ABSTRACT

The purpose of this two-year project (2009-2010) is to improve the distribution of DAISY content and the development of an online delivery service of DAISY content, both talking books and talking newspapers. The project is carried out by two organizations: Celia – the national library for persons with print disabilities in Finland (hereinafter Celia) – and the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (hereinafter the FFVI). The solution will be based on network-capable DAISY players, not on computers. An online delivery platform supporting the international standard DAISY Online will be developed. The project involves 960 of Celia’s clients. These clients will be provided with a DAISY player and an Internet connection. The results of this pilot project will be used in building a national online delivery service system of DAISY content in Finland.

1 Participating organizations

In Finland there are several service providers, who produce DAISY content for visually impaired and people with other print disabilities. Together, Celia and the FFVI produce the majority of DAISY content in Finland. The Library concentrates mainly on talking books, while the Federation distributes mainly talking newspapers and magazines. As both organizations have the same target group, a cooperative project was natural and this is how “Moving DAISY online – Online delivery of DAISY content” (“DAISY verkkoon” in Finnish) started.

1.1 Celia – National library for persons with print disabilities in Finland

Celia is a library specialized in providing services for visually impaired people and persons with other print disabilities in Finland. The library was founded already in 1890. Celia produces and lends for example Braille books, talking books and electronic books. Content is produced for leisure as well as for studies.

Celia is a state-owned library, coordinated by the Ministry of Education. The library is one of the members of the Finnish DAISY Consortium which in turn is a full member of the international DAISY Consortium.

Celia offers approximately 25 000 talking books. Titles can be lent independently via the Internet, by e-mail, by phone or post, by visiting Celia or via public libraries or schools. On-demand lending of DAISY titles started in 2006.

At the moment, the library strives to improve its online services. This is partly done by offering clients online delivery via computer. Now Celia has set up and finances the project “Moving DAISY online” in order to offer online services to clients without computers, as well.

1.2 Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired

The FFVI is a special service provider for blind and partially sighted people. The FFVI looks after the interests of blind and partially sighted persons, thus striving for an improved quality of life. The FFVI offers rehabilitation services, employment consultation, IT training and guidance, lends and sales technical aids,
produces content and information, provides guide dog training and offers different kinds of leisure and cultural activities. The FFVI consists of 14 regional and 11 activity related associations.

The FFVI produces several newspapers and magazines in digital format and distributes them to visually impaired customers with DAISY players. At the moment, the delivery is based on CDs. People using a computer can read their newspapers online. Now the FFVI strives to offer its online services to people without computers as well. The implementation of “Moving DAISY online” will be done by the FFVI. The FFVI is also one of the members of the Finnish DAISY Consortium.

2 Purpose of the project

"Above all, visual impairment makes it difficult to acquire information." (Information society strategy, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, 2006)

Celia and the FFVI want to improve blind, partially sighted and print disabled people’s access to information. In our information society the need to quickly and effortlessly acquire information is a crucial matter. Unfortunately, visually impaired are often overlooked in the process. Celia and the FFVI want to offer visually impaired persons quick, effortless and current-critical information. To achieve this, both organizations need to invest in improving online services. At the moment, online delivery is offered to computer-users but the aim is to offer online services to others as well. As most of Finland’s 80,000 visually impaired are over 65, a solution based only on computers is not satisfactory. When completed, “Moving DAISY online” will be a base on which a national online delivery service can be built. The goal is to offer a service including “the whole package”:

• delivery and installation of the player
• user training
• maintenance
• user support

2.1 Target groups and regions

The target group involves 960 of Celia’s clients. The test group will be chosen from the capital region, in order to enable personal visits to the client’s homes. The purpose, however, is to reach visually impaired people in South-Eastern and Eastern Finland. These regions were chosen because of special conditions such as underdeveloped online services that is, very few computer users. This is the main target group of the project: people who do not have a computer or the prerequisites to use one.

3 What is needed?

The project requires the following:

• Network-capable DAISY Online players
• Internet connections
• User support
• Online delivery platform supporting DAISY Online
• Test group
3.1 **Network-capable DAISY Online players**

Plextor’s PTX1 Pro player will be used in this project. This DAISY player enables online delivery and is designed with the needs of visually impaired in mind. As the project is a pilot, the solution must and will be compatible with other devices in the future as well. This has been taken into account already at the planning stage.

3.2 **Internet connections**

If the client doesn’t have an Internet connection from the start, this will be delivered and paid for by the project. Today, fast and high-quality Internet connections can be delivered to almost every part of Finland. Alongside with “Moving DAISY online”, another project concerned with the Internet connections is taking place. This project is carried out by the FFVI. The purpose of this project is to secure a deal with an Internet operator that would be responsible for delivering all the needed Internet connections, both to the clients chosen for “Moving DAISY online” and clients in the future. The minimum requirements including factors such as speed, invoicing and delivery are being decided at the moment.

3.3 **User support**

Both Celia and the FFVI wish to create a delivery system that is easy for the user. Therefore it is important to provide user support and helpdesk services. The project will employ local support persons who will install the players and offer preliminary user training. This means that each client will be personally visited and granted personal training. The organizations believe this is important to ensure maximal user friendliness. The FFVI will train the local user supporters and they will be compensated for their work. Unfortunately, Celia and the FFVI can only offer installation and preliminary training locally. After the initial phase, users will be offered helpdesk services by phone and e-mail both at Celia and the FFVI. While Celia will concentrate mainly on the lending process, technical help will be provided by the FFVI.

3.4 **Online delivery platform supporting DAISY Online**

The international DAISY Consortium is preparing the launch of the international DAISY Online Specification that hopefully will set the standard for online delivery of DAISY content in the future. Already in 2008, Celia and the FFVI decided to use the DAISY Online Specification for the online delivery platform. In “Moving DAISY online” the delivery will be based on Celia’s existing delivery platform, which will be updated to support DAISY Online.

3.5 **Test group**

As Celia and the FFVI wish to offer a simple and ready-to-use solution, the technical procedure has to be finished before delivering players to the clients. At first, a demo server supporting the DAISY Online Specification will be set up and the player PTX1 Pro will be tested against this. After this, the existing platform will be updated. The platform will then be tested by a hand-picked test group after which players can be delivered to other clients.
4 Benefits

“Electronic services, when properly implemented, open new opportunities for groups with special needs and can decrease inequality.” (Information society strategy, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, 2006)

Celia and the FFVI have identified several benefits with online delivery:

4.1 Improved services

At the moment, accessible audio content is mainly distributed on CDs. This means a process including burning, packing and sending of the CDs. The client will get their order in 2-3 days. When distributing online, both Celia and the FFVI can offer swifter delivery. Online delivery is not tied to opening hours of the library or the federation, which gives the clients more freedom and possibility to use the services at any hour.

4.2 Financial savings

In comparison with posting CDs, online delivery is cheaper – mostly due to savings in posting and staff costs. As the economic situation of both Celia and the FFVI is always a matter to be kept in mind, an economical delivery system is important.

4.3 Online delivery is more ecological

Together, Celia and the FFVI produce more than 1 million CDs per year and the amount is steadily growing. Earlier, when cassettes were used, they were returned by post but in on-demand lending CDs are not returned. However, due to copyright issues the clients are not allowed to keep the CDs. Instead, they have to get rid of them after listening to them. This means a lot of garbage. Furthermore, a lot of energy and material is needed for the packing and posting of CDs.

4.4 Non-computer based option

Both Celia and the FFVI offer online services to users with computers. The reality, however, is that most visually impaired in Finland are over 65, and everybody is not necessarily interested in using a computer. They might also have other disabilities that complicate the use of a computer. Both organizations naturally want to offer services to non-computer users as well. In “Moving DAISY online” the aim is to bring non-computer users into the sphere of online services. This will broaden the clientele and improve the services of both Celia and the FFVI.

4.5 Availability of current-critical content

One of the challenges when delivering by post is time. At the moment, DAISY content can be delivered mostly in approximately two days. The delivery of DAISY content has been revolutionized thanks to on-demand lending, but it has also vastly increased the number of CDs produced. The importance of delivering current content is explicit first and foremost in the case of newspapers. Thanks to online delivery, a visually impaired person will be able to get his or her newspaper in the morning, just as the sighted person reading the printed paper.

4.6 User-friendliness

When moving from cassettes to CDs, it was noted that big changes are a challenge both for the service providers and users. Therefore, special attention is given to this in “Moving DAISY online”. The PTX1 Pro DAISY player was chosen not only because of the technical properties, but also because it was deemed easy to use. The aim is to make the delivery of DAISY content as easy as possible for the user and the user should not
necessarily need to know or be familiar with the distribution process as such, but instead enjoy the other benefits of online delivery.

4.7 A global trend

It is clear that online delivery is on the way of becoming the new global trend setting the standard for delivery of content to visually impaired people. Celia and the FFVI are proud to be among the forerunners putting online delivery into action.

5 Conclusion

Both Celia and the FFVI constantly work for better services for the visually impaired people. This is the motive behind this project. A co-operative effort between two key organizations on the disability field in Finland is bound to have synergistic effects and further the availability of information. In this pilot project, we envision a future where every visually impaired person in Finland has the services of all service providers at their reach, regardless of residence, age, technical equipment or other preconditions. "Moving DAISY online" is the first step towards device-independent online delivery of DAISY content in Finland.