



SEMINAR

## Future of deaf technologies



Christopher Jones (right) in animated discussion with Paul Hanmer (left) and James Mountcastle (centre) at the TAG Seminar on future technologies for deaf people

Speakers from top UK telecoms and broadcasting organisations gave a glimpse of the future of technology with a deaf perspective at a TAG seminar in the DTI Conference Centre in London in May. Hailed as TAG's best-ever conference, it gave a generally optimistic view of developing technologies and how they can be made accessible to deaf people.



Ruth Myers of TAG with Terry Waters and (right) Frank Phillips of Ofcom.

The future looks bright even if there are "challenges" to face. As Ed Richards, Chief Operating Officer of Ofcom, said: "Many potential problems can be solved by raising issues at the right stage of development and ensuring there is appropriate input and effective consumer testing." More conference news inside.

Conference Proceedings are available on CD from TAG for £10. email [r.myers@merula.co.uk](mailto:r.myers@merula.co.uk)

Ben Fletcher of IBM explaining pervasive messaging technology.



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

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# The future of mobile communication

**Ben Fletcher of IBM at Hursley gave his vision of 'pervasive messaging' at the TAG seminar.**

How can deaf people be made aware of audio information that is available to hearing people when on the move? Ben Fletcher thinks he has the answer – pervasive messaging could deliver important messages to deaf people anywhere. Armed with a mobile phone or similar device deaf people could receive train announcements – all via text and all on a single device.

Ben also sees a great future for on-demand interpreting via mobile devices. He'd like to be able to have one- or two-minute video interpreting sessions on his mobile to help him communicate with people like taxi drivers, even



in foreign countries. With new mobile messaging technologies, Ben sees a way to diminish the disability of deafness.

ABOVE: Dr Keith Monserrat, Director of Communications & Policy at NTL-Telewest, (right) with Andrew Farthing.

RIGHT: John Whittingdale, MP and Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee



## Having trouble with your set-top box? You are not alone!

**Speaking at the TAG technology seminar, Jim Slater, explained that there is a new type of digital divide. As a TV engineer, even he has trouble with set-top boxes that convert your analogue TV to digital and give access to Freeview!**

"Lots of people I know who have bought the [set top box] kit are sticking with analogue because they can control it, they know what to do with it!" explained Jim.

Jim has tried converting his six remote controls to one universal control, but without satisfaction. He knows that video recording

from the set-top box is possible, but it requires an exceptional level of knowledge.

Fortunately, he says, new and better equipment is coming to market – but it costs a lot more than the £50 that people have come to expect to pay.

With much of the existing equipment, he says, you can

expect crashes. Software updates (which can be delivered automatically to your equipment) can often provide the solution – and that, he suspects, tells the real story: initial designs were poor.

So deaf people may find this new technology difficult to use – but then so does everyone else! This particular digital divide is between the technocrats who designed the equipment and the people who have to use it.

## BBCi-player: a new and accessible way to watch TV

BBC plans to introduce BBCiPlayer to improve the accessibility of its programmes and allow you to watch subtitled programmes whenever, wherever and however you want, writes *Andrew Strachan*, Accessibility Manager BBCiPlayer.

During 2005/6, the BBC held two important and successful trials of new ways to access its programmes.

iMP (integrated media player) was tested with 5000 people from different backgrounds and enabled them to download subtitled programmes legally (using Digital Rights Management technology) from the internet onto their PC for up to seven days after broadcast.

At the end of 2005, BBC also launched a structured subtitle trial for the BBC News 24 technology lifestyle programme Click Online using BBC Media Selector. These trials provided very useful feedback from users and helped to resolve technical issues.

As a result of the success of these trials, the BBC is now developing the BBCiPlayer which will bring together iMP, services like BBC News Player,



Andrew Strachan,  
Accessibility Manager BBCiPlayer

and archive material into one portal to provide an accessible service to sensory-impaired audiences.

With BBCiPlayer, subtitled programmes will be able to be downloaded through 'streaming' while connected to the Internet or downloaded for later viewing.

So, with the innovative BBC Media Selector, the audience can choose to view programmes in a variety of ways including Windows Media, Real Media, Broadband or Narrowband – and with subtitles.

BBCiPlayer therefore makes BBC output accessible to a very large number of deaf people, enabling the audience to access programmes whenever, wherever and however they want – on all sorts of home and hand-held devices.

LEFT: Ken Carter of Deafax, enthusiastic as ever.



### TextTerm: textphone software for PCs

TextTerm is a free download from NDCS that lets you use your PC as a textphone. Its many features include letting you choose fonts, colours and sizes, use it with BT TextDirect, store conversations and clearly see who said what.

See [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk) and enter "TextTerm" in the search box.

### UK red-button first

S4C has just made access to subtitling much easier on the digital satellite platform. Instead of going through menus, you just press the red button to access English or Welsh subtitles. More than 80% of S4C's prime-time output has English subtitles, and about ten hours a week have Welsh subtitles.

### Additional relay study

The Ofcom study of additional relay services, including video and captioned relay, has been completed by the City University team. Ofcom is considering the report and will expect to publish it in September this year. Sequel will carry a full report then.

### TAG's seminar sponsors



TAG warmly acknowledges the sponsorship of its technology seminar by the DTI, Awards for All, Channel 4, IMS, ITFC and Nokia.

## Digital switchover

Between 2008 and 2012, region by region, the UK will switch from analogue to digital TV. Ford Ennals Chief Executive of Digital UK, explained the background at the TAG seminar.

A massive engineering programme will convert up to 1160 transmitters to digital to ensure that anyone who can receive analogue TV now will be able to receive digital by 2012. At the moment there are only 80 digital transmitters.

The core switchover cost is estimated to be about £1 billion, and, in addition, Ofcom has estimated that the average new equipment cost (set-top boxes or digital TVs) per household will be about £130.

Wales happens to be the nation with the greatest conversion to digital in Europe – and Britain as a whole is ahead of the rest. But other countries are following close behind.

Recent UK surveys for Digital UK of those who have digital

TV have shown that nearly everyone thinks that it is better, but awareness of digital TV is not so impressive. So a major publicity campaign has begun.

Watch out for the digital tick logo: it's a certification mark that tells you that equipment will work now – and at switchover.

Of particular interest to deaf people is a targeted help scheme for the over 75s and severely disabled people. Further information about this is expected later in the year.

Digital UK recognises that deaf and disabled people may need help in choosing and using equipment. It is looking forward to the forthcoming DTI-funded Ricability reports on digital TV equipment.

## Up & Coming

### Video conferencing at school

Following the success of video conferencing in hearing-impaired units in two London schools this spring, another is planned for the autumn. It's web-based video conferencing and doesn't need expensive equipment. To participate, London schools should apply before 7 July 2006. Email [jo.dilworth@lgfl.org.uk](mailto:jo.dilworth@lgfl.org.uk)

### Ricability Reports

Ricability will soon begin publishing reports on equipment for digital TV. They will start to appear from 1 July 2006 at: [www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk](http://www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk)

## Video on demand – by phone

Stephen Hall, project manager of BT Vision, gave a preview of BT's forthcoming entertainment service at the TAG Seminar and showed that he'd been paying attention to TAG's accessibility requirements.

Later this year, BT will launch a set-top box device that will integrate television broadcasting and broadband Internet. It will record TV programmes and download movies, videos, and classic and contemporary TV programmes via its broadband connection.

Subtitling will be available on the TV recordings – the finances of providing subtitling for video-on-demand are being studied.

Price of the new device has not been set, but it might be in the region of £100-£150. It will usually be fitted by a BT engineer. There will be no subscription as each downloaded item will be charged individually or in packages.

Simplicity, claimed Stephen Hall, is key to the service in terms of pricing, usage – and the remote controller!



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

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