Amazon's Kindle to get audible menus, bigger font

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(AP) -- Amazon.com Inc. will add two features to the Kindle e-book reader to make the gadget more accessible to blind and vision-impaired users.

Monday's announcement comes a month after Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y., and the University of Wisconsin-Madison said they would not consider widely deploying the device until Amazon makes it easier for blind students to use. Both universities bought some Kindles to test this fall.

The Kindle has a read-aloud feature that could be a boon to blind

students and those with other disabilities including dyslexia, but turning it on requires navigating through screens of text menus.

Amazon said Monday it is working on audible menus, which would let the Kindle speak menu options out loud. It's also working on an extra-large font for people with impaired vision. The additions should reach the Kindle next summer, Amazon said.

Chris Danielsen, a spokesman for the National Federation of the Blind, said Monday that the organization doesn't know enough about the new features to say whether they adequately address concerns of the blind community. But, he said, it's a good sign Amazon is expressing commitment to improve the Kindle.

Amazon released this year the $489 Kindle DX, a large-screen model aimed at textbook and newspaper readers. Several colleges including Arizona State University are testing the gadget this academic year and sending feedback to the company.

The federation for the blind, which is based in Baltimore, teamed up with another advocacy group, the American Council of the Blind, to sue Arizona State in an attempt to block it from using the Kindle as a way to distribute electronic textbooks because the devices can't be used by blind students.

It also filed complaints with the Justice Department against five other schools participating in the Kindle trial with Amazon: Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va., Pace University in New York, Princeton University in Princeton, N.J., and Reed College in Portland, Ore.

Syracuse University and the University of Wisconsin were not among

the pilot-test schools.

Danielsen declined to comment when asked if Amazon's proposed changes would lead the federation to abandon its complaints.

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