

**MEMO:**

To: OverDrive library partners

From: Steve Potash, CEO, OverDrive, Inc.

Date: July 9, 2009

Re: OverDrive's commitment to accessibility for eBooks and all digital book materials

The past year has been challenging for all of us who are committed to making sure that all digital book products and services are accessible to readers with visual or print disabilities. Last year Adobe Systems updated their eBook reader software that removed the Text-to-Speech (TTS) feature of eBooks. Since that time we have been urging Adobe to restore the TTS feature to their software and also seeking other solutions. We are trying to balance the needs of the print impaired with the need to respect the rights of our supplying publishers and authors. While we appreciate the concerns of the Authors Guild and those who oppose TTS as a built-in feature of every eBook, we find ourselves frustrated that the visually and print impaired are denied access to eBooks when, in fact, they should benefit the most from the technology.

Over the years, OverDrive has consistently supported accessibility for our library digital book products. Some examples:

- OverDrive Media Console is free digital media software for students, readers and patrons of libraries designed for accessibility and compatibility with screen readers. This product is in use by thousands of visually impaired readers.  
[www.overdrive.com/software/omc/accessibility.asp](http://www.overdrive.com/software/omc/accessibility.asp)
- We develop, host, and operate the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) in partnership with the American Printing House for the Blind.  
<http://www.nimac.us/> Our team has developed tools and services for publishers so their textbooks and curriculum materials are NIMAS compliant and accessible. We educate and manage the production and distribution of NIMAS files to 50 state agencies that, in turn, provide accessible educational materials to students.
- OverDrive developed and donates hosting and technology services for download audiobooks to several state talking book libraries for the blind. This service provides narrated digital audiobooks for blind or visually-challenged individuals in California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Oregon and Texas.  
<http://unabridged.lib.overdrive.com>
- OverDrive provides eBook titles in EPUB format to [www.bookshare.org](http://www.bookshare.org) at no charge, working with major trade publishers to gain permission to deliver these open XML files to benetech.org. These XML eBook titles are then made available to readers with print and other reading disabilities.



We believe it's very important for everyone in this industry to support accessibility of all digital materials for the visually impaired. We remain hopeful that all eBook and software readers will make this their priority, but we realize that we cannot simply wait for them to take action. We know this is a high priority for our school and library partners and your patrons. As a result, we are looking at both near-term and long-term solutions to resolve this issue.

- I am actively seeking to partner with a program that would permit OverDrive eBook collections to be accessible to print impaired patrons of the public libraries, thus expanding the titles available to them. There are stumbling blocks to overcome – including administration and logistics for the services – but we are engaged in discussions with other digital book providers and working diligently to find a solution.
- We are exploring other options including developing or expanding our own software to address the needs of the libraries' visually-impaired patrons of our library partners. That is a more significant undertaking – one that we hoped would not be necessary. However, in the long run, that may be the best way to make sure that all the materials to which we gain digital rights are accessible to your readers.

We will keep you informed as we move forward on these important initiatives. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me or any member of Team OverDrive know. We look forward to continuing to work together to address the needs of all your patrons and to improve our digital library and media services for the visually and print impaired.

SP/