NORTH HENNEPIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WHY HAS NORTH HENNEPIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEEN USING READSPEAKER TEXT TO SPEECH FOR ALMOST A DECADE?

Kathy Grady
TECHNOLOGY
SPECIALIST

North Hennepin Community College has used ReadSpeaker text to speech in their D2L LMS environment for 8 years, as well as for their website. Hear from Kathy Grady, Technology Specialist at North Hennepin Community College, about how ReadSpeaker text to speech adds not only accessibility and engagement to coursework, but also gives adult learners productivity tools to help them complete their courses, and succeed.

ReadSpeaker: What were the challenges you faced and/or your institution's reasons for selecting a text-to-speech tool?

Kathy: NHCC was looking for a text-to-speech option that could be easily and economically used for our students who needed services through our Access Services department. We were also looking for a TTS option to use with our Learning Management System (LMS) and within any website that our students were accessing.

ReadSpeaker: Can you characterize the changes you have seen in how academic institutions view and provide for learners who need accommodations?

Kathy: Several years ago, in terms of websites, LMS, and digital documents, campuses were required to comply with ADA requirements and either they embraced it to make accommodation changes for everyone they served or just muddled

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along and made changes when individual accommodations were needed. Like with many things, awareness to provide equitable access has evolved over time to accommodate for any user rather than provide just because it is a requirement.

I also think campuses that belong to a larger system of universities and colleges are working collaboratively to find common practices, training, and technologies to meet students, staff, and faculty accessibility needs.

ReadSpeaker: What has been your experience with ReadSpeaker, having used it for so long, and why did you choose ReadSpeaker?

Kathy: We began with ReadSpeaker webReader about 8 years ago and shortly after added the docReader integration into our LMS – D2L Brightspace. Once TextAid was added and authentication access through Brightspace, it was easy for our Access Services staff with the Coordinator role access to share textbooks with students that have accessibility needs. This option provides the coordinator access controls to what and how long students have to the material due to publisher stipulations.

We have also used ReadSpeaker webReader within our NHCC campus website with great success.

ReadSpeaker: Have there been any changes to the tool and/or the way students interact with it, since it was first introduced to NHCC? Are any of these changes especially valuable?

Kathy: Students have been using ReadSpeaker webReader to read out loud the course content from their Brightspace courses to not only address accessibility needs, but to also help them study while addressing other duties in their busy lives. An example is listening to lecture notes while cooking meals for their family.

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In addition this 'bimodal learning' technique helps students of all types in retaining information longer, with deeper understanding of course material. Especially for courses that have heavy reading loads.

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A feature that was added a couple years back that was greatly needed was the ability to use ReadSpeaker webReader in D2L Brightspace's quiz questions and assignments. Also, the addition of

ReadSpeaker webReader to the Discussion tool. This rounds out the access of ReadSpeaker tools in the major tools used within Brightspace.

ReadSpeaker: What has it been like working with the ReadSpeaker team?

Kathy: I have always had positive interactions with the folks that work at ReadSpeaker. The support team is great from implementation/upgrades to answering various questions or working on issues and resolving them in a timely manner.

Paul Stisser and Ginger Dewey are both very attentive in meeting our needs at NHCC. It has been great getting to know them better over the years.

ReadSpeaker: Is there anything you recommend to other institutions or educators when it comes to TTS, or a statement you'd like to say given your experiences and passion for education?

Kathy: Like any educational tool, it is important to have a department responsible to champion the ReadSpeaker TTS options so that they are used to their full potential.

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