

Company offers first true smartphone for the blind (w/ Video)

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(Phys.org) -- British company Screenreader, has created what it calls the first true smartphone for the blind and those with vision impairments. While it's not actually a new smartphone, it's more a suite of apps that turn a conventional phone running Android into a new way to use the phone, it is a giant step forward for the visually impaired who have been left behind by the move from pushbutton phones to those that use touch screens. Instead of the usual mass of icons, the Georgie, as the company calls it, comes with a simple menu that offers auditory feedback and features that are important and useful to those who cannot see.

Developed by married couple Roger and Margaret Wilson-Hinds, who have also created talking computer applications for the blind, the Georgie takes what they've learned about computer applications and takes it on the road, providing real world useful applications such as telling the user which direction they are facing, or where the nearest bus stop is. The menus can be easily traversed by simply running the fingers across them, a voice calls out their function; settling on a menu option for an extra moment causes that function to launch. In like manner, calls can be placed by moving fingers over numbered buttons. The system has been thoroughly tested by the couple themselves, who are both blind (the name Georgie came from one of their guide dogs) and a group of other blind or visually impaired people.

Georgie can be purchased as a set of apps for those that already have a phone, or as a complete system, i.e. phones with preinstalled apps. It's being distributed by Sight and Sound Technologies. It comes with a single basic app that allows for performing functions such as dialing and voice dictation and has useful features such as "Places" that announce direction and can be loaded with known hazards such as low hanging tree branches or potholes. Users that wish to add functionality have three different apps packages to choose from. For those out and about a lot, there is a "Travelers" app that features "Near Me," which calls out place names such as restaurants, bus stops, stores, etc. along with weather reports. Another package called "Lifestyle" offers an ability to listen to newspaper and magazine articles or even whole books (while on the bus for example). The third app, called "Communicate" helps users connect socially by helping them record, translate to text and then send twitter or text messages.

All of this comes at a cost of course, with different pricing for different features. The basic app costs \$230 and each add-on adds an additional \$39. Most would consider this quite cheap however, as other systems total in the thousands and aren't nearly as mobile.

More information: www.screenreader.net/

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