Brad Turner (Benetech/Bookshare, Palo Alto)

Bookshare: Helping Higher Education Provide Accessible Books to Students

Universities in the USA, Germany, and many countries around the world provide services for students with disabilities. Usually, these services include providing accessible versions of books, partial books, or other documents for students who cannot use print material. Creating accessible versions of these books requires the university to request a copy from the publisher or scan and proof the book. Adding complexity to the challenge is that students in higher education use a broad selection of books from all over the world. Unfortunately, the work of the student services office is frequently duplicated across multiple universities due to a lack of sharing or coordination.

This session addresses how Bookshare, an initiative of Benetech, provides technology that allows universities to set up their own university-branded accessible library that automatically converts, stores and distributes titles to students with disabilities. It also discusses how Bookshare utilizes books provided by publishers and books scanned under a national copyright exception to offer a large and ever-growing collection of titles in 34 languages. Universities can find accessible books in the large collection, or they can create accessible versions of new books students need and put them in the library dedicated to higher education, quickly building a collection of frequently used titles. This removes duplication and enables student services offices to provide a broader range of titles. Additionally, with the impending EU ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled, more books are available from more countries. Learn how Bookshare's distribution engine enables books created in any ratifying country to be distributed directly to the consumer in any other ratifying country, reducing the workload for student services offices. Finally, hear about how Bookshare, in conjunction with other accessible libraries, are driving systemic change in the publishing industry by implementing a global accessibility certification program for books.