

Tactile Reading 2021 preconference
Evaluation report

TACTILE
READING

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1. Summary

Tactile Reading 2021 (TR2021) was arranged by Statped (Norway) in collaboration with the Norwegian Association of Blind and Partially Sighted (NBF) and The Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille (NLB). NLB arranged a four hours preconference on technology and tactile reading.

The preconference took place the 28th of April 2021 as a live event on Zoom, free of charge and open for all. 316 people from all over the world participated.

The report describes planning, organizing and experiences based on the evaluation form sent out to the participants. It is written by Kari Rudjord (NLB), member of the TR2021 program committee and project manager for the preconference. The highlighted quotes are taken directly from the evaluation form.

2. Background

Feedback after the first Tactile Reading in Stockholm (2017) revealed that some participants wanted more focus on technical topics related to tactile reading. The program committee for TR2021 asked NLB to organize a preconference on the matter.

3. Target group

The target group was teachers for the visually impaired, practitioners, producers of tactile products and innovators in the field of tactile reading.

The largest participant group was teachers for the visually impaired and special education advisors. Many producers of tactile products also participated. Some attended as university students and professionals, while only 5 % participated as individual braille users.

Ninety persons participated exclusively on the preconference. It seems like the target group for a more technical focus is slightly different.

4. Aims

The aim for the preconference was to create a meeting place to discuss technology related to tactile reading. We wanted to present new and interesting products and facilitate a conversation about the future for electronic braille in a rapidly changing society.

“I think it is really important to discuss this at an international level in order to find effective and realistically priced solutions.”

54 % of the participants reported that they were very satisfied with the preconference. 38 % reported to be satisfied (in a scale form 1-6).

5. Conference program

To find interesting topics, NLB contacted Norwegian manufacturers of tactile reading devices who kindly put us in touch with international producers of technical aids within the field. We scheduled meetings at SightCity 2020 in Frankfurt, Germany, international trade fair for aids for the blind and visually impaired people. When the trade fair was cancelled, we arranged online meetings with some companies: Feelif, Help Tech, HumanWare, Optelec/Vispero/Freedom, Think.Able and Viewplus. Together with these companies and their network, we managed to put together a program of four presentations (30 min) and a round table discussion (70 min).

Conference program:

- **With Feelif the blind and visually impaired can access digital graphic content**
Katarina Pavšek, Content Designer at Feelif
- **Graphiti: Interactive Tactile Graphic Display**
Venkatesh Chari, President at Orbit Research
- **The next milestone for braille. Taking electronic braille to a different level**
Andrew Flatres, Product Manager at HumanWare
Greg Stilson, Head of Global Innovations at American Printing House
- **HT Instructor, training solution for teaching with Braille displays**
Sigi Kipke, CEO at Help Tech
- **Round table: Future directions on technology and tactile reading**
Gilles Pepin, founder and CEO at HumanWare
Noel Duffy, Dolphin Computer Access
George Kerscher, Chief Innovation Officer at DAISY Consortium
Svein-Erik Morkemo, father of visually impaired high school student
Morten Tollefsen, Head of Research at MediaLT, moderator

46 % of the participants reported that they were very satisfied with the program and thought it was relevant. 35 % reported to be satisfied (in a scale from 1-6). The gender balance could have been better, as pointed out by an attendee:

“Seeing that there is a high level of female professionals in the field of VI and VI and technology, it was disappointing to have a non-diverse panel of male only panellists”

Originally, we had a female participant in the round table, who unfortunately had to cancel.

The evaluation score is above average for all parts of the program. In a scale from 1 (low rank) to 6 (high rank), presentations as well as round table have scores from 4,56 to 5,00. All parts of the program had a 10 % score for not relevant.

“Thank you for insight! Videos were important for me. To see devices I had only heard of.”

“Inspiring, good balance with presentations and discussion.”

“Highly qualified speakers.”

6. Participants

The preconference was free of charge and open to anyone with an interest in the topic. The event had 316 unique log in's and an average of about 250 people logged in during the four hours.

The preconference had attendees from 23 European countries as well as from Turkey, India, Nepal, Hong Kong, Japan, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia and Uganda. Of the audience, 16 % reported to be visual impaired.

7. Organization

Originally, NLB planned for a physical preconference with 150 people and space to demonstrate electronic devices. This together with an exhibition at the main conference should guaranty for a more practically point of view opposite to a more theoretical and science based main program. This practical approach disappeared when the conference went digital, due to covid-19.

Nevertheless, 52 % prefer a digital conference on this topic.

“It is easier to get people to attend a meeting place for technology and tactile reading if it is digital.”

“On a physical conference it would have been possible to touch the products, and then I think I would have a better outcome. Despite this, the digital format function well and I would like to participate again.”

7.1 Conversion to digital conference

When TR2021 went digital, the main conference and the preconference chose different organization. The main conference was a pre-recorded arrangement with live meeting room in breaks. The preconference was a mix of pre-recorded presentations and live questions and debate.

NLB wanted a preconference with interaction, open to all and with good universal design. We attended the digital Sight Tech Global 2020 to learn and get inspired, which was very useful.

7.2 Technical solution

Zoom webinar was the chosen meeting platform, used worldwide and known for being good on universal design. On the question if Zoom is a good platform for a conference like this, 47 % answered very satisfied and 32 % satisfied with Zoom.

The program was a combination of pre-recorded videos and live questions and answers as well as a live round table debate. Camera was off for all attendees. People in the program had camera on in their part of the program. Text posters with voice messages and pause music went on an hour before the program and during breaks. We also had a person available to help people with log in problems.

The conference was set to 12:00-16:00 Central European Summer Time. This, of course, is a disadvantage for participants from other time zones, and some participants reported that they could only partially participate due to the inconvenience.

Prior to the conference, we arranged a short test login for the program participants to prepare the program and answer practical questions.

7.3 Universal design

To take care of universal design, we did several choices:

- No log in, audience could attend by clicking on the link
- Audio and voice messages one hour before program and during breaks
- Questions & Answers was chosen for communication with audience, not chat
- Sound quality was improved on pre-recorded presentations
- Subtitles by text agency on pre-recorded presentations and auto text available on live program
- Texts available for deafblind people, sent by email

“Very well organized, accessible and interesting day. Thank you!”

7.4 Communication with audience

Speakers answered questions aloud. The attendees could not ask live, but had to type out the questions. We chose this to avoid disturbances and to have some control over the questions. We feared interventions from random persons not interested in the topic.

We chose to drop chat because the combination of reading chat with a screen reader and follow the program can be disturbing.

There were 65 questions and comments sent in. Two persons handled the questions and sent relevant questions on Slack to the host, who presented them to the right person. The audience had many questions to presentations of already existing products. For products and plans for the future, there were fewer questions and we used a list of questions we had prepared in advance.

8. Promotion

Preconference and main conference had joint marketing on the TR2021 webpage, tactilereading.org, Facebook and in emails. For details, see the TR2021 Evaluation report.

9. Evaluation form

We used Questback to send out an evaluation form especially for the preconference. The results in this report originate from answers given in the evaluation form. 110 people answered questions about the preconference, a response rate of 35 %.

[At \[tactilereading.org\]\(http://tactilereading.org\) you will find evaluation report for the main conference and several recordings from TR2021.](#)