Qualcomm Introduces Android Smartphone for the Blind, Ray

An Android app [1] for the blind called Georgie that uses gesture, voice recognition and haptics has already been developed by a UK couple, but consists of one £149 app and a series of add-ons to get the functions a user is after. Qualcomm, in collaboration with Project Ray [2] (which designs accessibility tools for around 285 million blind and visually impaired people), is looking to develop one "off-the-shelf" Snapdragon-powered Android device which has all these functions embedded and ready to go.

Chief executive of Project Ray, Boaz Zilberman said the user interface presents a "new language for human-device interaction that is built ground-up for eye-free operation".

Users can, he explained, start any process by touching any spot on the screen. Finger gestures then allow them to navigate to their desired function, while haptic vibrations and voice alerts let them know if they are on the right track and give choices. The device is built to learn the habits and preferences of the user over time to make the user experience more fluid, fast and natural.

It offers all the usual services you'd find on a smartphone -- phone calls, texts, social networking and navigation -- but Qualcomm and Project Ray are also working with Israel's Central Library for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Handicapped to include access to an impressive catalogue of audio books.

"Audio-books, magazines and periodicals are an important method for accessing information for blind and visually impaired people, but the current system requires renting items by mail, which is not timely," said the library's chief executive, Amos Beer. "Subscribers [the library currently has 10,000] can now use Ray devices to easily access and download audio assets from the library over an advanced mobile broadband network, rather than waiting to receive CD copies."

The smartphone is currently being trialled in Israel, with 100 people across the country using the device.

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Links:
[1] http://mashable.com/2012/07/17/android-app-for-blind-smartphone-users/

[2] http://www.project-ray.com/