Smartphone Apps

8 Great iOS Apps to Help Partially Sighted People

Today, there are dozens of specialist Smartphone apps available to assist a person who is Blind or partially sighted. There are also dozens of mainstream apps that are extremely useful. There are simply too many to list them all. However, the following 8 apps for your iPhone, could provide you with the tools to make life a whole lot easier!

1.   Seeing AI

Seeing AI, by Microsoft, consists of 9 main features known as 'Channels', as follows:

- Short Text Capture, where simply pointing your phone at a printed document, a sign on the wall etc. will result in the text being spoken.
- Document Scanner. You can scan a document and have it read back, save it and then send it via email.
- Bar Code Reader. This is really cool, as you point your phone at the product which contains a bar code, an audible sound is played when it's detected, a photo is taken and then the name of the product is announced. There's also an option for reading more information about the product, for example cooking instructions if a food product.
- Face Recognition. This feature allows you to take a photograph of a person and store it in the Photo Library. Then, when you point your device around a room for example, if the person you point your phone at is someone in the library, their name is announced.
- Currency Recognition. This feature allows you to identify British, US and Euro bank notes. Simply point your phone at the note, and the denomination will be announced.
- Scene Preview. This feature allows you to point your phone at a scene and then have it described to you. It's not 100% accurate, but does allow you to gain an understanding of the environment you are in.
- World. Still in development, this feature provides you with an overview of an environment using both Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality.
- Colour Detector. This feature tries its best to identify colours. You point your phone at the item and the built-in VD alerts you to the colour. Works best in good lighting conditions.

- Hand Writing Detection. This feature is still in its development. However, it allows you to read hand writing, as best as it can. Simply point your phone at the writing, take a photo and have the text announced!
- Light Detector. This feature allows you to determine the amount of light in the room. Point your phone at the light source and a tone will be omitted. The higher the pitch, the brighter the light! Ideal if you have no sight and want to know if the lights are on or off!

Seeing AI really is a must app for your device! It's the equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife for a Smartphone!

Once you have installed Seeing AI, you'll need to agree to Microsoft's license and then allow access to the camera on your device. Once you have done this, you are ready to explore the app!

Seeing AI is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 14.0 or later for this app to work.

2.   Be My Eyes

The Be My Eyes app allows a blind or partially sighted user of a Smartphone or Tablet to request sighted assistance to help them perform a wide range of tasks. For example, you might want to know the use by date on a bottle of milk, the content of a letter that has just come through the post, the location of something you have dropped on the floor and even assistance with mobility when you are out and about!

Be My Eyes works by connecting the user to a sighted helper via the internet. The rear facing camera on the users' device is then used by the sighted helper to see the surrounding area, therefore being able to support the person. Hence the name, 'Be My Eyes'!

Be My Eyes is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 13.6 or later for this app to work.

VD Scan

VD Scan allows you to scan printed documents with the rear-facing camera and then have the text read aloud using built-in text-to-speech.

VD Scan uses state-of-the-art AI (Artificial Intelligence) for OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and text recognition. It's fast and accurate, even in poor lighting conditions. It works entirely on your device, so there's no need for an internet connection.

You can export scanned documents as plain text or PDF with embedded text to another app, or save them on your device, iCloud, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

Additional Features Include:

- Automatic detection of document edges for stretching and cropping.
- Automatic detection of document orientation and auto rotate.

- Automatic image enhancement.
- Batch mode for scanning multiple pages quickly.
- Spoken words are highlighted in the text or the image.

VD Scan costs £8.99 and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 14.0 or later for this app to work. This is a must app for your device if you intend to read lots of printed documents!

4.   Prizmo Go

Prizmo Go is a high quality OCR (Optical Character Recognition) app. Using the rear-facing camera on your Smartphone, you aim at the text and then take a photo. Once the text has been recognised, it's automatically read aloud. There are options for changing the reading VD, changing the reading speed and playing and pausing the reading. There's also an option for translating the text into another language! All in all, this is an excellent and reliable app.

Prizmo Go is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 14.0 or later for this app to work.

5.   Trainline

The Trainline app is a superb and easy to use app for planning your train journeys. The interface is very simple, with one box into which you type your starting station and the other into which you type your destination station. When you perform the search, a list of train times is displayed and there's also an option for viewing the intermediate stations on the journey.

Other features include an option for reversing the most recent journey, choosing a specific date and time of travel, a history of journeys you have planned in the past and even options for finding out the price of a ticket and purchasing it! The Trainline app is one which you should definitely install onto your device if you use the trains regularly!

Trainline is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 14.0 or later for this app to work.

6.   UK Live Train Times

The UK Live Train Times app is a simple app that displays live train information in a list format. It displays the time the train is due to leave/arrive, whether or not it is delayed and the all-important platform number. You can easily create a list of favourite stations and access them at the tap of a button.

UK Live Train Times also allows you to see where each train currently is, where it has stopped and at what time. It also displays a list of intermediate stations on the journey.

UK Live Train Times is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 13.0 or later for this app to work.

7.   Lazarillo

Lazarillo is a specialized GPS app that includes mobility tools for blind and partially sighted people. Using audio messages, Lazarillo will inform you of nearby places, the street you are walking on, road junctions and more! Lazarillo will announce the places around you as you move around. This app was designed and implemented with active feedback from blind and partially sighted people. The GPS resource is used even if the App is in the background. This allows the user to keep using the app without active usage of the screen, so that they can still enjoy the features of Lazarillo even when their phone is in their pocket or when using other apps.

Lazarillo allows you to use its accessibility functions for free, it just requires a mobile data or a Wi-Fi connection. It contains the following features:

- Exploration: Provides your actual position, nearby places, and street intersections whilst you are walking on the pavement, sitting on a bus or travelling by car.
- Category searches: Allows you to find nearby places from a specific category such as banks, health, food, shops, art, entertainment, etc.
- Specific searches: Allows you to find a route to any place using your VD or the keyboard.

Lazarillo is a free app and is available from the App Store. Your device needs to be running iOS 13.0 or later for this app to work.

8.   Magnifier

The Magnifier app is built-in to the iPhone and iPad. It turns the display on your device into a hand-held magnifier! You can freeze the image, change the background and foreground colours and adjust the size of magnification right up to 10 times the original size.

This app is ideal when out and about, for example when you are at the Supermarket and you want to read the ingredients on a food item. It's also great for reading menu's and train tickets!

You can quickly open the Magnifier app on your iPhone or iPad by asking Siri to "Open Magnifier". Alternatively, it can be found in the Accessibility section of the Settings app or in the Control Centre.

For further information on these apps and others, please contact Gary Eady, Access Technology Trainer at Sight For Surrey, using the following email address:

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