



Photo courtesy of Mark Crick

CAMPAIGN

TAG campaigns to bring deaf telecoms out of the dark ages

TAG has launched a campaign calling for the modernisation of telephone relay services for deaf people.

Just as technology is beginning to enable new types of telephone relay services like captioned relay and video relay, there has been some really bad news. Resources are not being made available to sustain them. Last year RNID's video relay service and Teletec's CapTel services closed through lack of funding

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

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TAG telecoms campaign

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leaving many deaf people bereft of key services.

TAG has been lobbying behind the scenes for a very long time for improved telecoms for deaf people, but now believes a full-scale campaign is essential to prevent deaf and hard-of-hearing people being excluded from employment and social opportunities.

TAG is calling for modernised telecommunications services for deaf people at fair prices.

Ruth Myers explained: "The current arrangements stifle innovation and prevent the creation of new services. The inaccessibility of the telephone is severely damaging the life chances of

deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

"TAG is therefore calling upon Government, Parliament and Ofcom to provide a new framework that will enable deaf telecom services keep pace with the mainstream. Quite simply, deaf people are being denied their human rights. We want to see decisive action before the end of 2008."

There is real frustration amongst deaf people because the technologies needed to open up telephony are already available at no extra cost in countries such as Sweden, Australia and the USA.

Two deaf telephone services that can change lives

Captioned telephony

Captioned telephony was available in the UK from 2002-2007 on a very limited basis. With two communication channels, speech recognition software to convert the relay operator's voice into text, deaf people can read the conversations on their PCs or telephone displays with minimal delay. CapTel, the only captioned relay service in the UK, was closed in December 2007 for funding reasons.

Video Relay

Video relay enables sign language users to communicate on the telephone through a sign language interpreter. The sign language user and interpreter interact via PCs and webcams or videophones. Two fledgling services currently operate in the UK: Significan't's SignVideo service and a service in Scotland. Last year, video relay services run by the RNID and the the BDA closed.

One of the lucky few ...

Profoundly deaf Tish Kerfoot is on a par with her hearing colleagues – thanks to video relay. The 27-year-old marketing executive says using the service to communicate with hearing people in the business world has liberated her career potential.

But this wasn't always the case – in the past she missed out on jobs because of having to talk using conventional text relay, a slower process which she felt drew attention to her deafness and away from her talent.

With video relay she no longer sees herself as disabled. It has been the telephone, she says, that has disabled her.

"The natural flow and speed of video relay gets a positive response from virtually all my telephone contacts and it's so much easier to do my job." Her video relay calls are almost indistinguishable in character from regular voice calls and, significantly, many hearing contacts are now prepared to initiate calls to her, something they hardly ever did with conventional text relay.



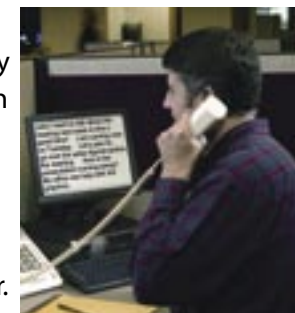
... and one of the many not-so-lucky

Severely deaf Charles (not his real name), a customer liaison officer, has lost the equivalent of one working day each week since the only captioned telephony service in Britain closed in December 2007.

Without the service that until recently enabled him to hold fluent telephone conversations, he has to make an additional day of home visits, taking several hours to do what used to be done on the phone in less than an hour.

He calculates that one day a week is taken up by home visits – resulting in a 20% drop in his overall work efficiency. Ironically, the cost of providing the captioned relay service is a fraction of this loss.

He can't help wondering how his future career will develop if he cannot get modern access to the voice telephone network.





BROADCASTING

Watch your own TV with subtitles anywhere

While so many designers continue to ignore accessibility needs, deaf people continue to find workarounds.

Becoming a little tired of receiving a bottle of wine as recompense for subtitling systems that can't be accessed through hotel TV remote controls, Paul Hanmer has discovered a more relevant solution.

He now travels with a Slingbox which enables him to watch his home TV on a laptop (or a handheld) anywhere with an Internet connection – next door or on the other side of the world

The small Slingbox device plugs into his home TV and his home broadband connection. Then, when he is on the move, he simply connects his laptop to any other Internet connection and watches all his usual programmes with his usual subtitle facilities available through the virtual remote control that appears onscreen. This "place-shifting" device costs less than £100.

See: www.slingmedia.com/go/slingbox

Adapted from NADP Newsletter No 89

Query

Why do some hearing TV reviewers insist on picking on deaf people by complaining about their in-vision signing on occasional off-peak programmes?

Signed programming changes

From 2009, non-Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) must transmit at least 30 minutes sign presented (rather than sign interpreted) programmes a month between 7am and 11pm, or agree a suitable alternative such as a Community Channel sign zone.

The signed programming requirement for PSB channels will rise to 5% of output in 2009.

Kids' TV

As the Internet and mobile phones gain in popularity, changes are happening in children's TV, according to a recent report from Ofcom.

Ofcom's review shows that the trend is for more children's channels, fewer new programmes, and falling revenues from kids' TV. And 80% of kids say that they watch TV while using some other media – a very difficult task for a deaf child.

TAG is concerned that this diversification is isolating deaf children who cannot access much of the new media and find few if any new TV shows made specifically for them.

www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2007/10/nr_20071003

TELECOMS

US grass not so green

TAG frequently hears reports about the superiority of telecoms facilities for deaf people in the USA. However, Ross Trotter, Secretary of TAG, has received a different perspective from a recent newsletter from the Association of Late Deafened Adults. Ross commented: "There are some familiar complaints from our North American colleagues: trouble with telephone relays and switchboards, refusals to take sales orders over the phone, and delays in getting through to emergency services. There is a lot more, but this gives the flavour. It really does read as though, despite the Americans with Disabilities Act, they have all the same problems as us."

Access to Work changes?

Consultation on a proposal to withdraw the Government's Access To Work (ATW) funding from public bodies closed in mid-March. Public bodies may be expected to act as model employers and fund access support themselves. A decision is now awaited.

In 2006/7, ATW spent £60 million helping more than 24,000 disabled people in employment.

Some deaf people received funding help for access to CapTel (until the service closed) and video relay. More than half of those worked for public bodies.

IN BRIEF

Antique TVs still sell!

If you are about to buy an analogue TV, think again! After Digital Switchover, already started and to be completed by 2012, you won't be able to use them without a digital set-top box. But still one-third of all TVs sold in Britain are analogue! Some retailers are taking a lead and withdrawing them from sale. **To choose a digital TV, see www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk/**

Cryptic film

Deaf Australian film lovers have been perplexed by some subtitles recently. Watching *The Queen* starring Helen Mirren, they read about "Burking in Paris" which might possibly have been "Buckingham Palace", and thought Prince Philip said "people removed their heads" rather than their hats. Maybe confused by the posh accents, the Aussie subtitlers didn't give a XXXX.

Radio for the deaf?

A US consortium is developing a system to translate speech radio into text and to display it on a radio screen in real time.



Subtitling in the You Tube era

Now that UK terrestrial broadcasters are required to subtitle at least 80% of their output this year, what is happening about the subtitling of You Tube and other new media?

The announcement that the Internet TV company CNET (www.cnettv.com) is to subtitle at least some of its content voluntarily is a welcome but unfortunately not a typical initiative of Internet TV.

As the popularity of new media like You Tube go mainstream, deaf people are feeling cut adrift because so few of these outlets incorporate subtitles. It was a recurring theme of those who contributed case studies to TAG's new book, *The Road To Access* (see back page).

"The lack of subtitling of new media is a very real and growing issue," said Ruth Myers of TAG. "New media is no longer an obscure, geek favourite. It's gone mainstream. But deaf people are getting stuck in a backwater.

"We have made excellent progress in the subtitling of so many terrestrial TV programmes—an ongoing campaign that has been boosted by the popularity of subtitling amongst hearing people.

"The subtitling campaign has extended to cinemas and DVDs with varying success despite the lack of specific

regulation. We even have subtitling of some theatre. But it's difficult to know who to lobby for subtitling of Internet video and the like."

Views from the subtitling industry show a few signs of hope.

James Gardner of IMS, which subtitled almost 30,000 hours of programming last year, said: "IMS is already providing subtitles and audio description for online content including Flash video-based websites.

"Many broadcasters are looking to re-use subtitles ordered for traditional TV on their accompanying online services, which makes good sense.

"Some of the newer IPTV platforms have also expressed an interest in access services generally. All they need to do now, it seems, is find a financial model to justify it."

Toby Blizard, Head of Business Development, Access Services at Red Bee Media, which produces 50,000 hours of subtitling each year, said: "We have the technical capability to subtitle virtually any visual media, but experience has shown

Photo courtesy Red Bee Media



that demand for subtitling services follows regulation. And we aren't seeing any new regulations. We are developing

a system for Channel 4 to convert the broadcast programme subtitle files to a format useable for on-demand services where obviously there is a lot of growth, but elsewhere demand for new media subtitling is intermittent."

Chris Higgs, Managing Director of ITFC agreed that a lack of legislation was slowing the take-off of new media subtitling, but thought that this would change "as more consumers see the advantages subtitles can bring to the whole community including those with hearing impairments. I am sure subtitles will be used more in future as service providers realise their potential to widen their audience and therefore increase their revenue."

Who creates your subtitles?

The UK's Big Three

Red Bee Media	50,000 hrs/year
itfc	36,000 hrs/year
IMS	28,000 hrs/year

These figures have been growing year on year.

Independent Media Support Group plc



Origins

providing literature to TV-am viewers, but then saw potential to provide subtitles for TV.

First moves

persuading big brands to subtitle their adverts.

Operating principle

subtitles enable broadcasters to increase audience size.

Recent and current work includes

subtitled more than 28,000 hours of broadcasting in 2007

subtitles all Sky's major channels

subtitled 30 major cinema releases in 2007 including *The Simpsons Movie* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*

BSL interpreted programming for broadcasters and corporates

audio description for visually impaired and blind people.

The future

"We intend to stay at the head of the pack and continue to provide cost-effective and quality solutions to its clients."

NEW PUBLICATION

New TAG book

TAG has just published a book, *The Road To Access*, outlining the history of deaf people's access to the telephone and broadcasting and looking to the future.

Packed with pictures from the past and present, the book is available for £12 incl p&p from Ruth Myers, TAG, 4 Juniper Court, 85 Quickley Lane, Chorleywood, Herts, WD3 5PG.



Test yourself

- A When was the first UK deaf telephone relay service launched?
- B When was the UK's first textphone introduced?
- C When was RNID Typetalk officially launched?
- D In what decade did programming specifically for deaf people begin?
- E What was the first teletext subtitled programme?

These questions and many more are answered in *The Road To Access*. Here's a sneak preview of answers:

Answers

- A 1975 at a Cheshire Home in Bedfordshire.
- B 1979 The Vistel I by Breakthrough Trust.
- C 1991 in Speke, Liverpool.
- D In the 1950s: *For Deaf Children*. *Vision On* followed in the 1960s.
- E *Quietly in Sweden* in 1979, but more people remember David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* series from the same year.



www.tagcomm.org.uk

TAG contact

Ross Trotter
TAG Secretary
36 Victoria Street
Wetherby
Yorkshire
LS22 6RE
Fax: 01937 580956
tagenquiries@hotmail.com

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Ruth Myers
Sequel
4 Juniper Court
85 Quickley Lane
Chorleywood
Herts
WD3 5PG
r.myers@merula.co.uk

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