Swiss scanners to help blind in the kitchen

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A blind trainee at a hi-tech call centre gets instructions from a supervisor in Moscow in 2009. Blind people in Switzerland will soon have help telling their ravioli from their tinned fruit in the kitchen as a new loud-speaking device able to decipher 50,000 products was launched Monday.

Blind people in Switzerland will soon have help telling their ravioli from their tinned fruit in the kitchen as a new loud-speaking device able to decipher 50,000 products was launched Monday.

"It is almost indispensable for a blind person who wants to live independently", the spokesman for the Swiss union for the blind that will sell the device, told AFP.

"Being blind myself, I can tell you that if you are in the kitchen and you want to open a tin of ravioli without running the risk of actually picking up some tinned fruit, it is absolutely necessary", Martin Mischler said.

The scanner, which uses speech synthesis, has the size and appearance of a small television remote control.

It is programmed to be able to read the barcodes of 50,000 products sold by leading Swiss retailer Migros, which collaborated on the launch of the device.

Some scanners will be available to use in Migros supermarkets.

"In future we can imagine that (the scanner) will also give the price or expiry date", Mischler said, who estimates only "a minority" of Switzerland's 20,000 blind and partially-sighted will use the device.

The union is in talks with other companies to enable to the scanner recognise a wider range of products.

The scanner will be available in March for 333 euros (453 dollars).

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