

For Immediate Release

A computer screen reading software developed by a totally blind person for the blind

[26 March, Hong Kong] A man who is totally blind since childhood has brought new hope to the visually impaired in the use of IT with a computer screen reading software which he has developed with his own resources and in his spare time. This software runs on Windows XP and earlier versions down to Windows 98.

The biggest obstacle to a blind person in the use of the computer is his inability to read the computer screen. Over the years, screen reading software packages with speech and Braille output in western languages have been made available for visually impaired computer users. These packages are upgraded in pace with the release of new versions of Windows. Even in Mainland China, there are a couple of screen reading packages in the market with speech output in Putonghua. Visually impaired persons in Hong Kong are, however, less fortunate in this respect. There is only one screen reading software with Cantonese speech output and this runs on Windows 98 only. Further, this software has also much to be desired in terms of functionalities and stability.

Mr, Ha See Hung, member of Retina Hong Kong, has now developed and released Windows Light, a screen reading software which runs on Windows XP. It is currently the only released screen reading package which runs on Windows XP with Cantonese-English speech.

From the demonstration, you can hear the clear Cantonese-English speech output of Windows Light. With Windows Light, a blind user can now operate conveniently in a Chinese BIG5 version of Windows XP. He/she can navigate around the Windows desktop and system menus, do word processing and spreadsheet calculations in MS Word and MS Excel and even access the Internet in MS Internet Explorer. If used together with a Chinese Braille input method system, Windows Light can also help a blind user to write and edit Chinese with the PC.

Ha See Hung has received special education at Ebenezer School for the Blind, studied in two ordinary secondary schools, obtained a BA degree from the University of Hong Kong and an Msc degree in business information technology systems from a UK university.

Recognizing the need and desire of Cantonese-speaking blind people to take advantage of the technological advancement in IT to improve themselves and enrich their knowledge, Ha See Hung devoted much of his spare time after work over the past few years to the development of Windows Light. In the process, he has done a lot of literature search, looked up a huge amount of technical documentation, experimented extensively in program coding. He is happy that his efforts are paying off.

Screen reading software packages in Putonghua or western languages are commercially available at prices ranging from HK\$1,000 to more than HK\$20,000. To encourage blind people to make better use of IT and remove the financial inhibition for them to access the wealth of knowledge and information publicly available through the computer, Ha See Hung is pleased to share his achievement by offering to provide Windows Light to all blind individuals, Government departments and non-government organisations absolutely free of charge. He is also prepared to assist in training up trainers to teach the blind in the use of Windows Light.

Ha See Hung points out that although Windows Light is a usable product, it remains to be perfected. He will continuously upgrade it to fix bugs and add on new functionalities. His next objective is to provide an interface to Braille output devices so that text on the computer screen can be reproduced in Braille.

Ha See Hung would like to express his thanks to two friends for their contributions to Windows Light:

- to Mr. Leung Wai Ming for sharing the source code of hsi Cantonese speech engine; and
- to Mr. Ho Ching Shek for editing the Chinese code table.

Any enquiries about Windows light may be directed to Retina Hong Kong at telephone number 2708 9363.