

Making a Case for SensusAccess

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The SensusAccess Service at a Glance

SensusAccess is a self-service solution intended for students, faculty, staff, alumni and others with a need to convert material into alternate formats. Based on web and e-mail and combining a wide range of assistive and mainstream conversion technologies with an easy-to-use user interface, the service is entirely automated. With SensusAccess, users can convert most popular document types into the following target formats:

- **MP3 audio files.** MP3 files are highly portable, play on a vast number of devices but may be difficult to navigate.
- **Structured audio books in both DAISY and EPUB/Media Overlay format.** Structured audio books include synchronised text and audio as well as all the features needed to navigate the documents.
- **E-books (Digital Large-Print).** E-books are reflowable, making it possible to scale up the text, substitute fonts and make changes to the foreground colours, background colours, line spacing, scrolling direction and more.
- **Digital Braille books.** The resulting digital Braille books are ready to be embossed on a Braille embosser, displayed on a Braille display or loaded on a Braille notetaker.

In addition, users can use SensusAccess to convert otherwise inaccessible or tricky formats into more **accessible formats**. These accessibility features include conversion of image files and image-only PDF documents into Word, RTF and text files, conversion of image-only PDF documents into tagged (= accessible) PDF documents and conversion of PowerPoint presentations into web projects, tagged PDF or RTF outline files.

The Case in Higher Education

Independence and self-sufficiency. As an accessible self-service solution, people with special needs are not relying on others to convert their documents into more suitable formats. Consequently, SensusAccess can be used to promote and support independence and self-sufficiency of people with special needs in mainstream environments such as mainstream education and subsequently on the labour market. While empowering students, the service will likely reduce spending on traditional document conversions.

Availability. As an entirely automated service available on the web, SensusAccess is available whenever and wherever users need to convert documents. Conversions can be requested on-campus, off-campus, when visiting a foreign university, during the weekend, in the middle of the night or whenever else the need arises.

Privacy. As no-one but the requesting user is involved in the conversion, the privacy of those with special needs can be preserved.

Multiple formats. Using traditional means of conversions, users with special needs are frequently provided with only a single alternate format. However, depending on the actual situation of the student, this may not always be the most suitable format. With SensusAccess, students can convert doc-

uments into the format that works best form them in any given situation (e.g., when commuting, doing work-outs, doing repetitions, engaged in in-depth studying).

Language support. SensusAccess has support for a substantial number of languages in its audio and Braille conversions including support all the main European languages, some of the smaller European languages, American English, Latin American Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese and more. Some target formats even support multilingual contents.

Cost. The target formats produced by SensusAccess can be read on existing hardware (computers, tablets, smartphones) using free applications and apps, thereby removing the need for costly reading solutions. Note: Braille readers will need a Braille device (Braille embosser, Braille display, Braille notetaker) to render the digital Braille document produced by the service.

Platform. SensusAccess is provided as a service. Consequently, neither institutions nor users need to install software to access the service. Furthermore, SensusAccess is available across platforms irrespective of operating system, browser and hardware.

Continued support. Included in the annual subscription fee to SensusAccess is the right for academic institutions to extend services to their alumni without affecting the cost. This way, SensusAccess can be used as a long-term alternate media strategy by individuals and as a means of retaining ties to alumni with special needs by academic institutions.

Accessibility support in online education. As an automated, web-based service, SensusAccess can be used a means to provide accessibility support in conjunction with online courses, blended learning and other online activities.

Integration with other systems. In addition to the main web-based interface to the SensusAccess, several other interfaces are available to facilitate integration of the service with other systems, including integration with email-enabled photocopiers/scanners, learning management systems, digital library systems, learning portals and more.

Users

As an inclusion technology, use of SensusAccess is not restricted to users with special needs. Rather, in an effort to remove the stigma often associated with assistive technology, subscribing institutions are offered the rights to extend access to the service to everyone associated with an institution, including mainstream users, without affecting the cost. Typical SensusAccess users include the following groups:

Primary users. The primary users of the SensusAccess service are those with special needs, including the blind, partially sighted and people with dyslexia, cognitive disabilities, learning disorders, motor deficiencies and concussions.

Professionals. This group includes alternate media producers, staff members and others at academic institutions who produce material on behalf of the primary users.

At-risk students. This group includes students with poor reading skills who either do not qualify or do not want to qualify into the official disability/dyslexia programmes.

Mainstream students and faculty. This group includes students with poor language skills (e.g., foreign students), foreign-language students (reading support, support in pronunciation), students exploring different learning styles (mixing modalities), faculty members with a need to convert legacy PDF documents and more.