



BTBL News

Braille and Talking Book Library,
California State Library, Sacramento, CA

New Series no. 2 (Fall 2008)

View from the Crow's Nest

Greetings from sunny Sacramento! The National Library Service (NLS) is gearing up for the 2009 rollout of its digital talking book machines, and we have begun ordering digital books for you to borrow next year! In this issue we'll further explain the benefits of the new book and machine formats. We want to assure those who are not yet ready for the new formats, that if you wish you may keep your cassette machines and use them for years to come. Those who embrace the new technology will also likely want to keep their cassette machines on hand for a while even after receiving digital machines, as many of the existing cassette books will not be available digitally for some time.

We are including a survey in this issue to gather information from our customers, to prepare for digital machine distribution. Look for the survey inside the cover for this issue. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU SEND THIS SURVEY BACK TO US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE A DIGITAL MACHINE.** If you prefer, we can conduct the survey with you by phone; see details on page 4 of this issue.

Thanks to all of you who took the time to call or write in with your feedback on our last newsletter. Your comments and suggestions are much appreciated. I'll continue to check BTBL sonar on a regular basis and report new developments as they surface. – Mike Marlin, Navigator

Digital Dilemma: FAQs, Current and Future Digital Talking Book Services

Understandably there is confusion between the current and future digital talking book services offered through BTBL and NLS. The following are questions and answers covering the most frequent inquiries we have from our customers about these services.

Question: What does “digital” mean, when it comes to talking books?

Answer: For nearly 30 years the primary format for talking books has been cassette tapes. This format is an “analog” format, meaning that a replica of the sound of the narrator’s voice is physically stored on magnetic tape. In a “digital” format, measurements of the narrator’s voice are stored as combinations of digits, that is, ones and zeros, the way computers operate. Most modern methods of delivering information of any type process and store information in digital form.

Question: What are the advantages to using a digital format?

Answer: There are many advantages to using a digital format for storing voice recordings. Sound quality is greatly improved and there are conveniences that don’t exist with a cassette format, such as the ability to jump forward or back by chapter, set bookmarks, and vary playback speed without affecting the pitch of the narrator’s voice. Also there is typically no need to change sides, as there is with the cassette format.

Question: What options for getting talking books in digital format through BTBL and NLS are available to me right now?

Answer: There are two main options available now. NLS currently offers about 12,000 titles in digital format which can be downloaded from the NLS web site through subscribing to the Expanded Digital Download Pilot Project. **YOU MUST, HOWEVER, PURCHASE YOUR OWN COMMERCIAL "THIRD PARTY" PLAYER** in order to play what you download. There are currently three player models from which to choose: HumanWare's Victor Reader Stream, APH's Braille Plus Mobile Manager, and LevelStar's Icon. The first one lists for \$329; the others for \$1395.

In order to qualify for and utilize the Expanded Digital Download Pilot

Project, you must be in good standing with the NLS network, have high-speed Internet access, own one of the three types of players mentioned above, and provide an email address. The signup page for the Download Pilot Project is at <https://www.nlstalkingbooks.org/dtb>. One warning: on the application page, there is a drop-down menu where you must indicate the type of player you will use. A “library loaner” option is included in this menu; please do not select this option. As your service provider for NLS, BTBL does not have commercial players to lend. The new, free NLS digital players are not yet available.

Another option is to use our Unabridged service. With Unabridged, our readers can choose from about 2500 commercially-produced audio books and download them to their personal computers for a two-week loan period. These books can then be played back on a computer, or in some cases transferred to storage media such as compact discs (CDs) or to compatible portable playback devices.

To use Unabridged you need a Windows-based computer system and high-speed Internet access. You also need to download the free OverDrive Media Console software from the Unabridged web site (<http://unabridged.lib.overdrive.com>). Finally, you must request a special Unabridged library card number and personal identification number (PIN) from BTBL; to do so, just give us a call.

Question: What will the new NLS digital books and players be like?

Answer: The new NLS digital books will be stored on flash drive cartridges and shipped in containers that are slightly thinner, slightly longer and slightly wider than the cassette versions. There will typically be only one cartridge per book. The new digital machines will be smaller, lighter, more durable, and easier to use than the cassette players.

Question: Will I be able to download books using the new NLS talking book player?

Answer: Not directly. In order to download books from NLS and use your new NLS player to play them, you will need a computer and a storage device with a built-in USB port, such as a "thumb drive" (also known as “flash drive”). Once you have downloaded the book through

the computer to the thumb drive, you will then be able to attach the drive to the NLS player and play your book selection.

Question: When will the new digital books and players be available?
How do I get one?

Answer: According to NLS, we will receive the first digital talking books and players in early 2009 but we will only receive enough to distribute to a small fraction of our customers in the first year. Priority will be given to veterans of the armed forces; we are still working out the details of how we will distribute digital machines after veterans are served. Your first step in getting a digital machine, even if you are a veteran, is to fill out and return the survey that's included in this issue of *BTBL News*. If you cannot fill out and return the printed survey, please contact us at 916-654-0396, and leave a message with your name and phone number. Someone will contact you to conduct the survey with you by telephone.

From the Reader Advisor Unit: Wait a Minute, Mr. Postman...

No cassettes in the mail? You may wonder why sometimes your book delivery slows down. Most of our customers are set up for automatic service based on profiles set up in our library system. If your automatic service slows down, rest assured there are solutions. Your reader advisor can adjust your profile and otherwise assist you to get books faster.

To speed up your deliveries, consider how you return books to us. If you're not getting new books, it may be because of our limit as to how many books you can borrow at a given time through our automated service. Try returning some of the books you have, because we send out books only as we get books back from you in the mail. Another way to increase the number of books you get in the mail is to increase your book requests or add areas of interest to your reader profile. Your reader advisor can modify your profile and request list to make sure the service has enough titles to send you. Also, consider if your service is set up to send you enough books. Your reader advisor can adjust the number of books sent to you in each shipment and how often shipments are sent.

Finally, there may be problems with the postal service that need to be resolved. Sometimes we receive books back from the post office marked

“unable to deliver” or “refused”. When this occurs, we put library service on hold until we can clear up address or delivery questions. Also, the post office now processes our mail through a bulk mailing center before it is routed to you, and so books are taking a little longer to get to you.

So if you want speedier service, follow these simple guidelines:

1. Make sure you get books back to us in a timely manner.
2. Make sure you have enough book requests and designated areas of interest in your customer profile.
3. Ask your reader advisor to make sure your automatic service limit is set high enough so that you receive enough books with each delivery to meet your needs.
4. Check with us to make sure your address and delivery status are okay.

And remember, your reader advisor is always here to assist you!

Unabridged Technical Support Contact Information Change

Tom Peters, technical support for our Unabridged downloadable book program, can now be reached at 816-616-6746. His email address, tpeters@tapinformation.com, is unchanged. Tom is located in the central time zone, which is two hours ahead of California time. Tom can help you troubleshoot problems with using the Unabridged service, but he can't sign you up for it. To sign up for Unabridged, contact BTBL.

Spotlight on Readers: Say Hello To Bill Barker

You may have met him at the Lighthouse for the Blind Enchanted Hill Camp, reading a Braille book expressively to other blind campers. Or possibly you've been one of his many students at the Lighthouse for the Blind in San Francisco or the Orientation Center for the Blind in Albany.

Bill Barker has had not one but two distinguished careers. As a teacher, he has given Braille, typing and music instruction in both English and Spanish to visually impaired students in the San Francisco Bay Area for many years. As a broadcaster, he has hosted the Bay Area's Braille Reading Radio Program, a show featuring inspirational short stories and articles, for almost 20 years.

Bill was born and raised in San Francisco. He describes his parents, who were manufacturers specializing in custom-made wedding dresses, as excellent role models and attributes much of his personal success to his family's support. His mother's influence was particularly strong and she taught him integrity and self-reliance. As a young man, starting off in his broadcasting career, he would edit his scripts by asking himself, "Is this something my mother would like?"

Bill's love for music and reading has sustained him throughout his life. He is an excellent musician and has been an instrumentalist at the St. Ambrose Catholic Church in Berkeley for 29 years. Bill has eclectic tastes in both music and literature; and as a broadcaster and teacher, he is in a unique position to share them. He prefers Baroque and Renaissance music, but also enjoys pop, his favorite being John Gary's rendition of "Little Green Apples". Bill's reading tastes run to adventure and historical fiction, and he keeps up on politics and current events. He also enjoys inspirational works, recently choosing "Chicken Soup for the Soul" (BR 10088, RC 39870) to read to campers at Enchanted Hill.

You can tune in Bill Mondays at 10:30 am on the second audio programming (SAP) selection of TV channel 2, San Francisco Bay Area.

Volunteer Corner: Spring Volunteer Recognition Event

To honor its hardworking volunteers, BTBL hosted a barbecue on May 22. About 60 volunteers attended the event; also present were State Librarian Susan Hildreth and David Whittall, western network consultant for NLS. Addressing the audience, Susan Hildreth acknowledged the hard work of BTBL volunteers "who help so many Californians enjoy the world of books and information service." David Whittall reviewed the history of the NLS network, noting that its success has been due "in no small part to the contributions of volunteers over the years."

BTBL volunteers include narrators, monitors and reviewers for the California book narration program; inspectors and repair specialists who examine and repair audiocassette books and players; and volunteers who read letters, documents and other materials for the blind.

Advice from the Machine Shop: Give Us a Call

If you think you need a replacement machine, it's best to give us a call before sending your machine back. If we can't solve the problem on the phone, we can send you a replacement right away. You'll get a new machine much faster, you'll have a machine until your new one arrives, and the new machine's packaging can be used to return the old one.

If you send in your machine without calling first, you may be in for a wait for a replacement. It's our policy to contact customers when we receive machines back without knowing why, which takes extra time. While you can mark on the return card that you want a replacement, or include a note asking for a new machine, we handle hundreds of machines every month. Cards and notes can be lost or overlooked.

So if you're having problems with your machine, please give us a call. You'd be surprised how much we can solve over the phone.

Music All Around: R4R, NLS Music Section

Did you know that NLS directly offers music library services through the NLS Music Section? The Music Section has a circulating collection of more than 30,000 Braille and large-print music scores, texts, and instructional recordings about music and musicians on cassette. The collection holdings can be searched through the NLS catalog at nls.catalog.loc.gov. Magazine subscriptions on cassette, in Braille or in large print are also offered.

Musical recordings intended solely for listening are not part of the collection. Any BTBL customer in good standing automatically qualifies to receive music services; if interested you should contact the NLS Music Section directly at 1-800-424-8567, or send an e-mail to nlsm@loc.gov.

BTBL customers are eligible to subscribe to music for listening through Recordings for Recovery (R4R), a specialized service providing the visually-impaired with access to a broad selection of music on cassette. For a small yearly fee (\$10.00), tapes may be borrowed for up to 60 days and returned through the mail postage-free. The registration fee may be waived if you are unable to pay. Institutional memberships are also available. For more information, call 1-800-798-1192, or e-mail the R4R staff at staff@r4r.org.

Braille and Talking Book Library
California State Library
900 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Free Matter for the Blind and
Physically Handicapped

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

BTBL News is written and edited by staff of the Braille and Talking Book Library. It is available in Braille, on cassette, through e-mail, and in large print upon request, or through our website: <http://www.library.ca.gov/services/btbl.html>

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Phone Numbers: 1-916-654-0640; 1-800-952-5666 (toll-free in California); 1-916-654-1119 (fax)

E-mail for customer requests or contact information: btbl@library.ca.gov

Web catalog: www.library.ca.gov/klasweb

Holiday closures for September-December 2008: We will be closed on September 1 (Labor Day); October 13 (Columbus Day); November 11 (Veterans Day); November 27 and 28 (Thanksgiving); December 25 (Christmas Day)

Donations to BTBL are accepted at any time and are used to enhance and improve library services. In the case of memorials or donations in honor of a particular person or event, please include the name(s) and address(es) of those to be notified. Checks should be made payable to the California State Library Foundation and should include a note that the donation is for the Braille and Talking Book Library. Donations should be sent to: California State Library Foundation, 1225 8th Street, Suite 345, Sacramento, CA, 95814-4809.

[A note to our customers accessing this publication online: If you did not receive a large-print copy of this customer survey, you can call us at 800-952-5666 and we will send you one. Alternatively you can fill out and print the survey from the form which is available on this website, and then send it in to us via free matter at the address indicated on the form. If you wish to be surveyed by telephone, please contact us at 916-654-0396 and leave us a message with your name and telephone number. Someone will get in touch with you within a few days. The survey questions appear below, for your reference.]

Customer Survey, Fall 2008

Name: _____ Phone: _____

1. How would you describe your interest in receiving a new digital talking book player from NLS?

_____ "I can't wait to receive a digital player."

_____ "I want a digital player but I can wait."

_____ "I am not interested in a digital player at this time."

2. If you do not have a commercial third-party digital player that will play NLS digital books, are you considering buying one? ___ Yes ___ No

3. Do you own or have easy access, either personally or through someone else, to a personal computer connected to the Internet?

_____ Yes _____ No

4. Do you have high-speed Internet access? _____ Yes _____ No

Customer Survey (continued)

5. You would rate your comfort with using the Internet as follows:

____ Very comfortable ____ Somewhat comfortable
____ Not comfortable but can use it ____ Not comfortable at all

6. Do you have the following type(s) of video players at home:

VHS? ____ Yes ____ No DVD? ____ Yes ____ No

7. Are you interested in participating in the following types of programs:

Book discussion groups conducted online? ____ Yes ____ No

Book discussion groups conducted by telephone? ____ Yes ____ No

Book discussion groups meeting in person? ____ Yes ____ No

Summer reading programs? ____ Yes ____ No

Speaker or cultural program series? ____ Yes ____ No

Other? (write your suggestion or comment here):

General comments:

Thank you for completing this survey. We look forward to receiving your response.