

Chairperson,, US Access Board:

I am a US citizen who unfortunately lost 100% of my vision approximately 7 years ago. Being struck blind in mid life I was fortunate to be adept at utilizing electronic tools as my interface with the world. I spend hours daily with a voice adapted laptop for communication , information and performing my duties as an elected official of my town (Saugus, MA) as well as numerous volunteer positions to help the physically handicapped.

Without standards established by Federal overseers such as the Access Board it becomes the business decision of individual companies to determine costs verses benefits of addressing our needs.

With Senator Markey the issue was opened for televised media when he was successful in requiring stations to broadcast a minimum number of hours of programing with descriptive technology providing depth and understanding to a limited number of programs. The limited shows currently accessible to the blind *viewer* is still very few. The hope then was that it would lead as the first step through the door of full accessibility.

In addition only a few cable providers carry this programming, and until this past winter my local cable provider, Comcast, had no means that would orally present channel selections, command controls or programming descriptions.

Standards issues with respect to web sites create daily frustration, Even if the site is available to a screen scrapper for reading there exists absolutely no consistency in formatting the information that makes it easier to locate. What happens is a hunt and peck adventure on my part to attempt to understand that that I cannot view before my eyes. Often I am forced to quit sites when the time consumed does equate to the value of the information that I was searching for.

Finally, once a trained user in JAWS, difficulty with the complexities and required memory consumption brought me to the market place for visually adapted tools. As of this writing I am a loyal user of all Apple products. The reason being that the provide as a function of every product shipped their *voice over adaptive software. I am a proficient user of the Apple hardware as a result. This includes all products other than the iWatch.*

If I was not blind there exists software that links and converts Microsoft documents into Apple readable output. This process is compatible with Apple sending to Microsoft.

But being blind the MS supported JAWS translator and the Apple Voice Over resources are absolutely NOT able to interface like their visually promoted products. I have spent days on the telephone with both Apple and Microsoft over the past several years looking for a solution. Ultimately this became a lobbying effort once I established that the problem rested with the standards used to write

programs. Frankly, where Apple appeared to support my efforts, Microsoft, on those few occasions where I was able to get a live person would not address this problem for such a limited market.

From what I have related to you in this missive I think you can understand the need to rapidly establish electronic standards which will bring together individual corporations, but, seeing the incredible speed of growth of technology, will be monitored and updated by our Federal Government on a frequent schedule.

Blind people are just people with added challenges We work just as hard as our sighted brothers and sisters... in point of fact I would propose the fact that they work harder to overcome their disability and I propose that they tend to be even more creative with what little resources they have available to them.

Please take your responsibilities towards these often neglected citizens and establish the new electronic standards as quickly as possible, hopefully by year end. We have been waiting to long already!

Robert J. Cox
5 Bayfield Road
Saugus, Massachusetts 01906
Land Line: (781) 233-5465
Cell Phone: (781) 405-7180
e-mail: cox.robert@comcast.net