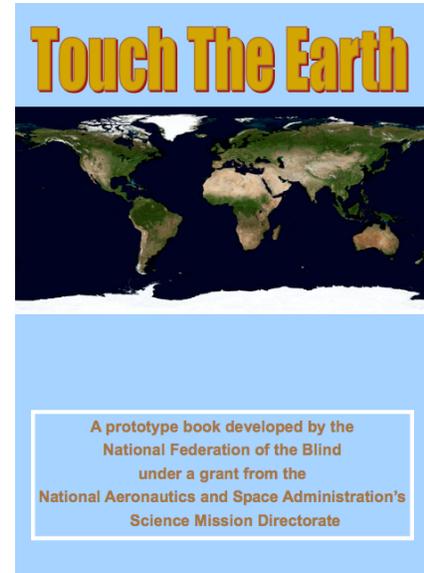




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The National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute Unveils Prototype of Braille-Embossed TouchBook with Digital Capabilities

Baltimore, MD - July 11, 2006 -- The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) announced today that it recently demonstrated a prototype tactile book with a computerized Touch User Interface (TUI) at its national convention in Dallas, Texas on July 1-7, 2006. The book entitled *Touch the Earth* is the first Braille book combining MODIS Sensor imagery and science content from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) along with the TUI technology of Somatic Digital. *Touch the Earth*, conceived by the NFB Jernigan Institute, offers new educational opportunities for blind students to break through barriers to accessing printed and pictorial information in existing materials.

According to Dr. Marc Maurer, president of the National Federation of the Blind, "*Touch the Earth* is an effort to examine how we can use Braille in conjunction with technology to produce multi-sensory educational experiences in ways that have never before been imagined. Furthermore, we believe these multi-sensory learning experiences are important not only because they are accessible to the blind but also because they provide more meaningful learning opportunities to all students."

Touch the Earth is a proof of concept demonstrating how a paper-based Braille book with tactile images can be connected to supplemental digital content stored on a computer simply through the touch of a page. The demonstration book includes five Braille pages, four tactile map images created from NASA satellite imagery, and an additional tactile page, which serves as a remote control to access the associated digital content. The NFB believes this innovative approach to educational material could serve as the guide to produce a full-scale book to help teach Earth science concepts to both blind and sighted students alike.

Dr. Elissa Levine, a research scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and collaborator on the book, says, "The cutting edge approach of this book is an expression of NASA's vision to inspire and engage the next generation of explorers. The concepts and technology used in creating *Touch the Earth* can be applied to many new educational products, which will broaden the pool of people inspired by NASA and deepen science literacy nationwide."

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According to Jason E. Barkeloo, president, Somatic Digital, “We are proud of this work under the leadership of the Jernigan Institute. By working with the NFB we are focusing on bridging the digital divide for all students. We know that by connecting those who are blind, hearing, motor, cognitively, or socio-economically impaired, we can connect everyone to digital content through the ubiquitous paper-and-ink medium. We are converging print and digital with the book being the point of convergence rather than a new appliance.”

The TUI technology enables regular printed pages to connect directly to digital content and communication protocols. When the print or tactile page is touched, a signal is sent to a computer to execute the associated command. The TUI technology is an open technology designed to enable educational publishers to create interactive digital and print hybrid workbooks, texts, and supplements.

This technology is ideal for providing a multi-modal learning environment to all students. The TUI allows individual books to be customized to the needs outlined in students’ individualized education plans. Properly designed TUI-based TouchBooks, such as the Federation’s *Touch the Earth*, should meet the requirements outlined in the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the inclusive learning requirements of laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act, No Child Left Behind Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

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About the National Federation of the Blind

With more than 50,000 members, the National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. The NFB improves blind people’s lives through advocacy, education, research, technology, and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence. It is the leading force in the blindness field today and the voice of the nation's blind. In January 2004 the NFB opened the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute, the first research and training center in the United States for the blind led by the blind.

About Somatic Digital

Somatic Digital, LLC, is the developer of the Touch User Interface (TUI) technology as the TouchBook platform. The TUI technology connects paper directly to digital content that can reside on optical media, the Internet, or hard drives. It enables a bridge over the digital divide because it eliminates barriers that previously prevented people from connecting to digital content. With the press of a finger, stylus, or pointer, a physically, visually, or hearing impaired student can gain access to digital content. The company's publisher development kit (PDK) integrates easily and quickly so that publishers can rapidly design TouchBook products. Located in Cincinnati, Ohio, Somatic Digital manufactures and helps the publisher integrate the TouchBook into the production process.