

Group protests Kindle e-reader's read-aloud limits

April 7 2009, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer



(AP) -- A group representing the blind and other people with disabilities protested limitations to the new read-aloud feature on Amazon.com Inc.'s latest Kindle electronic reader Tuesday, arguing that the restrictions unfairly limit their access to e-books.

The feature, which reads text in a stiff-sounding electronic voice, is still available for all [books](#) on the new Kindle, which was unveiled in February. But the Authors Guild has expressed concern that the feature will hurt sales of audio books, so Amazon plans to give publishers and authors the ability to silence the text-to-speech function for their books.

That is what prompted the newly formed Reading Rights Coalition, whose supporters include the National Federation of the Blind and the

American Association of People with Disabilities, to stage what it called an "informational protest" outside the office of the Authors Guild in New York.

The protesters shouted "We want access sooner" and "Stop the greed, we want to read."

Marc Maurer, president of the National Federation of the Blind, said the protest was the first of several to come around the country, in the hopes that Amazon will change its stance. The group started with the Authors Guild because it "caused the trouble" with the text-to-speech feature, Maurer said.

The number of books Amazon has made available for the Kindle - more than 260,000 so far - is "huge" compared to the 50,000 to 60,000 books generally available through libraries for the blind, he said. It is not known how many of these Kindle books now have the text-to-speech feature disabled.

Maurer said he doesn't buy the notion that the feature could hurt sales of audio books. He said the function might even help audio book sales because "if you get a taste of it, you might want the other version," he said.

In a statement, the Authors Guild called the protest "unfortunate and unnecessary." The group reiterated an earlier suggestion that the Federation of the Blind take advantage of an exception to the Copyright Act that lets visually impaired people access audio versions of copyrighted books.

"Technology makes this step easy: Certified users of existing Kindles could activate their devices online to enable access to voice-output versions of all [e-books](#). This process could be ready to go within weeks,"

the Guild said.

Amazon spokesman Drew Herdener said the company had no comment.

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Citation: Group protests Kindle e-reader's read-aloud limits (2009, April 7) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-group-protests-kindle-e-reader-read-aloud.html>

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