

# Case Study



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Michael and Daniel Smith



Michael and  
Daniel Smith  
Students

In 2009, Michael Smith first noticed changes in his sight; “My symptoms came on suddenly – one day I was in a lecture and I could not make out the projector in front of me, it was really hazy,” he explains. Having lost 70%-80% of sight in his left eye within a matter of weeks, he was forced to leave university and discontinue his first year studying Medicine at the London School of Medicine. Following his decline in sight, Michael’s diagnosis was slow; however, after a genetic test Michael was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition called ‘Leber’s Optic Neuropathy’.

Unfortunately, less than a year later, his twin brother Dan suffered the same fate whilst in his second year of studying Aeronautical Engineering at the University of Bristol. Although devastating for Dan, he was able to continue his studies due to the experience and awareness his brother had gained in previous months. At least now the brothers knew which technology was available, how to access it and the processes required, thanks to organisations such as Sight and Sound Technology.

Dan Smith commented: "The most important thing after devastating sight loss is being aware of what technology there is at the cutting edge to help make life efficient and independent again. I was immediately put in touch with Sight and Sound Technology where advice was given to me on the leading assistive technology available to enable me to continue my studies with as little disruption as possible."

### Challenges

On Good Friday, 6th April 2012, identical twin brothers Michael and Dan Smith, aged 20, cycled tandem, the 570km from London to Amsterdam to raise funds for UK charity, Blind in Business. The route started with the trip from London to Calais on day one, onto Gent, Rotterdam and Amsterdam over the course of four days. Michael and Dan were guided through their route by five sighted guides, all medical students at Barts London School of Medicine. After various problems to overcome such as punctures, broken chains, swollen knees and illnesses, as well as the boys falling from their cycle on Day three, the boys completed their challenge, raising over £16,000 for the charity.

Dan remarked: "The thinking behind the challenge was to divert attention away from our predicament but also to raise money to help others in a similar situation. The challenge was far tougher than expected, with freezing conditions, dehydration and sickness on my part but I feel that helping others when you yourself are in need gets you through tough times."

Glenn Tookey, Managing Director at Sight and Sound Technology said: "It is a privilege to work with such inspirational boys; we are very proud to have sponsored them for the race and will continue to support them in the future."

### The Sight and Sound Technology Solution

In order to gain access to a range of assistive technologies, Blind in Business directed Michael and Dan towards Sight and Sound Technology. As leaders in cutting-edge technology to aid the visually impaired, Sight and Sound Technology were able to give the boys the help they needed with support from their highly skilled trainers and technical support desk. Matt at Sound and Sight Technology has been training Michael ever since in using technology and software programmes such as JAWS (screen reader software), ZoomText (screen magnifier software), TOPAZ (desktop magnification) and Kurzweil 1000 (text to speech software and scanner). Daniel also uses similar technology with the addition of PEARL and Openbook, a text to speech software and capture solution.

Michael Smith commented: "At first I struggled to adjust to life without my sight; it was very difficult to come to terms with it all, but with the help and support of Blind in Business and Sight and Sound Technology, the transition has been made a lot easier. Dan and I are happy that we could take part in the bike race to thank the organisations for their hard work."

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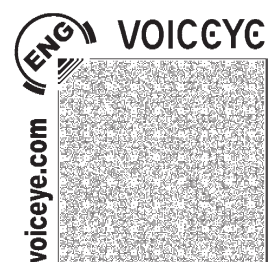
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