

# TECHNOLOGY

## *Improving Lives*

### Technology Provides People With Print Disabilities Access To More Documents

(NAPSA)—Most people take it for granted that when they see a headline, it helps them find an article on the printed page. Those who are blind, however, have to struggle to find their place because they cannot rely on seeing the type size, page number or font to orient themselves.

Traditionally, those unable to read have turned to talking books: audio recordings on CD or tape.

The challenge, though, is that only 5 percent of published material is currently in formats accessible to people with print disabilities and the only way to use this content has been to slog through it, listening from start to finish.

It's a limitation keenly felt by a growing number of people. An estimated 160 million people worldwide are blind or have significant vision impairment, and their ranks in America are expected to balloon as the population ages, with older people more vulnerable to such eye conditions as glaucoma. In addition, there are millions more with cognitive and learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

Now, however, new technologies are leveling the playing field.

Organizations such as the DAISY Consortium, a global coalition of talking-book libraries, work to harness digital technology so print-disabled readers can navigate text with all the agility of their sighted peers. For example, there's a way to convert text to digital files that can be synchronized with audio narrations.

"The impact of DAISY is truly profound for people like me with print disabilities," said George Kerscher, secretary-general of the coalition. "The DAISY technology makes it possible to jump between chapters and sections, go directly to pages, and even speed up or slow down a recording and bookmark content. Synchronized en-



**George Kerscher, secretary-general of the DAISY Consortium, is blind and advocates for the use of DAISY technology by persons with print disabilities.**

larged text and presentation on refreshable Braille displays make this extraordinary in the hands of a person with a print disability."

Free new software, developed by Microsoft, the DAISY Consortium and Sonata Software International, lets people convert the millions of documents created with Microsoft Word from Open XML, an increasingly popular file format standard, into DAISY XML, with a single mouse click.

"Adding an easy button for converting content within the most widely used word processing program will be a catalyst for publishers, universities, libraries and government agencies to develop material for those unable to read print—opening up new audiences for them and new worlds," said Jeff Bishop, presenter of the "Main Menu" Internet radio show for the American Council of the Blind.

For people like Kerscher and Bishop, it's more than software. It's a major step toward a future when people with print disabilities will literally be on the same page as everyone else.