



RESEARCH

Deafblind foiled by tech

In the largest-ever survey of deafblind people (*Make Technology Work*), Sense has discovered that over half are facing difficulties using technology.

Everyday items like mobile phones, remote controls and cookers can be difficult for many of the UK's 23,000 deafblind people to use.

In telecoms, textphones and mobile phones were singled out. Almost 40% had difficulty using textphones (mainly because of the display's single line, size and colour).

With mobile phones many found tiny keypads, non-clickable buttons and the tiny screens a barrier to use. One respondent used a mobile magnifier to good effect (see page 3).

Fortunately, some new television technologies like widescreen and even cordless headphones were well suited to some deafblind people.

In general, the most commonly



cited complaints were:

- » lack of help when buying
- » lack of information in accessible formats
- » decreasing mobile phone sizes
- » small print instructions.

Sense is calling for inclusive design by manufacturers and intervention by government when specialised equipment has a very small market. It also wants to see action at the European level.

The report's authors say: "technology that works well for deafblind people will also work well for millions of people with either hearing or sight impairments."

Full report: www.sense.org.uk



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

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Ofcom disappoints on USO

Ofcom's latest statement on Universal Service Obligation, the regulatory tool to promote equality in ecomms use, contains some good news, but many disappointments for deaf people, says Ross Trotter, TAG Secretary.

"The good news is that Ofcom is proposing a Stakeholder Advisory Group for the Relay Service, and an increase in the accessibility requirements for payphones. It will also consider video relay services and captioned relay services for deaf people who use speech for calls.

"Unfortunately there are many more disappointments. For instance, they have not included mobile or broadband as Universal Service elements and say that a Universal Service Fund to help fund developments for disadvantaged users is not justified at this time."



Two's company

Being deaf and working in an office surrounded by hearing people can be incredibly isolating – there's often no-one to share experiences with or discuss the latest information on new products. So making your first profoundly deaf friend can be a very enlightening, as Molly Haynes discovered.

Recently I met Claire Snell, 30, a learning and knowledge manager for Unilever and we've had a great time swapping work experiences. Profoundly deaf since birth, Claire relies on hearing aids and lip reading to communicate and, like me, she doesn't sign.

This month Claire changed her analogue aids for new Oticon Spirit IIs on a trial basis and she is very pleased with them. In a busy, noisy office environment, both Claire and I are used to missing out on general office chatter but with the new Oticons, she now finds that speech seems to pierce through background noise. The Oticons are also compatible with mobile phones. "This is great – I don't waste time removing my aid before answering the phone," says Claire.

Claire does not have any additional equipment at work to help her, but admits that without her hearing aids she wouldn't be able to manage. The T-setting on her hearing aids helps with telephone calls but, like me, she still struggles. "I try to avoid the phone whenever I can and rely a lot on emails," she says.

As a non-hearing-aid wearer myself, I am unable to hear much of what goes on in the office.



Molly Haynes, a journalist for consumer magazines, talks about being a deaf employee.

One piece of equipment that has really helped is my Connevens Personal Pager System. It vibrates when my phone rings and also alerts me when the fire alarm sounds. This allows me to work late in the evening without feeling too isolated.

I also have a Phone Plus amplifier by Sarabec for my BT Converse 225 telephone, which enables me to hear callers and has a tone adjuster to improve clarity. But this is not a magic solution and I still struggle with new voices, bad phone lines and foreign accents. Unless I tell people I am deaf they don't realize, which can lead to embarrassing situations.

Claire also struggles this way and in the past she took pride in getting away with people not knowing about her disability until

she realized that by not asking for help, she was missing out. "As I got higher up in Unilever, I couldn't afford to miss out on conversations and if I was going to continue to do well I needed to be more open," she says. "It was so hard the first time and I was really apologetic about it – but then I realized that if I was assertive about my deafness then people would automatically be assertive back." As a result, she feels that she gains respect and that people are happy to help her with things like listening to garbled phone messages.

Claire travels a lot with her job and finds that it's worth checking with the hotel if there are any services in place for deaf people. "Once of twice I have been upgraded to swish rooms with flashing fire alarms and vibrating alarm clocks and telephones." She always tells airline flight crews that she is deaf and that she needs to be informed about important announcements, but says that the lack of subtitles for the in-flight entertainment makes long flights very tedious.

When travelling to work, Claire and I would like to see more effective digital signs on the London Underground to inform us of train destinations and any delays – the feeling of panic is overwhelming when trapped on a stationary train in a tunnel unable to hear announcements.

I was so inspired by Claire's new aids that I have booked an appointment myself – it would be great to hear in meetings, but what I really want to hear is office gossip!

MSN's messaging & video

The latest version of MSN Messenger (7.0) is of special interest to sign language users. It enables you to have full screen video conversations with your MSN contacts. The picture quality of course depends on internet speeds, the webcam and other equipment.

MSN video calls can only be made to other MSN users and cannot be used with other videophones or to contact RNID Typetalk.

The calls can be made with or without audio, but not with

Instant Messaging if the full screen version is used.

MSN Messenger is free and can be downloaded from <http://messenger.msn.com/>

Ruth Myers of TAG commented: "Even if this service has its shortcomings, it's marvellous to see how some applications that benefit deaf people are moving into the mainstream and becoming relatively low cost."

TAG has made a few informal calls with mixed results. Tell us your experiences.

ME & MY BLACKBERRY

No single device is perfect for everyone says Matthew Israelsohn, but the Blackberry is his favourite so far.

As a mobile deaf IT professional, I need to respond rapidly to texts and emails. I've had PDAs and laptop PCs, but my Blackberry is by far the sweetest of them all.

I use the RIM Blackberry 7730. It's a smartphone with a bright, colour screen and a QWERTY keyboard. It's light, easily fits in the palm of my hand, and can be used almost anywhere in the world. It handles wireless email and text messaging, and has a Web browser, a WAP browser, and personal organizer applications.

My Blackberry vibrates when emails arrive – I don't have to dial or check anything. This "push" technology lets me keep in touch when on the move and to respond immediately to urgent business requests. I used to have to lug my laptop around and look for a telephone point or dial up through my mobile phone. The Blackberry is wireless and always on.

All my work computer applications are automatically synchronised with my Blackberry and it's very secure. So I can work anywhere without having to upload and download files.

I also use my Blackberry to search the web and keep up-to-date with breaking news. And I can even contact friends and colleagues on Instant Messenger. Despite this almost constant use, I only need to charge the battery once a week!

Is my Blackberry perfect for me? Not quite. I'd love to use it with TextDirect.



Subtitled theatre

Established as a charity by three deaf people in 2000, Stagetext is now being used to caption performances regularly in about 50 theatre and arts venues right across the UK.

In welcoming Stagetext, Ruth Myers, Chair of TAG said: "Stagetext provides access to the theatre for people whose first language is English and, because it is verbatim, enables them to enjoy mainstream culture."

www.stagetext.co.uk



New abbreviations for TV Guides

- S** ... subtitles
- SL** ... sign language
- AD** ... audio description

Mobile Magnifier

A device to enlarge type on mobile phone screens from Codefactory. www.codefactory.es



TAG's sponsors

Sequel is sponsored by a National Lottery Awards for All England grant and by ITV. TAG warmly acknowledges this support.



Scrolling subtitles

By the end of July all live programmes on ITV1 will have scrolling subtitles. Many people find the present system of block subtitling confusing because it is often out of synchronisation with the picture and dialogue. ITV has been using scrolling subtitles for morning programmes most of this year.

ICE TEXT

Putting ICE (In Case of Emergency) alongside a name and telephone number in your mobile phone address book enables the emergency services to contact your family in the event of an emergency.

There is now a deaf version – ICE TEXT. The word “TEXT” tells the finder that they should use SMS, not a voice call.

Digital switchover and you

Since the 1930s, analogue TV signals have been transmitted across the UK, but over the next few years analogue signals will be switched off and you will need a set-top box, a digital TV (iDTV), cable or satellite reception.

The switchover is planned to take place region by region with two years' advance notice in each area. The actual change will take a few weeks. Messages on your TV screen will keep you informed. Then analogue will be gone – forever! Some video recorders may lose functions after the change.



Expected switchover dates:

2008	2009	2010	2011
Border	Granada	Central	Meridian
Westcountry	HTV West	Yorkshire	Carlton
HTV Wales	Grampian	Anglia	Tyne Tees
	Scottish TV		Ulster

Want to be on Millionaire?

Are you sure?

All broadcasters welcome applications from deaf people to appear in game shows. So with a new *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* starting soon, you can find out how to enter on www.itv.com/millionaire. You can apply by SMS, the Web or telephone. TAG has made sure that producers are aware of the varied needs of deaf people.

LTN moves to the North East

LiveText North (LTN), which covers the Granada, Tyne Tees, Yorkshire and Border TV areas, will move from Leeds to Gateshead early next year. Its new offices will be alongside SignPost, supplier of on-screen British Sign Language (BSL) services. LTN is one of two subtitling units set up by ITFC to provide live subtitling for ITV's regional TV stations.

Feedback



Molly Haynes' first article attracted quite a bit of attention. Here's one response:

"I've just been reading Sequel 14 and the opinion of Molly Haynes on text messages to taxi companies. I have a family of cab drivers one of whom is also an editor of a taxi magazine. After reading Molly's column I have been speaking to him about the possibilities of the company he works for accepting text messages. We shall see what happens – I will keep you informed!"

Send Sequel feedback to tagenquiries@hotmail.com or to the address below.



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