



World-leading OCR means greater independence and privacy for the visually impaired

The Disability Network's Community Technology Center helps people with disabilities use and acquire assistive technology. For those with visual impairments, the ability to read independently is vital – and text-to-speech solutions are essential. But without accurate Optical Character Recognition (OCR,) the translation of scanned documents into speech could be uncertain and garbled – until ABBYY FineReader® provided a reliable solution.

“It’s a great product. We highly recommend it every time somebody comes in needing scanning software.”

Carrie Baugher, CTC Coordinator, The Disability Network



About The Disability Network Community Technology Center

The Disability Network promotes access, opportunity and equality for people with disabilities through education and employment. Its resources include The Community Technology Center, where persons with disabilities can learn computer skills and find computer-aided solutions to otherwise impossible tasks.

Learn more at www.disnetwork.org

Breaking down barriers to personal freedom and opportunity

In the last five years The Disability Network Community Technology Center has helped nearly 12,000 people overcome barriers to leading more independent, productive and enjoyable lives. Focused on customizing its services to an individual's needs, the Center's staff creates solutions to a customer's obstacles by testing combinations of technologies. As the Center's CTC Coordinator, Carrie Baugher, says: “We pride ourselves on being able to eliminate computer technology barriers – so that a person with any disability can use a computer independently to achieve their goals.”

And in support of this, she and her colleagues conduct ongoing research into assistive technologies – evaluating the hardware and software necessary to implement them.

Overcoming an ongoing obstacle to assistive solutions

However, Baugher and her team faced a recurring challenge: Inaccurate OCR. “Visually impaired customers,” she says, “often require a solution that scans a paper document, converts it to digital text using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and then reads the text out loud using a text-to-speech program.”

But as Baugher explains, such solutions are only as good as their OCR. “If the OCR software is inaccurate, then the text-to-speech component will produce incomplete and inaccurate results. We were on the lookout for better programs. And when our new customer Jennifer arrived, we decided to try ABBYY FineReader.”

Lifting the limits on text-to-speech technology with ABBYY FineReader

Jennifer, who is blind, relied upon a chore provider to read her mail to her. Wishing to maintain the privacy of her personal communications, and to handle her correspondence independently, Jennifer sought advice from a local agency – which referred her to the Technology Center. “The agency donated a laptop to Jennifer,” says Baugher, “and I met with her to assess her needs and create a solution.”

Jennifer had no experience with computers and said she would only use her laptop to read mail. “So,” says Baugher, “our usual programs wouldn’t work for Jennifer. She couldn’t use a standard keyboard independently and the OCR accuracy was insufficient. So our IT specialist tried several programs and ABBYY FineReader topped the list in accuracy and ease. It delivered the precision we needed.”

Baugher integrated FineReader with the laptop’s screen reading software and an X-keys strip (a programmable macro keyboard.) This simplified the scanning, conversion, opening and reading of documents enabling Jennifer to perform operations with a single keystroke. “It’s as simple as pressing a button,” says Baugher. “Jennifer was using it comfortably from day one. ABBYY helped make it that easy.”

The results

Jennifer can now read personal correspondence, bills, notices, notifications and forms independently and whenever she wants to. As she says, “Now my private mail can be private.”

And Baugher describes a host of additional uses for FineReader. “I use it to convert forms into editable and form-fillable PDFs. Plus, we have customers who are unable to write on their forms. FineReader enables them to scan and convert them into PDF forms that they can fill out using speech-to-text software – that’s how accurately it preserves text and fields.”

FineReader’s accuracy also means the Center uses it exclusively in their computer lab for people who require scanning technology, whether it’s scanning an outdated resume or using it in conjunction with adaptive equipment. “It’s a great product that you guys have. We highly recommend it every time somebody comes in here needing scanning software. And I’ve had nothing but positive feedback on our end.”

The Challenge:

Enable visually impaired people to read mail and fill out forms independently, by using precision OCR to raise the accuracy of their assistive technologies.

The Solution:

ABBYY FineReader precisely and automatically converts paper documents into editable digital files – making it easy for people with disabilities to use adaptive technologies to read correspondence and complete forms.

“I’ve had nothing but positive feedback on our end.”

*Carrie Baugher,
CTC Coordinator,
The Disability Network*

**Visit www.ABBYY.com/FineReader for more details on ABBYY FineReader.
Or call ABBYY at 866.463.7689 for immediate assistance and to discuss your specific needs.**

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