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GPS Navigation to help blind people

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Every once in a while you'll see a technical solution that is really useful and can bring real benefits to people. An Italian company is pioneering a GPS solution to help blind people find their way around. The Easy Walk service installs onto a [Symbian mobile phone](#), uses text2speech software and connects to a GPS receiver via Bluetooth. At anytime the user can find their current location by pressing one of the buttons on the phone. The phone will state current location, which street, which direction they are facing, etc. The other main function key on the phone is programmed to dial a call centre support service, which is operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When the call centre receives an alert, they call the user and guide them through by giving step by step instructions until the user has regained their bearings.

“What is really important is that behind all the technological stuff, there is a call centre with a human being that can help you and who understands your needs”

Andrea de Paoli, the technology officer from il Village, the company behind the project, refers to the call centre as like having “a Guardian Angel” there to offer assistance whenever needed. Because the Easy Walk service uses digital maps, in theory it is possible a user can be guided anywhere across Europe. The first phase of the project resulted in a 95% accuracy in locating users, and the target for the second phase of testing is to offer 100% reliability.

Plans are for the Easy Walk system to be made available to people in the Italian region of Piedmont initially, with Europe wide release hoped for by the end of this year, subject to further successful testing.