DOT WATCH

2016 Nominet Trust 100 Winner

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THE FIRST BRAILLE SMARTWATCH

By Dot Watch

Project URL: http://fingerson.strikingly.com/
Project Twitter: @N/A

- Digital Engagement
- Physical Computing

When Dot Watch co-founder and CEO Eric Ju Yoon Kim saw his classmate lugging around a heavy Braille Bible that contained only 5% of the text, he was astounded – were there no tablets or smartphones that could display Braille for the visually impaired?

Kim discovered that there has been little innovation in Braille displays in the last 20 years, even though the World Health Organization estimates that there are 285 million people with severe visual impairment. Education is a problem – in the UK alone, less than 1% of visually impaired people can understand Braille.

Displays that read Braille text in real time typically cost between $2,000 and $15,000, and cheaper Braille texts are very laborious to read – a full Braille Bible for example is typically 40 volumes. Most people with access to smartphones rely on voice-recognition software like Apple's Siri to 'read' communication from loved ones.

Kim's team developed a smartwatch that uses magnets and a grid of pins, which can be raised or lowered to make four Braille letters at a time. It links up with Bluetooth to convert text from apps like iMessage into Braille letter equivalents. Impressively, the device can last for five days on a single charge and comes with a relatively low price tag of $290 plus tax.

150,000 pre-orders have already been logged in the US and Canada, where the watch will be available from the end of 2016. In South Korea, Kim's team is experimenting with what he calls "public Braille", a series of installations at ATMs and in train stations, which can provide account balances or the subway schedule for the visually impaired. Find out more at http://fingerson.strikingly.com