Announcement: HathiTrust, NFB to make 14M+ books accessible to blind and print-disabled users

Colleagues,

I'm writing to share the exciting news that HathiTrust and the National Federation of the Blind have agreed to work together to provide users with print disabilities access to the HathiTrust collection. As you know, we have been providing such access to qualified individuals at HathiTrust member schools. Now NFB will develop a service that will enable similar access individual print disabled users in the general public. This will be an enormous leap in the quantity of materials available to this community of under-served readers. You'll see in the announcement that we still have some work to do, and our timing for implementation is still TBD, but we are actively working with the NFB on the project and hope to have a target start date within a few weeks. I'm very pleased to announce this collaboration, and proud that the HathiTrust partnership is able to provide such an important service to the public. I'm including the lede for the news release below, followed by a link to the full announcement, and answers to likely questions at the bottom. Thanks to each of you for being a part of HathiTrust.

mike

HathiTrust, NFB to make 14M+ books accessible to blind and print-disabled users

June 29, 2016

ANN ARBOR—More than 14 million digital books will soon be made available to blind and print-disabled users, thanks to a new collaboration involving the National Federation of the Blind and the HathiTrust Digital Library, a digital repository hosted at the University of Michigan.

When launched, the program will dramatically increase the availability of books for users who are blind or print-disabled. According to the NFB, currently less than 5 percent of all published works are estimated to be available to the blind, most of which are popular titles.

The text of the full announcement is here: https://www.hathitrust.org/hathitrust_NFB_announcement

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Why are HathiTrust and the NFB collaborating?

HathiTrust and the NFB share a common goal: to expand access to the scholarly and cultural record to users who have print disabilities. The NFB is the largest US member-based organization that is focused on improving the lives of blind people. It also provides information services to its members (i.e., via the Newsline service), researches and explores the intersection of accessibility and technology, and develops tools that help blind users read books and other printed materials, among other things.

During the earliest phases of mass digitization, libraries planned to use the digitized books to provide access to users who have print disabilities. HathiTrust has had services for users served by research libraries in place for years. This partnership extends those services to users who have print disabilities outside research libraries, to a more comprehensive set of users. When HathiTrust was sued by the Authors Guild, the NFB intervened as co-defendants in the case, and their involvement helped us secure important legal rulings about how higher education institutions may support users who have print disabilities.

How will the service work?

Our plans are to build services using existing HathiTrust infrastructure and systems. The NFB will have the responsibility of certifying that an individual is a qualified person who has a print disability under US law. The NFB will provide certified users with login credentials to HathiTrust, through which they can gain access to the collection. The NFB already operates a similar service itself, called Newsline, which provides registered qualified users with access to news content provided by newspapers and other news organizations.

Will the planned service for the NFB’s users differ from the service HathiTrust now provides to users who have print disabilities at HT member libraries?

We expect them to be very similar. Qualified users at HathiTrust members and those users supported by the NFB will have access to the entire HathiTrust collection. Access for individuals who log in via the NFB will be based on our existing interfaces and authentication systems. Like HathiTrust members, the NFB will implement a Shibboleth authentication service (https://www.hathitrust.org/shibboleth). Users certified for access will log in to HathiTrust much the same way any individual at HathiTrust member libraries do now to gain access to HathiTrust services. There may be some differences in the interface and delivery of full-text content, but those specifics are still being worked out.

Will the NFB have to identify staff who serve as “proxies” for users and access materials on behalf of users?

We are planning a new service model that would allow users who have print disabilities at HathiTrust member libraries and those certified by NFB to have direct, unmediated access to materials in HathiTrust. However, we will not enable direct access for any user until we have all appropriate security measures in place. During the coming months we will establish the protocols for this service in consultation with both HathiTrust members and the NFB.

We plan for this service model to include additional verification steps in the authentication process i.e., to implement two-factor authentication.

The so-called “proxy” staff members who help users with print disabilities from member libraries often provide important additional support for their users, and so we anticipate that we would still have proxy access for members who wish to identify them. For more information about this service, please see https://www.hathitrust.org/accessibility.

How does this service differ from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped? Will users of NLS also have access to HathiTrust?

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) is the largest US member-based organization that is focused on improving the lives of blind people. It also provides information services to its members (i.e., via the Newsline service), researches and explores the intersection of accessibility and technology, and develops tools that help blind users read books and other printed materials, among other things.
It will be similar in many ways, though our service will initially not provide access in multiple formats. The material available in NLS is significantly different in the range of subject matter available and the scale of the collections. The NFB has plans to eventually provide access to users of NLS and similar services.

**Is the NFB becoming a member of HathiTrust?**

The NFB will not become a member of HathiTrust. It will not pay fees nor will it have the privilege of participating in HathiTrust governance.

**How will the NFB certify users as qualified?**

The NFB has existing procedures for certification and authorization in place to access their Newsline service. These are commonly accepted processes that are based on U.S. law. It will continue to make these authorizations under these policies and work with similar organizations to accept their certifications.

**Are there costs to HathiTrust?**

The cost to implement this on the HathiTrust side primarily includes the time of existing staff to plan the work with NFB staff and to implement and test needed modifications to our user interface. The work done to test and improve our interface for users who have print disabilities will benefit all these users at all HathiTrust member schools. HathiTrust and the NFB are each covering their own costs of implementation.

--

Mike Furlough

Executive Director

HathiTrust Digital Library