# Braille Promotions Workshop: Let’s Talk about Home Embossers

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Moderator: Kim Kilpatrick

Panelists: Marilyn Rushton, Betty Nobel, Diana Brent, Jen Goulden

This workshop was an informal discussion on the use of braille embosser at home. Each of the panelists have used their home embossers for many years. They share their experiences, embosser preferences and discuss pros and cons through responding to questions posed by Kim, the moderator. If you have any questions about this resource page, please don’t hesitate to contact us info@blc-lbc.ca

## How long have you used an embosser?

Jen got her embosser in 2012 and it is still working.

Diana had access to early pro-type through university and when working in the 80s

Betty started using an embosser mid -80s at VCC, she purchased a second-hand home embosser.

Marilyn got one in the 90s… which still works well.

All panelists concluded that the embossers last well. … maybe just as long as a good car!

## What are the factors you consider when choosing an embosser?

Marilyn - a big consideration is the price. Also, consideration is the size of paper the embosser could handle. Chose a Romeo, 40-character line, that uses 11x11 paper, as wanted bigger format for school learners, a second embosser, the Blazer (no longer made) takes the 8x11, and could do single sheets.

Type of paper required - Wanted tractor feed paper type, and did not need to have an embosser that did double sided sheets

Jen, agreeing with what has already been said and that in considering a choice, you need to ask yourself, what do I want to use this embosser for, that is, in what context will you need it.

Portability was important – required one that was light and compact enough to take to meetings

Diana, building on the discussion mentioned that you need ask yourself if you want to print graphics. Another important factor to consider is wireless capability.

Diana has had good success with an Index embosser. Wanted one that was portable, 40 character/line capability, and embosses double sided, as it uses less paper.

Betty - wanted option of single and double sided, and simple graphics. Another consideration is ‘noise’ – embossers tend to be quite loud. She also mentioned that a built-in translator might be a consideration

Other considerations were also discussed:

* How much printing you going to do…will the embosser stand up
* The dot quality of embosser, some produce crisp dots, some produce a more rounded dot. Dot quality is not consistent throughout the embosser, newer models don’t necessarily produce better quality dots. Before purchasing or acquiring a second-hand embosser ask the owner or distributer for sample of embossed braille.

## What are the PROs and CONs of using an embosser at home

Betty CONS – the noise, needs to be placed on padding to protect the table top from damage, with consistent and heavy use, they tend to jump around and could potentially markup wooden surfaces below. Foam might not be a good choice, as you need to consider over-heating.

PROS – smaller embosser will take smaller sized paper – which are good for making booklets, on single feed machines. Index uses tractor feet, doesn’t jamb,

Wireless capability handy as you can put the embosser in a quieter area of the house,

Weight, the more modern ones are lighter

Some embossers have the capability of embossing braille and also print

Marilyn CONS – found that the embosser key pad was not accessible, and stick-on tactiles readily dropped off. This was a barrier to setting up the equipment independently, the set up needs to be accessible

* cost is not justified, people don’t have the opportunity to use braille, a barrier

Started not embossing middle of lines, servicing the equipment fixed the problem

PROS – prefers hardcopy braille, doesn’t trust technology … having hardcopy gives the reader of skimming down a sheet or accessing music score. Having an embosser gives the option of producing hardcopy braille.

Jen CONS – if I am not embossing a lot, can I justify the cost for something I don’t use all the time. And especially when it breaks you can’t fix it yourself.

PROS – hardcopy, you need to see the entire page.

You can have hardcopy when you want it, braille on demand, no waiting

Diana CONS – might overheat, if embosser is sitting on foam, better to seat on metal grate to ensure air circulation
PROS - think about braille translation, unless the printer has a built in translated you end up with uncontracted computer braille,

Home embosser gives you control over formatting, unlike a braille display

If you only had money for embosser or braille display what would you prefer

Diana - if I wasn’t doing braille translation, she would lean to braille display … Hard choice

Betty – had embosser before braille display and would choose embosser first because of the ability to have hard copy braille when you want it

Marilyn – go with braille display and iPhone, in combo… uses more than embosser. Disadvantage, of braille display, don’t get the formatting you get with hard copy braille. Hardcopy braille is best for recipes

Jen – a tough choice, uses braille display more and would choose this, but would work hard to find a discounted embosser.

## Where can you get an embosser second hand?

When you get ready to make the purchase of an embosser it is always helpful to talk with someone who already has the unit you are considering. The approximate cost of a new embosser is around $4,000 -$5,000.

CCB has a buy and sell list-serve – embosser can often be found there

US based list serves have also been used or word of mouth, asking around.

Additionally, sometimes companies that sell embossers will discount their demo ones, or have trade in embossers.

Something to note: It is really important to have the embosser serviced at least annually, clean and oiled. An additional cost, dependent on how much you use it. Some of the panelists have used Rick Chant from [Chaos Technical Services](https://www.chaostechnicalservices.com/) for servicing. He is able skilled and reliable.

## You need to use some braille translation software. What do you use?

Braille translation software converts documents or other forms of digital text into a braille file and may differ in editing capabilities and system compatibility.

All panelist are using or have used [DUXBURY](https://www.duxburysystems.com/), the older versions were more complicated to set up Duxbury. Duxbury now about $800

[BrailleBlaster](https://www.brailleblaster.org/) – freeware, if you are familiar with Word, BrailleBlaster has a similar set up. Made by APH and is regularly updated

Other translation software that was mentioned includes [Braille 2000](https://www.braille2000.com/) is not free, but also good

[Braille Sao Mai](https://saomaicenter.org/en/smsoft/smb),

## How does the set up go?

All panelist agreed that this is relatively dependent on your individual tolerance for tech. Noting that user manuals are not usually available in hardcopy braille.

Betty - found it difficult, had tech person assist (Rick Chant), doable but very difficult

Marilyn - complication increased with inaccessible keypad.

It was noted that some of the newer embossers have braille keypads and built in voice

Jen - found Duxbury install process to be easier now. Noted that embossers and braille displays manufactured in Europe have different processes and workflow… Index isn’t as intuitive to set up as Juliet/Romeo are, as they are produced by Humanware.

NOTE: In finding a place to locate your embosser, make sure that there is room for the paper to flow easily out of the machine. This helps to avoid paper jams.

## Are there any ways of keeping the embossers quiet?

Place it on a sound absorbing pad, foam might be a consideration,

Locate it in a place in your house or apartment where it is ‘away’, put it on outside wall, not one shared with your neighbor.

Talk with your neighbor, tell them what it is.

Timing is important, emboss during working hours

## Types of embossers mentioned by panelists

Index Braille – produced in Sweden

Romeo and Juliet series – produced by Humanware, North America

Blazer – a reliable workhorse, but no longer made

Other embossers discussed:

Tiger software embossers, will produce graphics, and colour/print, ViewPlus

## How you keep it in good shape?

Cover it when you are not using it, so that the dust get in.

Use compressed air, to blow dust out of print head

Don’t eat or drink near your embosser, or braille display

Use a reputable service person, such as Rick Chant. Call the manufacture for servicing

## Q&A

Do some of these embossers have speech output?

Index, newer Juliet and Romeo. give helpful reminders,

Romeo 50 does speak, a PRO, Romeo 20 doesn’t speak

Index, speaks,

How do you get paper jam fixed? Open the locks, and you can pull it out. Note: need to set up so that paper will flow out, ensure there is adequate space.

Page numbering at lower right,

Additional considerations

When servicing, the cost for shipping is large as it must be done by courier, very expensive. Servicing companies don’t have loaners when servicing, so the turn-around time of repairs is a consideration.

Need to have manuals in braille

Do embossers have speech capability?

Some embossers have a set up with translation software with braille display

Can you do set up braille embossers to braille devices?

Braillenote, mantis, braille sense, BTspeak with braille display,

Need to advocate for more devices to connect directly embossers.

Is there a braille embosser that will connect to iOS?

Difficult to access brf file on phone

i-editor, will open brf on phone,

Coder needs app to open brf files.

Does anyone know about a network or library where you can get a file printed? Recent article in BC newspaper about open-use embosser in college library. [Kwantlen College](https://www.kpu.ca/news/2025/02/05/kpu-introduces-self-serve-braille-printer-university-and-community-use#:~:text=Use%20of%20the%20embosser%20is,Copyright%20Act's%20Fair%20Dealing%20guidelines.) and [braille printing info](https://www.kpu.ca/library/braille-printing)