

First I want to thank you for taking time to gather input from the actual user community regarding Blind/VI/blind-deaf access to cell phones. I believe that the current state of access is in something of a crisis, and am therefore glad to see you directing your attention to this matter.

To give you a brief synopsis of my background, my experience with cell phone access is fairly extensive. Beginning in 2007, I used a Windows mobile phone with Code-Factory's Mobilespeak screen reader for two years. I then used an iPhone for approximately a year and three months. Unfortunately, due to a recent move, I had to change cell providers and thus abandon the iPhone, so am currently using the Motorola Droid 2, an Android device.

In today's mobile environment, I believe that the iPhone offers the only truly accessible option for blind/VI users. Not only is the phone 100% accessible via speech and touch, it also supports the use of Braille displays. No other provider can currently claim this last. This in and of itself is a problem. If, like me, you are unable to have AT&T as your mobile carrier, you are left with a pretty miserable array of choices if you are blind. Verizon, arguably the largest carrier in the U.S., does not currently have an accessible phone. While Android does offer some access, much functionality continues to be inaccessible. This includes access to the touch screen, to information such as the date, time, battery status, and signal strength, as well as to the native web browser and email client. While the messaging client is accessible using Talk Back it is not currently possible to do any editing of text that you have typed, which presents a real problem if the phone is being used in professional communication. Sadly, Google's response to all this has been to hire a blind engineer who is designing some special blind apps. While this may appear to be a good solution, it is not. These apps always have more limited functionality than their native counterparts, and they create a blind ghetto, separating blind users from the mainstream, and making it virtually impossible for us to interact around our phones with sighted peers or colleagues. Though I and others have made repeated pleas for Google to make native applications accessible, they have so far paid no heed to our requests. Having had the pleasure of using an iPhone, it is my opinion that Android accessibility is sorely lacking at this time.

Similarly, Microsoft has shown no interest in making the new Windows 7 mobile platform accessible. In fact, as I understand it, Code Factory has made repeated attempts to engage Microsoft around this issue, as it is in their business interest to continue to sell screen-readers for Windows Mobile devices. According to posts I have seen from Code Factory's Caroline Ragot, Microsoft has so far refused to cooperate with them, so at this time, there will not be an accessible Windows Mobile option for blind users, and those currently holding MobileSpeak licenses are left without an upgrade path, so will be forced to let their licenses collect dust, while they switch to other operating systems.

In addition to these problems with the operating systems, phone manufacturers frequently "break" access that has been built into the OS. One example of this can be found on the Droid 2. While the

option to set individual ringtones for contacts is accessible within Android, Motorola reworked the Contacts app, and rendered this feature inaccessible. While this may not seem significant, when you can't see the caller ID, the option to set individual ringtones is a great way to alert a blind user to the identity of the caller. Though many phones do have a spoken caller id option, if you carry your phone in a purse, backpack, or briefcase, it is easy to miss a spoken ID, so an individual ringtone is often much more practical.

Another issue which I believe must be addressed is that of cost. Screen readers such as MobileSpeak or Oratio for Blackberry typically cost around \$500, in addition to the cost of purchasing the phone. This is untenable, and frankly ridiculous, given the rapid rate at which mobile technology evolves and changes. Many blind people continue to be un- or under employed, so without state or federal assistance are simply unable to afford such a high price tag. Additionally, while a sighted user can switch at will from Blackberry, to an iphone, to an Android device, once one has shelled out \$500 for a screen-reader, one is for all practical purposes locked into that particular operating system. And then, of course, one can end up in the situation described above, wherein after spending the \$500--or more if they have also paid for upgrades--they find that the OS is no longer accessible, and their current license is completely useless.

I would personally like to see the FCC hold all parties--those responsible for the operating system, the phone manufacturers, and the cellular providers--responsible for making their phones fully accessible, as Apple has already done. If this is not viable, I would suggest that every carrier needs to offer at least one fully accessible phone option, and that the access should be provided at no additional cost to the blind consumer, again, following apple's model. Apple has shown that this can be done, and as I see it, there is therefore absolutely no excuse for others not to implement the same level of accessibility.

Again, thank you for taking the time to read my comments.