

I am visually impaired and have numb fingers from about 40 years of juvenile-onset, brittle diabetes. Here is my personal experience with cellphones.

When I phoned Verizon, asking for a cellphone that was suitable for a person with low vision, they passed me around three departments in a circle; I kept hoping they'd pass me to someone who could help, so I did the circuit several times. None of them knew which phones were useful for persons with low vision. I visited two Verizon stores; the clerks had no suggestions. A blind person's review on the internet pointed me toward an Lg phone, which I purchased and have had for years.

I use the phone in "Driving Mode," where it gives some vocal cues and takes some voice commands. Between my numb fingers, low vision, and the phone's incapacity to perform fully through speech, I use few of its features. I cannot find the numerical keypad, since those keys are surrounded by other, abutting keys, and I cannot feel the nub on the five that is supposed to distinguish it. Thus, a sighted person has to input any numbers I want stored in the contact list. If I have three entries for one person on my contact list, such as their home, work, and cellphone numbers, the verbal commands only let me access two of the entries. To call someone who is not on my contact list, I can say, "digit dial," and speak a phone number, but only if I can speak the number without pauses, which can be difficult. Since the phone contains no list of all possible verbal commands, I had the phone for years before I found out I could ask it, "Time and Date?" I have never used the "text messaging" function, since this phone does not allow that to be done verbally, either in preparing messages or receiving messages.

More irksome, I cannot make a timely response to voice mail. The phone will tell me I have Voice Mail. It will connect me to Verizon's Voice Mail service. But to access my messages, I need to input numbers on a keypad, so I have to wait until I can get to a landline phone with a normal keypad.

At home, on my land line, I receive free 411. I asked Verizon Wireless if I can get free information on my wireless plan, and they said that's not possible. I heard about the phone number that gives access to free information calls and have tried it twice on my cellphone. It appears to be a number that makes you listen to ads before taking your 411 request. then it provides options, from which you can make a verbal choice. It would not recognize my answer and kept circling through the choices and other menus, frustrating me until I either was shouting my choices or hung up. One of those two tries, I finally received the phone number I had requested, but it ate many minutes of my limited plan. If the blind can sign up for free 411 on land lines, I don't see why they can't register and, perhaps through a password, have access on mobile phones.

Recently, I lost all useful vision. My next phone must be one the blind can use entirely through verbal commands and the phone's vocal features. Since my LG phone is old, I've been trying to keep up on news of which phones will serve best. The latest I heard about over email is the Samsung Haven

which I could obtain through Verizon, and I have corresponded with a Verizon representative. I told him about my numb fingers and my history with the LG phone. He mentioned the Haven had "no digit dial." that could be interpreted to mean it doesn't have the feature I need or it does. I decided to look on the internet for the Samsung Haven's features, but gave up when I couldn't locate any site that listed or described the Haven's features. I'll try again in a month or so.

I am surely only one of many blind persons with numbness from neuropathy or other causes. Buttons that give vocal feedback so the user knows which button is being pressed, and vocal functions for using all aspects of a cellphone would make phones accessible for persons in my situation. Buttons that are grouped, either separated from other keys or with a raised edge delineating the outer edge of the grouping would be helpful, making the number pad distinct from other keys. Being able to change the volume is important for privacy or politeness in various situations.

the computers and cameras in smart phones allow many opportunities to make the phones a multipurpose device for the blind. Other brands need to compete with Iphones in providing many functions the blind would find invaluable, including accessible GPS, currency readers, color identifiers, barcode readers, and scanners.

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