

Simply brilliant Braille

HP teams with ViewPlus to put Braille in living color

HP customer case study: ViewPlus of Corvallis, Ore.

Industry: Assistive technology



“Teachers can’t wait to get their hands on it,” said John Gardner, president, CEO and CTO of ViewPlus. “Emprint is an incredibly valuable tool to help people overcome the daily challenges they face with visual impairments and learning disabilities.”

Objective:

ViewPlus wanted to develop a tool to help people with visual impairments communicate better with their sighted counterparts.

Approach:

ViewPlus teamed up with HP Specialty Printing Systems (SPS) to combine HP TII 2.x color inkjet printing technology with advanced paper embossing technology to produce raised color text and graphics, making it possible for people who are sighted and visually impaired, or have learning disabilities, to collaborate on the same document, communicate more effectively and develop better comprehension and learning. HP SPS also helped bring the resulting product to market by providing engineering support and featuring the prototype at trade shows.

IT improvements:

- Emprint features a fully integrated solution without the need for an add-on product
- Documents printed with Emprint have the same high quality as documents printed with HP inkjet printers
- Emprint uses the same paper and reliable ink cartridges as HP inkjet printers
- Emprint can print Braille and ink together or separately

Business benefits:

- Coupling HP color inkjet printing technology with Braille embossing serves multiple needs; people with visual impairments, normal sight and learning disabilities can work together more effectively
- Partnership with HP ensures high-quality printing and further bolsters credibility in the marketplace
- Tripled initial sales forecasts in its first month on the market



For people with visual impairments, living and working in a sighted world is a daily challenge. The gap between colleagues, teachers and students who are sighted and visually impaired is often vast. But what if there were a way both could “read” the same printed document? John Gardner, president, CEO and CTO of ViewPlus Technologies, figured out how to make that happen, creating the world’s first printer to combine Braille and HP color inkjet technology.

Gardner understood firsthand the needs of people with visual impairments. Blind in one eye since the age of two, he lost his sight completely in 1988. To develop tools that could improve communication between people who are sighted and visually impaired, he founded ViewPlus Technologies, Inc., in Corvallis, Ore., in 1996. ViewPlus develops and manufactures hardware and software for people with sensory disabilities, such as blindness or low vision, as well as people with learning disabilities.

He was particularly interested in helping people with various needs share documents more effectively. “Communication for people who are blind is hard,” Gardner said. “Very few people read Braille. It became obvious to me that ink should go with Braille, so that people who are sighted and people who are vision-impaired can work more effectively together and help each other.”

Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

Complete embossing and printing solution for people with visual impairments and learning disabilities, as well as complementary software for audio enhancements.

Primary hardware

Emprint™ Braille Embosser

Enter HP and reliable TIJ technology

Gardner wanted to work with a company that would understand and rise to the challenge. "By definition, what we are doing is innovative. We sought out a partnership with HP because of its superior innovation," said Gardner. The ViewPlus solution, Emprint, is a new Braille embosser featuring color HP inkjet technology. Emprint embosses Braille along with corresponding text using color ink in a single pass.

Gardner believed demand would be high, and he was right. Emprint tripled initial sales forecasts in its first month on the market.

Emprint combines HP TIJ 2.x color inkjet printing technology with advanced paper embossing technology to produce raised color text and graphics. With Emprint, people who are sighted and visually impaired can easily collaborate on the same document in the classroom or the workplace. A person with a visual impairment can rely on the Braille and/or raised color text and graphics, while a person with sight can read the text itself. There's no need to print and translate separate documents.

Documents printed with Emprint have the same high quality as documents printed with HP inkjet printers, and can use the same paper and reliable ink cartridges as HP inkjet printers. Emprint uses standard HP 56 and 57 print cartridges, making it easy for users to get the supplies they need for regular use.

The first integrated solution of its kind, Emprint also can print Braille and ink together or separately. ViewPlus' tactile-audio system IVEO (hardware and software) complements Emprint, converting inaccessible visual documents into a format that can be "read" by touch and audio. With IVEO®, teachers can scan textbooks to make content accessible to all of their students.

The power of partnership

ViewPlus began working with HP SPS in 2003 and is now a licensed SPS OEM partner. SPS engineers worked closely with ViewPlus to provide technical support and assist with troubleshooting during product development. ViewPlus is also a member of HP's Assistive Technology Partner Program (HPATP). As part of HP's commitment to developing products, services and information accessible to all who want them, the HPATP program partners with vendors like ViewPlus that have demonstrated a strong commitment to accessibility.

HP provides technical and co-marketing support to its AT partners, such as sharing booth space at major accessibility trade shows and providing partner links and information on the HPATP website.

"Emprint is an ideal product to help our customers with disabilities and age-related limitations access information more easily," said Michael Takemura, director, HP Accessibility Program Office.

Emprint is ViewPlus's second product powered by TIJ technology. The first, Pro Embosser ink attachment, is an add-on solution that uses black TIJ 1.0 print cartridges. Since its launch in early 2005, sales for the Pro Embosser have increased by 30 percent.

"ViewPlus is a great company to work with," said Gabriella Liem, HP OEM strategic alliance manager. *"They are a dedicated team, develop really useful products and are very nice people."*

Added benefits enhance learning

Not only does Emprint help people who are vision impaired and sighted communicate more easily, but it is also proving valuable in helping people with low vision and learning disabilities create spatial relationships through color and touch. ViewPlus' haptic (touch) color printing helps people with visual impairments and learning disabilities use tactile learning techniques to enhance comprehension and learning. "Emprint and IVEO give people with low vision or learning disabilities more options—personally and professionally," said Gardner. "It makes me so happy to see people realize how these products can help them. Teachers can't wait to get their hands on them, and their students can't wait to use them."

To learn more, visit www.hp.com/oeminkjet
www.viewplus.com

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