Proto Labs' Latest Cool Idea! Could Improve Quality of Life for 37 Million People Without Sight

MAPLE PLAIN, Minn. – The latest deserving idea to receive the Proto Labs Cool Idea! [1]Award, is a Braille labeler by Silicon Valley-based innovation laboratory 6dot [2]. The labeler aims to solve a persistent challenge among the 37 million people around the world without sight: identifying everyday objects. To a blind person, navigating familiar environments can be a tremendous obstacle, as objects such as cans of food (is it chicken soup or dog food?) and medicine containers can feel indistinguishable from each other. 6dots labeler uses an embossing mechanism to create adhesive labels with Braille characters to help people without sight maneuver more easily in their environments.
The portable, elegant design of the 6dot Braille Labeler has made it popular with testers and users alike. 6dot hopes that beyond helping people without sight navigate everyday environments, the device will also have an impact on improving the Braille literacy rate. Braille literacy rates, currently hovering at an all-time low of around 20 percent, are linked to high rates of unemployment. The intuitive, lightweight design of the labeler opens the door for children to learn Braille at a younger age by giving them a tool they can manage. Early Braille literacy has a positive correlation to employment among the blind and visually impaired later in life.

"We were inspired by the potential and simplicity of 6dots product," said Proto Labs founder and CTO Larry Lukis. "Not only does it break down access barriers to Braille education, but it also helps millions of people without sight get around with greater ease and convenience. We were eager to offer our injection-molding services to a cool product idea with an even cooler vision behind it."

"Wed heard good things about Proto Labs through the Silicon Valley hardware development community, so we knew wed found a good fit when we discovered the Proto Labs Cool Idea! program," said 6dot CEO and founder Karina Pikart. "We believe in using engineering and design to stamp out limitations that dont need to be there in the first place. Our labeler, through the help of the Cool Idea! program, has the potential to help millions of people learn Braille sooner and navigate everyday life more easily."

Cool Idea! Award [3] is an award program offered by Proto Labs that gives product designers the opportunity to bring innovative products to life. In 2012, Proto Labs expanded the programs reach [4] to include the European Union, and is now offering up to $250,000 of prototyping and short-run production services. For more information, visit www.protolabs.com/coolidea [1].

About Proto Labs
Proto Labs is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of low-volume CNC-machined and injection molded custom parts for prototyping and

short-run production. The company provides "Real Parts, Really Fast" to product developers worldwide and has two quick-turn services in North America, Europe and Japan: Firstcut (www.firstcut.com [5]) CNC machining and Protomold (www.protomold.com [6]) injection molding. Both are capable of providing parts in as fast as one business day. Product developers who use Proto Labs for prototypes and short-run production can upload a 3D CAD file at any one of Proto Labs online sites, get an interactive quotation and place an order for Proto Labs services directly online. For more information, visit: www.protolabs.com [7].

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