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Deafblind Newsletter   -   October 2007

DeafBlind Communicator to Provide TTY and Face-to-face Communications

Our September newsletter reported that the Washington State Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is funding the development of a new DeafBlind Communicator using HumanWare as its partner. The driving force behind the development stems from the existing technology on the market. Many state agencies in the US still feel that TeleBraille is the best communication device for deafblind people despite the fact that manufacturing of these units stopped in 1991.

Refurbishing these old TeleBrailles can be expensive but this is not the only weakness of this technology. The TTY component is not integrated into the deafblind device, but rather attached externally to the top of the Braille display/keyboard unit. This lack of integration affects both the usability and the

Photo of TeleBraille

overall size of the unit making it impractical for any portable face-to-face communication applications. ODHH wanted a new communicator that would integrate the TTY directly into

a portable device that users could carry with them anywhere. The unit should also wirelessly connect to an extremely portable companion unit with visual display and QWERTY (standard) keyboard for face-to-face use by the sighted person with whom the deafblind person needs to communicate such as on a bus or in a restaurant or shop.

One of the reasons HumanWare was selected to develop the DB Communicator is because HumanWare's BrailleNote (notetaker and PDA) is already the constant companion of thousands of blind people, i.e. it is portable and has a solid track record. The BrailleNote hardware is perfectly suited for a DeafBlind Communicator including a landline phone jack for the built-in TTY. The software platform also provides a straight forward way for the TTY and face-to-face communications capabilities. We'll talk more about the user interface in our next edition of this newsletter, but BrailleNote's software is known for its user friendliness. This addresses a key concern regarding any DB technology.

BrailleNote User on Bus

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