

BrailleNote Apex computers revolutionises education

BrailleNote Apex computers, with groundbreaking, inclusive technology, are bringing low vision and blind learners into the classroom. The technology will be on show at SABC African EduWeek to showcase latest classroom technology from 10-11 July 2014 at the Sandton Convention Centre.



BrailleNote Apex BT 32 Braille Notetaker

Image source: www.humanware.com

"If I had had this technology when I was still in school, I would probably have become a heart surgeon," says 22-year-old Kyle Williams, IT specialist at Edit Microsystems, which provides onsite support to the Athlone School for the Blind in Cape Town. Kyle is visually impaired and a former pupil of the school and currently assists the learners and teachers of the school to use 44 new BrailleNote Apex computers.

"What we are doing is revolutionising education and learning for those with visual impairments, making education and studying much easier. It is 99.9% similar to a laptop with a daily planner, access to email and internet. There is a media centre for radio, a scientific calculator and a built-in chat function." It has a braille terminal and, at the school, is connected to a computer screen for the teachers to follow what the learners are doing. It can also be connected to a smart phone.

Still need braille

The Athlone School for the Blind principal, Fletcher Fisher says, "We received a big donation from the Western Cape Education Department when we received 44 braille computers for our learners. The computer is very expensive but it is going to change the face of education for the visually impaired in South Africa."

He explains that learners no longer have to carry around enormous braille books and the traditional, heavy Perkins braille typewriter. With the braille computer, all the work can be uploaded electronically. "Whatever the learner is typing, the teacher can read on the computer monitor. This way the teacher can help the learner immediately during the lesson.

"One thing that I must emphasise is that this technology will never replace braille, you need to be braille literate to use it.

Braille will never be made redundant. This technology will simply enhance the braille skills." The school is currently using the technology for learners from Grade 4 to Grade 12.

Inclusive technology

"We are very passionate about inclusive technology," says Pieter Labuschagne, MD of Edit Microsystems, supplier of educational and corporate technology solutions in Southern Africa. "We think every single person should be able to be included in areas that traditionally were not available to them, whether it is in school or in the work environment.

"Athlone School in particular is one of the schools that we work with that embraced this technology instantly and all credit should go to the staff, and the principal in particular, who drive that project. I think whatever project you tackle, whether it is low tech or high tech, you need a passionate principal, to champion a project like this."

Edit Microsystems will display its technology, which includes the BrailleNote Apex and a scanner that can convert printed text into braille, sound or electronic format, at the upcoming show, where it is a bronze sponsor. "The show gives us an opportunity to showcase our products and helps us in our advocacy in areas that we are passionate about, to show the world that there are many solutions," concludes Labuschagne.

The company will also present a workshop session at the event on, 'Breakthroughs in technology for inclusive education'. One of the workshop facilitators is Gerhard Erasmus, in charge of blindness and low vision sales and support at Edit Microsystems. Erasmus (32) is blind and has been using the Brailnote devices for ten years and says, "A device like this and the scanner we sell simplifies the way we make content available to learners - getting ebooks from publishers, essays and question papers onto memory sticks. You don't have to be part of a small world anymore, you can join the world."

For more information, go to www.educationweek.co.za.

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