



MOBILES

## SMS Emergency Service prospects rise



An SMS emergency service may be provided sooner than we think. TAG representatives recently attended a meeting at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and learned several things that allayed some concerns.

According to mobile phone companies, SMS is more reliable than is commonly believed and often works in areas of poor reception where voice calls fail. An alert telling users that messages have been received should be relatively easy to implement.

Several police forces have been trialling an SMS emergency service. Hampshire police say that a few deaf users have used the service and that the call-handling has been effective.

“We are very encouraged by the prospects of an SMS Emergency service as deaf people will be able to contact the emergency services from almost anywhere that they can use their mobile phone,” said Ross Trotter, TAG Secretary. “But it must never become a replacement for the fully-fledged emergency service as offered through TextDirect and RNID Typetalk.”

## Who will monitor subtitles?

During the recent General Election, a Green Party political broadcast was transmitted with subtitles from the UKIP broadcast. Doubtless many deaf people were rather confused by the Green’s apparent political U-turn.

“Is anyone actually monitoring subtitles?” asks Ruth Myers, TAG’s Chair. “Nearly every day we receive reports that there are problems with TV subtitles: words or lines are missing on various channels and platforms. Viewers are told to send feedback to the broadcasters when that happens, but the sheer volume of incidents

makes that a well-nigh impossible task. I also fail to see why deaf people should need to do it.

“Broadcasters should be required to closely monitor their output and make it easier for us to send feedback. We all know how to contact the BBC because the information is at the end of every programme – it’s time ITV, Channel 4 and Five did that too. Providing fax and email contacts would be a good start.”

TAG is urging Ofcom to require broadcasters to monitor closely the quality of their subtitling output.



**TAG’s** newsletter about deaf people and telecoms, broadcasting and electronic communications.

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# Text services for deaf people

Since discovering text messages eight years ago, severely deaf journalist *Molly Hayne*'s life has been transformed.

Last week I left my mobile phone at home and experienced a terrible anxiousness. And it wasn't because I was some teenager who was waiting for that all important text from my new boyfriend on my pink customised phone (although I would quite like one of those!). It was because for the past eight years my battered and aging mobile has rarely left my side: it is my connection to the outside world.

I coped that day by sending emails, but it set me thinking about the importance of text messaging to deaf people and what it really has to offer us.

One of the best deals I have found is O2's ([www.O2.co.uk](http://www.O2.co.uk)) online offer with 600 free texts a month for as little as £20 line rental. I sometimes send 800 text messages a month so this has reduced my phone bill dramatically.

Now that I can communicate effortlessly, I am impatient for businesses to provide me with SMS alternatives.

The AA's SMS service is a good example. Breaking down is a common occurrence for me and my Mini, and I always felt a sense of dread before making that excruciating phone call to a poor call centre employee! So I asked my mum to call them up and



**Molly Haynes, a journalist for consumer magazines, is severely deaf and relies on text communications.**

complain. She was told that deaf people could text 07900 444999 when they broke down and help would be at hand. We were thrilled with this news and asked why this service wasn't more widely publicised, only to be told they didn't want too many people knowing about it! (The RAC also offers an SMS service.)

I've also discovered [www.spinvox.com](http://www.spinvox.com) which converts voicemail into text – something which will revolutionise the way I use my mobile.

I understand that there is now a taxi service in Prague that can be booked by text message – very useful to deaf Czech people but what about here?

A search on Google provides little enlightenment. But Sabre

Software Development ([www.mediacopy.co.uk](http://www.mediacopy.co.uk)) offers a service called Text-Connect™, which enables businesses to receive and send text messages on their computers. Costs are low (£149 a year with the first 100 texts free) to attract small business users. You can receive text messages and email alerts absolutely free, with replies costing much the same as those found in standard mobile tariffs.

With this system, businesses such as hairdressers, doctor's surgeries, taxi firms and restaurants could become more accessible to people with hearing difficulties. "We thought Text-Connect would benefit businesses which require customers – deaf or not – to place bookings" explains Text-Connect's Managing Director David Tapley. "I guess the challenge is to encourage businesses to embrace this idea."

I am shocked that there is an affordable service for companies, but none for individuals.

Far from being negative about the lack of text services for deaf people, I feel positive that the services and the means to implement them are there. All we need now is the publicity and the backing businesses.

I saw an advert this morning giving details of how you can now pay the Congestion Charge in London by text message. "Great," I thought. "Another provision for deaf people." But it was with disbelief that I realised that in order to register to pay by SMS; you had to phone a number first. Some things really are too good to be true!

## BT textphones – they exist!

Did you know that BT provides textphones? Did you know it was the only one available for rent?



If you didn't, don't be too ashamed – you are in good company. It doesn't seem to be mentioned on the [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com) website, but you can find it on the [www.btplc.com](http://www.btplc.com) website. Go to the Age & Disability section and search for "textphone".

The BT textphone costs £15.86 per quarter to rent and is available from the usual BT outlets. If they seem not to know about it, tell them to search under "textphone" on the BT website.

## ME & MY DVR

**Looking for a set-top box that can also record subtitled programmes? Christopher Jones has found one that he loves.**

"I was lucky enough to receive a pre-production Inverto IDL 7000T Digital Video Recorder that has just appeared in the shops.

It's an excellent dual tuner PVR (Personal Video Recorder) that can record subtitled TV programmes. It is easy to use and has lots of great features! It has the best Electronic Programming Guide I've ever used, two subtitled programmes can be recorded simultaneously and it has a Time Shift that lets you start watching a programme half-way through while it carries on recording. It even has an Instant Replay button that can be used with the Time Shift, so you can watch replays and not miss any of the action. And the PIP Switch feature lets you see a small screen version of another channel on the main picture and you can swap between the two – great during the advert breaks!

Although it records 60 hours of programmes, it is limited to 40 hours with subtitles, but I don't see this a major restriction. I was also able to transfer a recorded programme from the PVR to my DVD recorder to keep a permanent recording. It costs £219.99. I simply love it!"

*For more details, see [www.unbeatable.co.uk](http://www.unbeatable.co.uk)*



### I'm a textphone, get me into here

There are so many different tones made by textphones and other equipment used on the telephone network that TextDirect sometimes detects false tones. BT is addressing the problem, so there may be improvement in tone detection soon.

### Accessing Typetalk on the move – the latest

Ofcom has required that all mobile phone companies must give access to the relay service (RNID Typetalk) through mobile phones. How are they doing?

Vodafone was the first to provide mobile phone access to Typetalk via TextDirect and TAG is content with the result.

Orange has recently provided access, but TAG is not completely satisfied with its solution – time will tell just how well it works.

T-mobile's solution is expected this autumn and will be an IP-based solution using RNID software.

02 plans to adopt a solution similar to Orange, but we don't know of a launch date yet.

3 isn't saying much at the moment, so TAG has prompted the company.

### TAG's Award for All

Sequel is sponsored by a



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## Improving TV subtitling and signing for deaf children

BBC Broadcast and The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) have begun a study to see how to improve subtitles and sign-language on children's television programmes.

As a provider of subtitles and sign language interpretation to BBC TV as well as to some programmes on Channel 4 and Five, BBC Broadcast is one of the key UK suppliers of "access services".

The study will incorporate a survey and focus groups and will be the first study of its kind on access services. It will also examine the benefits of these services for deaf and hearing viewers. Results are planned to be released in October 2005.



The research follows Ofcom's announcement last year advising that more broadcasters would be required to provide an increased number of programmes that are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people under the 2004 Ofcom Code on Television Access Services. About 70 channels are now regulated and are required to comply with these regulations.

If you are buying new audio-visual equipment, make sure the box has a digital tick — that is your guarantee the equipment is digital friendly.

digital 

## Teen angst with subtitles



Every time Channel 4 broadcasts the omnibus version of Hollyoaks with an onscreen sign language interpreter, it receives complaints from about ten viewers who say they find the signing distracting.

A total of ten complaints is regarded as a relatively high response, but there's just a possibility that the ten complaints are from the same people each time...

After a recent meeting with Channel 4 executives, Ruth Myers, TAG's chair, reported: "We all agreed that closed signing whereby the signing could be turned on or off like subtitles would be the best way forward, but this cannot happen until the analogue signals are switched off. The other alternative is avatars — digital picture characters that sign and can be broadcast separately from the main picture — but deaf viewers don't think they are yet realistic enough."

## Subtitling howlers

The Sunday Times (1 May 2005) took broadcasters to task for some rather misleading, and sometimes amusing, subtitles.

Ruth Myers, TAG's Chair was quoted in the article: "We can send a man to the moon and get him back to earth," she said, "so why can't we see more correction of basic errors?"

Subtitling slip-ups included: Pope Benedict XVI became Pope "Ben Debit".

Kelly Holmes, the double Olympic gold medallist, said she would be "hanging up Perspex" (her spikes) after this year.

One forecaster predicted "the odd spud (spot) of drizzle".

Tell us your favourites.

**TAG**

[www.tagcomm.org.uk](http://www.tagcomm.org.uk)

### TAG contact

Ross Trotter  
TAG Secretary  
36 Victoria Street  
Wetherby  
West Yorkshire, LS22 6RE  
Fax: 01937 580956  
Email: [tagenquiries@hotmail.com](mailto:tagenquiries@hotmail.com)

### Sequel Distribution

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Ruth Myers  
Sequel  
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