

I am commenting both as a hard of hearing/visually impaired cell phone user and as a volunteer for the American Association of the Deaf-Blind.

More and more people are using pagers and cell phones these days. Many hard of hearing people who are blind or have low vision can use hearing aid compatible cell phones. Deaf and hard of hearing people can use cell phones or pagers that have text message capability. However, some cell phones are more compatible than others. We want to have a choice of cell phones and providers that will meet our needs. Some of us are limited to a few companies that can provide the types of service plans that we need. For example, I have had to purchase a more expensive plan with one company because the handset I purchased from that company had a handset that was more compatible for my hearing loss. Anyone should be able to purchase the handset and the service plan that meets their needs for accessibility and affordability. A hearing person can buy a cell phone for 10 or 20 dollars. Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind people have to buy phones that cost anywhere from 40 dollars to several hundred dollars to have their accessibility needs met.

Also, many cell phone handsets are not accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired because the cell phone buttons are too small to see easily or at all, and many do not have voice recordings that will help pick the options they need. The voice recordings, if available, would not help those who cannot hear the recordings clearly enough to understand them. While fonts on cell phones and pagers can be enlarged up to 14 point bold, that is still not big enough for many low vision people (some of whom are deaf or hard of hearing) to use.

I would like to see the following options added to cell phones:

Freedom of choice for cell phones/pagers and service plans, tactile buttons, screen magnification software so that people can enlarge the font to the sizes they prefer (at no cost, ability to adjust contrast to meet vision needs (e.g., change from a white background with black text to a black background with yellow text), enlarged buttons on cell phone handsets, voice recognition software (for those who can benefit from audio recordings)--at no cost, other necessary add ons provided at no cost and training of sales representatives so they are aware of these features and can assist customers who want to purchase phones.

Thanks for giving us all an opportunity to comment on cell phone accessibility.