn't make sense. Then he set me up with an e-mail account, and I sent my son an e-mail. I could hardly believe it when I got a reply back from him within minutes. He never returns voice mail that quickly. Well, I was sold on this new service. I thank the library for making me learn. Having a computer has saved my life as it allows me to live independently."

### From Jeremy

"The value of a program isn't in the numbers of people who use it. Even though statistically there aren't a lot of blind people out there, the benefit of these programs is huge. The National Library Service is great, but it is not equivalent to the public library because of the limited quantity of books available and the delay in producing them."

"Adaptive technology is how I can learn what I want to learn, participate in discussions about current books, and do meaningful (current) research on the topics based on my interest, not limited by what has already been produced in an alternative format. (I even chose my major in college based on what would require the least library research, because the student research help available to me was so unreliable.) "

"AT is one of the most important ways that I am an equal citizen to sighted people."

"Every argument about the value of public libraries applies to making AT available: AT is how the library that people without print disabilities can use opens up to me as a visually impaired person."

### From Wan Tao

"This is a great library. I have an engineering degree, but I cannot speak English well enough to get a good job. The computers lab lets me listen to words, as they should be spoken. The mechanical voice speaks English better than I do now, but that will change."

### From AK and Bharat B (New Delhi, India)

AK says, "The college doesn't buy books in Braille and we have to depend on a reader...the digital format allows me to access [information] and navigate easily between sections of the text." The computer instructor, Bharat B, says "when no human being cares, the technology is there to help us."

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>National Library Service. Factsheet: Web-Braille. Library of Congress, National Library Service. Washington, D.C. July 2003. [www.loc.gov/nls/reference/factsheets/webbraille2003.html](http://www.loc.gov/nls/reference/factsheets/webbraille2003.html) (accessed March 7, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>National Library Service. Current Strategic Business Plan. Library of Congress, National Library Service, Washington, D.C. December 2003. [www.loc.gov/nls/businessplan2003.html#execonal](http://www.loc.gov/nls/businessplan2003.html#execonal) Library Service (accessed March 7, 2004).