

My name is James Ansley, and I am blind.

I hold four university degrees, including a Ph.D., and I am a licensed psychologist.

I have worked as a senior administrator in higher education institutions and as an organizational consultant and public policy analyst for educational, governmental, and business organizations.

I am also the principal author of "Access to Airline Self-Service Kiosk Systems" (Washington, DC: National Council on Disability, 2006), a policy monograph commissioned by the Council as advisory to Congress and the Department of Transportation.

I am conversant in PC technology, as well as in campus-based IT (including IP, Wi-Fi/Max, ITMs, Web-based transactions, instructional and social media, and audio/video streaming and podcasting).

I have employed mobile phone technology for approximately the past eight years for both professional and personal communication purposes.

Although my personal wireless-mobile provider (AT&T, formerly Cingular) has been reliable throughout my customer experience, the company has proven unable to provide more than rudimentary access to a succession of mobile devices (from various manufacturers) that I have purchased through its outlets. All features of these devices, with the exception of the on-off, volume, call-answer, and direct-dial functions, have been inaccessible. I have not been able even to check battery or signal strength on these devices without sighted assistance.

I would note, however, that AT&T has given me use throughout of its excellent, albeit insufficient for my purposes, Voice Dial service free of charge.

Until relatively recently, AT&T and other service providers I have surveyed, have provided no means of access to their mobile devices to the blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired community that did not require purchase of both expensive hardware and software. Before texting and Web access became commonplace via mobile devices, I thought, "Why should I have to pay three hundred dollars or more just to make and receive phone calls??"

Moreover, near constant introduction of new services and devices (sometimes requiring newer types of SIM cards) would place me, as a consumer, in the unenviable position of needing to pay for yet newer devices and software with each service-contract renewal.

And now that AT&T and Verizon have placed devices on the market that come with built-in access features, the iPhone and the Haven respectively, I find myself confronted with the decision whether to upgrade to a more costly device and service plan from AT&T or to switch to a lower cost device with an unfamiliar service plan from another carrier, Verizon, with which I have had no customer experience.

My published investigation of access to airline self-service kiosk technology revealed that most of the cost of making information technology accessible is modest, up front, and nonrecurring. This fact has been demonstrated repeatedly in the banking and general-merchandise industries, where access to ATM and POS devices is fast becoming ubiquitous. I suspect, therefore, that providers of wireless mobile services and devices would have much the same experience once an industry-wide commitment to universal accessibility was made.

With respect to the airline industry's self-service kiosk technology, engineers from kiosk manufacturers told me repeatedly that access technology for their devices was readily available but that it would not be incorporated into the devices until the manufacturers were assured of a market within the airline industry. I would speculate that engineers from wireless-mobile device manufacturers would have a similar market-informed perspective.

Finally, I would share with the FCC some recent thoughts from Representative Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) that cut to the core of this matter. "Whether it's a Braille reader or a broadband connection, access to technology is not a political issue -- it's a participation issue. We've moved from Braille to broadcast, from broadband to the BlackBerry. We've moved from spelling letters in someone's palm to the PalmPilot. And we must make all of these devices accessible."