

I am continually disappointed with the lack of off-the-shelf accessibility of cell phones. Any sighted person can walk in to any cell phone store and purchase whatever phone he or she deems viable given finances, usage, etc. Someone who is blind or visually impaired, however, has no such free choice. If one wants an out-of-box, off-the-shelf, no software extras needed phone that is already accessible, one only has one choice: the iPhone from Apple. This also forces one to go with a particular mobile phone service provider. And regardless of what kind of phone someone purchases in-store, it is usually a smart phone with many extra capabilities which most companies have now chosen to charge extra data rates for, even if the blind person is unable to use those features given no other form of access or given greatly limited and tedious access sometimes experienced with accessible software. Rumor has it that some companies offer exceptions to these charges, but I repeatedly asked last time I went for a phone upgrade, and no one knew anything about it.

Let's say that I don't want, or can't afford, an iPhone. I can purchase another phone, but not be able to accomplish any of the things with it, besides make outgoing calls by entering in the digits (no addressbook use) and receive incoming calls (but not know who it is until one answers do to lack of caller id accessibility). This is a grave disservice to people with blindness and visual impairments. As people with disabilities, we are at greater risk in emergency situations. More and more, text messaging is being used to disseminate emergency alerts.

This lack of access to this information could prove dangerous.

If one doesn't want an iPhone, but still wants an accessible phone, one must purchase a screen reader to install on the phone which is \$300 on top of the initial cost of the phone and whatever other charges one may incur such as data rates. AT&T has partnered with the manufacturers of one such screen reader to lower the price to \$90 as the additional cost. However, this offer is only good if you choose one of 3 or 4 specific phones.

This is certainly not free choice! As someone on a fixed income, I understand all-too-well how hard it would be to pay \$300 above and beyond to use a cell phone for accessibility. However, partnering with the company to be able to have this offer is a very strong incentive for people to go with that particular screen reader even if the person much prefers the other which then would be more expensive.

On the iPhone, many, if not all, apps are accessible. On other phones, it seems as if we should be grateful that we can access caller ID, be able to set our phones on vibrate, text message, and access the addressbook. Simple phone functionality is only the bare bones of how most sighted people use their phones now.

There are so many ways in which cell phones are being used for personal and business purposes including GPS and other applications which are almost never accessible with the third-party screen reader mentioned above.

I thank you for hearing our comments. I am so happy to see the FCC take an interest in assisting the telecommunications industry realize what a disservice they perform when they do not consider the needs of people with disabilities. We are a very large population who relies on technology more so than even sighted people as many of us cannot resort to using pen and paper. Please help us express our right to equal access.