

Google funds new research to help blind web surfers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- New research by University of Manchester scientists that could help blind people find their way around the World Wide Web has been given a boost with a £50,000 grant from Google.

Drs Andy Brown, Caroline Jay and Simon Harper who are based at the University's School of [Computer Science](#), have already developed a prototype screen reader that has been successfully tested on blind web surfers in an independent evaluation.

The team used specialist eye tracking techniques to find out how sighted people interact with complex Web pages so they could translate the pages into audio.

Now they are working with [Google](#) to make their technology, which is not yet suitable for general use, freely available to people with visual impairments.

They aim to provide a way of modifying Web pages so blind people can easily access them without having to wait for commercial screen reading technology - which reads [web pages](#) aloud - to catch up with the latest research developments.

Dr Jay said: "The growth of Web 2.0 technologies is fundamentally changing the way that people interact with the Web.

"A short time ago, navigating the Web was simply a matter of clicking

links, moving from one static page to another.

“Now it's possible to spend a considerable amount of time interacting with a single page through its "dynamic micro content" that updates independently, without changing the URL.”

She added: “Unfortunately, [blind people](#) are excluded from many of these exciting developments and our research aims to change all that.

“They can have real problems accessing web applications - such as calendars, tickers and suggestion lists - found on travel, entertainment and social networking sites.

“This is because the screen reading technology which converts the visual page to audio doesn't say when a web page changes, making much of Web 2.0 is inaccessible to people with visual impairments.”

More information: The detailed technical reports describing background, implementation and all the underlying research for the SASWAT project are available in the team's open-access data repository: hcw-prints.cs.man.ac.uk/view/subjects/saswat.html

Provided by University of Manchester

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