

Innovative Rehabilitation Technology Inc. (IRTI) Teams with ABBYY to Help People with Print Disabilities



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- Peter Proscia

President and CEO, Innovative Rehabilitation Technology Inc.

Company’s Customer Base Expands with Integration of ABBYY FineReader Engine

Vito Proscia, founder of Innovative Rehabilitation Technology, Inc. (IRTI), graduated from Columbia University’s esteemed Engineering program in 1958. He was considered to be the first blind engineering graduate at Columbia.

A Long Road to Graduation

While in college in the 1950s there were very few tools to help people with impaired vision succeed. Mr. Proscia’s only choice at that time was to hire people to read for him—every syllabus, every assignment, every textbook, which he then manually typed into Braille. This is the way Vito had to access printed technical material throughout his college career.

Mr. Proscia went on to a successful career in the aerospace industry, became Director of MIT’s Sensory Aids Laboratory and served as the Vice President of Marketing for Telesensory Corporation, one of the first commercial product development companies for the blind. In 1979 he founded IRTI to offer products and services such as talking clocks, calculators, and specialized talking book tape players for use by individuals who are blind, have low vision or suffer from dyslexia.

“My father has a long history of championing issues for the blind,” said Peter Proscia, son of the now 82-year-old Vito Proscia, and the second-generation president of the family business.

A Leader in Digital Talking Books Technology

Peter Proscia focused IRTI’s product development efforts in digital talking book technology. It produced eClipseWare, which is comprised of three software applications



Company: Innovative Rehabilitation Technology, Inc. (IRTI)

Web: www.irti.net

Founded: 1979

Location: Grass Valley, California

Employees: 10

Industry: Software for the Print Disabled

Result: Significant sales growth, expanded target markets

Products: eClipse Writer powered by ABBYY FineReader® Engine

that facilitate the reading and creation of DAISY Digital Talking Books (the Digital Accessible Information System). DAISY is the international standard for accessible media and content targeted to assist those with print disabilities.

eClipseWriter Professional, the cornerstone of IRTI's eClipseWare products, affords organizations including schools, publishers and government agencies, as well as individuals such as students, teachers and professionals, a way to create accessible, DAISY-formatted media for professional and personal use. eClipseWriter Professional is a bundle that includes 1.) document scanning capability, powered by ABBYY FineReader Engine, 2.) a reader with a built-in Web browser that allows users to have content read to them in either a synthesized or human voice, and 3.) a document conversion application so that users can take their documents on-the-go in audio format for listening on iPods and other MP3 players.

"There are so many ways for someone with a disability to use our product," said Peter Proscia. "We make books more accessible and we automate the creation of portable media. We could only do that with a reliable OCR product," he said.

Finding the Right OCR Partner Helps Expand Customer Base

As part of eClipseWriter Professional's development process, IRTI needed to integrate an OCR solution. "We researched all the major competition," said Mr. Proscia. "We chose ABBYY because we felt it was the best one, not only technologically, but it was an easier company for us to work with. We believe (ABBYY) OCR is the best."

He noted that "one of the great things" about ABBYY FineReader Engine is its ability to recognize chapters, lists, and tables in a print document that subsequently get translated into DAISY book navigation elements through eClipseWriter Professional.

"Adding ABBYY and the scanning capability has really broadened us way beyond our original intent," said Mr. Proscia who said his company was just trying to empower the end user to create his own media. Now IRTI is accomplishing that as well as finding many different uses and audiences for its products including anyone with a reading disability such as new immigrants who may be able to speak English, but not read it; as well as colleges, universities, K-12 schools, and workplaces, many of which are trying to be in compliance with accessibility regulations.

"Now somebody will use our product from the simplest tasks of opening and reading their email, reading handouts from school or work, to more sophisticated word processing functions," said Mr. Proscia.

An Eye Toward the Future

Since launching eClipseWriter Version 4.0 powered by ABBYY FineReader in March 2007, IRTI's sales have grown significantly according to Mr. Proscia. He expects this trend to continue as the company expands its reach within education and government. Mr. Proscia said that among other entities, state and federal agencies are buying eClipseWriter for preconfigured computers to stay in compliance with legal mandates such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Adding ABBYY has turned out to be a really good thing for us," said Mr. Proscia.

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