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Smartphone Apps Provide Assistive Technology for Disabled

by Misty Faucheux

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Smartphones have been a blessing for people with disabilities for many reasons. Smartphone applications allow us to figure out where we are via the GPS system or get directions to where we want to go. And now, disabled people can use them as assistive technology to comparison shop by checking out the prices for a competing store on a needed or wanted item.

Smartphones and Disability: Good Match

Smartphones applications are getting more useful for people with disabilities. The new mobile app allows users to scan labels in grocery or retail stores using their smartphone camera. Once the item has been scanned, the phone will not only tell users if the price is right, but also it will also tell what the item is and read information off of the nutrition label.

The assistive technology works on pill bottles as well. Further, if a smartphone has a GPS locator, it can provide directions to the visually impaired or blind.

All smartphones and many mobile PC phones with imbedded software can use these apps, but the phone must have a built-in camera. The most popular phones on which this assistive technology app can be used are the iPhone and Google Android OS phones. Many of these phones, including the iPhone, can be purchased at discount retailers like Walmart.

Disability Apps for Shopping

The most popular apps for the iPhone and Google's Android phones are the [ShopSavvy](#) and [Good Guide](#), which includes scores for health, environment and social responsibility. Both of these apps are free to download and use. For the moment, there does not seem to be a scanning app for BlackBerry, but that may change in the near future.

Barcode Scanning Threat

There is one caveat to the barcode scanning capabilities. Many stores do not like consumers scanning products in their stores, especially if the goal is for comparison shopping. For example, a Michigan Target store recently requested that a shopper stop scanning the items since it was against store policy.

However, a follow-up to the store manager said she'd never heard of the policy and shoppers were welcome to scan items. Moral of the story: always ask for a manager if you get hassled, and write down their name.

It is expected that once this technology catches on, it will be available for a variety of applications, including finding the nutrition information for fast food restaurants.

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