

Tips on Buying a Braille Embosser

What to look and listen for (and who to listen to) when you're looking for an embosser to make good quality Braille

EMBOSSER SPEED RATINGS: CRACKING THE CODE

LISTEN for the brief pause in the normal sound of embossing as the machine moves to a new sheet of paper. Glance at your watch's second hand during this momentary pause, and look again at the next similar pause, and you have just measured the actual speed of the embosser. Speed ratings by manufacturers often involve complex calculations requiring wild guesses about line length and number of lines per page. When you time the interval between sheet changes during an embosser demonstration, you are learning the ACTUAL speed at which the machine embosses a page. Say the interval between pauses is ten seconds. That means the embosser in question can produce about six pages per minute, or roughly 360 pages per hour. This is a meaningful measurement for people who want to know how long it will take for their important work to get done.

Incidentally, a ten-second page could mean the machine is capable of roughly 100 characters per second, assuming it operates on only one side of paper at a time. Double-sided embossers must finish a sheet in roughly twenty seconds to achieve a similar speed. In any case, if you can time or even count to yourself to estimate time per page, you'll know more than the brochures or even the periodical reviews tell you about how fast it is really.

LOOK FOR SMALL CRACKS IN THE DOTS

Those small visible cracks tell you that the dots are as high as they CAN be without tearing the paper. If you want to see well-formed dots for the sake of comparison, examine a sample made on a Perkins mechanical Braille in good condition. These well-formed, uniform dots constitute the standard for the industry. You will see tiny cracks in these dots where tiny pockets of the paper are trapped for an instant against a pin, which creates the actual shape of the dot. Dots without small visible cracks are probably made too quickly or with too little impact. In any case, they are likely to weaken or disappear over time. The same can be said for dots which are misformed by poking holes all the way through the paper. This can lend a jagged or scuffed feel to the Braille.

When in doubt about the quality of a Braille sample, show it to a Braille reader and listen carefully. It takes training to prepare a visual inspector to recognize good, uniform, clear Braille. But for the person who reads it tactually for information purposes, no training is needed. It's either clear and uniform, or it isn't, and most any Braille reader can tell you right away which is true.

AVOID CARELESS DRIVERS WHEN CROSSING THE BRAILLEROAD

A driver in this context is a program designed to feed information directly to an embosser from a Windows program such as Microsoft Word. The trouble is that such drivers tend to scramble and misformat the text instead of presenting clear, easy-to-read Braille. How would you feel if someone handed you a business card which said: ???-(((?!?{

This is how our toll free number reads in Braille when presented in untranslated computer Braille. Strangely enough, the reader might eventually figure it out, but he or she would certainly be placed at a disadvantage in the meantime.

A Braille translator costs money, just like a print word processor, but when the job needs to look right, free Braille printer drivers simply aren't up to the challenge.