

New iPad app for people with sight loss needs backing from publishers (w/ Video)

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(Phys.org)—Scientists from Royal Holloway are launching a new iPad app to help people with macular disease, the most common cause of sight loss in the UK.

People affected by the condition, who include Dame Judi Dench and Last of the Summer Wine actor Peter Sallis, find it difficult to read normally, having lost their central vision. However, they can make use of their peripheral vision using a simple technique called eccentric viewing.

The new app, MD_evReader, is designed to enhance the eccentric viewing technique for reading eBooks. It enables users to scroll text from any ePub document in a single stream, like a news 'ticker'. The text is presented into the reader's best point of eccentric vision and helps them to maintain a 'steady eye'. The speed in which the text appears can be changed using a simple trackpad according to the reader's needs. The app also allows users to make changes to background and text colour, and allows content to be displayed on digital television screens, enabling very large font sizes to be used.

However, the success of the app relies on the cooperation of [publishers](#), who often use Digital Rights Management (DRM) systems to lock publications and prevent unauthorised copying. In effect these prevent the MD_evReader, and other accessibility software, from unlocking the publication and displaying content in the best way for users. This restricts the range of books that can be used with the app, to copyright free volumes and those whose publishers have relaxed their DRM

systems.

Professor Robin Walker from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway said: "DRM is a major limitation. Of course we recognise the rights of manufacturers, authors and publishers to maintain their intellectual property, but we would urge them to consider using lightweight DRM systems which would allow the MD_evReader to be used.

"People with low vision caused by macular disease, experience extreme difficulty with everyday tasks such as reading, which severely affects their quality of life. Volunteers who have been involved in testing the app have largely reported that the experience of reading was greatly improved with this system."

Helen Jackman, Chief Executive of the Macular Society, said: "This [app](#) represents an excellent opportunity to help people affected by macular disease to read more easily. However, for it to be able to reach its full potential we need publishers to stop using DRM in a way that compromises accessibility.

"Some publishers, including the Harry Potter books' Pottermore, have stopped using DRM and reported no adverse commercial affect. We now need other publishers to follow suit so that those affected by sight loss have the same access to literature as everyone else."

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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