

Accessibility Features of the iPhone 6 and iOS 8

By: Rachel Goldstein

Apple just put its two new iPhone models, the iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus, on the market and introduced the Apple Watch, which is set to be released in early 2015. Built-in accessibility features and the ability to download thousands of specialized apps have made the iPhone a popular smartphone choice amongst people with disabilities for the last few years. The new operating system, iOS 8, for iPhone, iPad and iPod touch was also just released and offers some new possibilities for users with disabilities. With the recent release of the new iPhones, as well as iOS 8, it is important to explore the assistive features that enhance the devices' usability for people with disabilities.

We all have heard the saying 'bigger is better' and that may just be the case when it comes to the new iPhone. The new iPhones are in a league of their own from prior models because of the phones size and larger, more advanced display. The iPhone 6 is 4.7 inches and the iPhone 6 Plus is 5.5 inches. A new feature called Display Zoom, allows the user to increase the size of specific content, between 100 and 500 percent, to take advantage of the larger screen size. Instead of zooming in on the whole screen, as the existing accessibility feature offers, Display Zoom allows users to increase the size of icons and buttons, and also provides larger target areas for tapping, which is a particularly useful feature for individuals who have low vision. The iPhone 6 Plus also allows for the landscape view so users can make the most out of the bigger screen.

A feature called VoiceOver, an advanced screen reader, is a great tool for people who are blind or have low vision. When VoiceOver is enabled you can turn the screen off and operate your iPhone by hearing a description of *everything* that is on your screen, from which app you are touching to your battery level to reading an article you have open in a browser. When composing an email, a note or a calendar entry, VoiceOver repeats each character on the keyboard when you touch it and will speak each completed word. VoiceOver works with all of the iPhone's built-in apps and Apple is working with developers to help make more apps compatible with VoiceOver. The iPhones also support more than 40 wireless braille displays.

For those who have a hard time reading, Speak Selection can be used to read email, iMessages, web pages and books aloud by highlighting text and tapping Speak. The language and speaking rate can also be adjusted. For people who have difficulty with processing or writing, Apple's iOS 8 has upgraded its keyboard for the first time and will include a built in predictive keyboard called QuickType. This new software keyboard will predict words for the user as they type and allows text to be entered more easily.

If you have trouble touching the screen or pressing the buttons, a helpful change is that users no longer have to touch the home button on the iPhone in order to access Siri. Say something like "Hey Siri, tell John I'm running late" and Siri will send the message. Siri is

now incorporated with VoiceOver so you can ask where the nearest movie theater is and hear the answer read out loud without having to touch anything. AssistiveTouch is another feature that can help you use your iPhone without requiring hand or multiple-finger movement and instead use a single finger or even a stylus you're holding in your teeth or fist. You can customize your device to meet your unique physical needs, for example if you have difficulty pressing the Home button, you can customize it to activate with an onscreen tap or shake.

With Guided Access, you can restrict an iOS device to a single app to help improve focus on a task and you can control which app features are available and even limit the amount of time spent in an app which can be helpful to people with autism or other attention and sensory disabilities.

An innovative feature that may help people with chronic conditions live more independently is the new Health app. iOS 8 is taking big steps to help people manage and improve their health by allowing users to input data into the health app through third-party health and fitness monitoring devices like a blood pressure or heart rate reader. The new Health app is a one stop app that puts all of this data in one place, can be accessed with a tap, and gives a complete overview of your health. Significantly, you can also create an emergency card with important health information – for example your allergies, blood type, and health history that is available from your lock screen. The data from the Health app can be automatically shared with a health care professional to help ensure timely and appropriate care. For example, if a blood pressure or glucose reading was outside of a normal range, a doctor could be automatically alerted.

These are only some of the assistive features that can be used to enhance the usability of the new iPhone for people with disabilities. The new iPhone 6, iPhone 6 Plus and iOS 8 offer the latest platform for assistive technology and are building on existing accessibility features to offer countless possibilities for users with disabilities. While the new iPhones are in demand, my hope is that users with disabilities will find they are in fact bigger AND better.