How assistive technology can help blind and partially sighted people at work

In London, 200,000 people are blind or partially sighted. They use computers, phones and other electronic devices just as much as sighted people do, and they're often supported by assistive technology. This means things like magnifiers, screen readers and voice recorders.

Vision Foundation
London's sight loss charity

Assistive technology for sight loss

Each person's needs are different. When working on a computer, some people simply use a larger monitor, bigger fonts and icons, or a different colour scheme. Others use magnification software to zoom in to a small part of the screen, and some have text read out by the computer.

Devices like smart phones, iPads and Kindles often have integrated features that help those with a visual impairment, such as font enlargement and speech recognition.

This factsheet outlines some of the most common kinds of assisted technology people use at work.

> Assistive technology has empowered me to not only find a job, but carry out the job independently and to the best of my ability.

Access to Work funding

Funding is available through the government's Access to Work[1] scheme for assistive technology products that a blind or partially sighted person needs to do their job. Applying for a grant involves workplace and work-based assessments to confirm what each person needs.

Types of assistive technology

There are a huge range of assistive technology products available for blind and partially sighted people. Here are some of the most common ones:

- Video magnifiers
- Screen readers
- Digital voice recorders
- Reading aids
- Braille displays
- Braille embossers
- Smart phones
- Assistant apps

[1] https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Video magnifiers

Sometimes known as CCTVs, video magnifiers use a camera and a screen to magnify things electronically. They are mostly used for reading and writing, but can be applied to any task where magnification would help.

There are several kinds of video magnifiers available, including models that can share a monitor with a computer, portable models and units that can focus on distant objects such as signs and noticeboards.

Braille displays

Some blind people use a braille display to access information on their computer screen. These can be used in addition to speech.

Braille embossers

If a blind person who also reads braille requires hard copy information (for example, to deliver a presentation, or to refer to at a meeting) this can be produced using a braille embosser and transcription software.

Digital voice recorders

Blind and partially sighted people often need to be able to take down quick messages, write notes and so on. They can use a digital voice recorder to do this.

Reading aids

By using a scanner with optical character recognition (OCR) technology, people with sight loss can convert printed documents into electronic text that can then be read by synthetic speech technology.

Screen readers

This technology supports blind and partially sighted people to use a computer by reading out loud what's on the screen. Users can adapt them to their needs, for example by decreasing the speed of speech or changing the language. Screen readers allow people to navigate through websites and applications via the speech output. Some can also be used with a braille display.

Smart phones

Accessibility features are built in to Apple and Android devices, meaning that they are accessible to blind and partially sighted people straight out of the box. Apple products such as the iPhone use VoiceOver, and Android devices use TalkBack. These screen readers work with thousands of apps. They can enable people to text, call, scroll through social media, manage money, do online shopping and respond to important work emails, even if they have no useful vision.

Assistant apps

Assistant apps are used to perform everyday tasks with an enhanced degree of independence. They can allow blind and partially sighted people to read printed materials like letters, magazines and menus, recognise currency, find out the colour of an item, identify products using a bar code reader, find out what is around them and hear descriptions of what a scene looks like.

They also help to make travelling from one place to another easier using GPS to provide directions, as well as information on landmarks and roads. New assistant apps are being developed all the time and solutions are being created to make many tasks easier.

About the Vision Foundation

The Vision Foundation transforms the lives of people facing or living with sight loss by funding projects that inform, empower and include.

Being blind or partially sighted shouldn't mean you're left out, isolated or held back. But too many people are. That's why we amplify the voices of blind and partially sighted people and inspire others to advocate and take action.

Our mission is to make London a shining example of a sight loss aware city.

Four ways you can make a difference...

£ Donate

Fundraise for us, make a donation or leave us a gift in your will to fund our life-changing work.

Shop

Visit your local Vision Foundation shop to donate and buy pre-loved clothes, books and toys.

Share

Do you have experience of living with sight loss? Share your story with us and together we'll change hearts, minds and lives.

Join

Become part of our expanding team of passionate volunteers and employees, working each day to make a difference.

Connect with us:

Call us: **020 7620 2066**

Email us: **hello@visionfoundation.org.uk**

Website: **www.visionfoundation.org.uk**

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