

I work with people who are visually impaired, and these are the issues they have with cell phones:

Buttons are too small to dial by touch.

Buttons are too close together, so the person cannot tell where one ends and one begins.

The display is too small and the screen does not have enough contrast.

Not all phones have voice dial capability, or people have to pay a monthly fee to have voice dial capability.

People aren't even told about voice dial when they purchase a phone.

Buttons have poor contrast (black or red writing on a gray background, for example, instead of white on black or black on white).

Tactile "bumps" on buttons are not pronounced enough.

People cannot independently set up/edit contacts without purchasing a separate screen reader for the phone, which is expensive (with the exception of the iPhone and the new Samsung Haven, which have a screen reader built in).

People do not know how to figure out which phone they should buy (I am commonly contacted for this purpose). I advise people to ask to see the phone that the provider has for senior citizens (for example, Verizon has the Samsung Knack), since these usually have the largest keys and large print displays. I also go to the provider's website and do a search for "voice dial" and then see which ones can be dialed by voice and also have the largest, high contrast buttons.

Sales representatives do not know which phones to recommend, how to access the voice dial features of the phone (or in the case of phones with speech built in, do not know how to activate the speech, or train blind people to use the speech, or refer them to someone who can help them learn to use the phone with the built in screen reader).

Manuals are available online now, so that is good for people who are computer savvy, but most of our clients are not (we tend to work with a lot of senior citizens). Having a quick reference guide on CD (and maybe the option to get it in large print) would be fantastic.

I have had a problem finding manuals for some phones that are detailed enough to provide instructions for tweaking the voice capabilities of a phone. For example, I had a client who had an LG phone through Tracfone, and they only had a quick reference guide that did not explain how to use various functions within the menus. I searched online for hours and even called Tracfone, and no one could ever provide a real manual.

That's all I can think of for the moment. I'm sure you will get lots of feedback from National Federation of the Blind. Thank you so much for taking the time to ask about this.