

# sequel

deaf telecoms update

## Broadband and VoIP what it means for deaf people

By 2008, the Government has pledged that everyone in the UK will be able to receive broadband. But broadband doesn't just mean email and faster web surfing. Its other uses – voice, text and video – are very significant to deaf people.

And broadband doesn't just mean faster communications. A fixed monthly charge usually gives you unlimited online time. In theory, you could have a permanent, live, two-way video connection to Auntie Edna in Australia and pay nothing extra – assuming that you both have broadband.

### VoIP


Realising the wider potential of broadband, many companies are beginning to offer new services based on the technology. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), also known as VoB (Voice over Broadband), shows great promise. VoIP can be very low cost and enables voice to be used simultaneously with text and video.

Ofcom is keen to see new voice services, but is seeking views about whether the new services should be regulated like traditional ones. One hot issue is whether VoIP services should be required to carry 999 calls and, if so, whether the calls should be given priority. TAG will send a response to Ofcom, not only because many deaf and hard-of-hearing people use voice, but also because any regulations for voice might also be applied to text, video and relay services.

### Video

Video technology has improved dramatically and broadband can now transmit pictures of near TV quality. Signers will find a significant improvement over conventional videophones. Lip-reading may also be possible in good conditions, but more research is needed before a reliable service can be offered.

Fortunately these services do not require special terminals. You can use a normal PC with some software and a few low-cost accessories. The future looks bright, but we must ensure that the new services are usable by deaf people without significant extra expense.

 For more information, search for “New Voice Services” on the Ofcom website: [www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk)

TAG's newsletter for advisers of deaf people and others interested in deaf telecoms

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- BT A&D celebrates 20 years of progress
- raising awareness of text payphones
- new telecoms guide

## A world of opportunities

### Jan Walsh looks at USO and the future of deaf telecoms



In the UK in 2005 the number of broadband users is expected to outnumber dial-up users.



**D-Link DVC-1000 broadband VideoPhone** is a stand-alone device for Internet video conferencing. Transmitting up to 30 frames per second, it costs about £200.

**TAG thanks Vodafone UK for its sponsorship of Sequel**

**Ten years ago telecoms services for British deaf people were world class, but now they are frozen in time. Is our regulation too desultory and out of step with technological advances and society's expectations, or does the current funding inhibit innovation?**

Some countries, like the USA, have surged ahead with new products and services for people with different degrees of deafness – video relay, caption telephone, relay caption conferencing, Internet relay services, as well as text.

But help is at hand in the UK. The Ofcom review of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) will revitalise the provision of products and services for deaf people. Or will it? Will it help deliver equal access to communications or be a damp squib offering too little too late?

Ofcom faces daunting challenges – not least USO funding. At present BT funds about 90% of the text relay service. That was fine when BT had a huge share of the telecoms market, but soon its market share may sink to around 50% and most of its not-so-new-competitors seem reluctant to address the issue of services for deaf people with real commitment. That's odd, since there are an estimated nine million deaf and hard-of-

**Only the text relay service is mentioned in the current regulation ...**

hearing people in the UK. Add to that colleagues, friends and family and you'd think there would be a real business opportunity.

Consumers want choice, accessibility, interconnectivity and affordability. Deaf consumers are no different. Only the text relay service is mentioned in the current regulation and so anything other than text-based communications is generally inaccessible to most deaf people.

In the USA, where there is no equivalent to the UK's USO, there is a fund for such

developments and there is much to recommend it. There is an expectation among the UK deaf community that if only a USA-style universal service fund were to be introduced there would be oodles of money

**"Ofcom will only get it right if deaf people explain what they want in clear, unequivocal terms."**

to be spent on service development. While that might not be strictly true, a different funding mechanism would not only be fairer to BT but would encourage innovation and competition, and force prices down.

But the USA model isn't the only option. Scandinavian countries use a combination of local and national government agencies to provide funding rather than relying exclusively on the telecoms sector.

Inevitably those who shout loudest will be heard. Who will roar longest, loudest and most cogently as Ofcom listens to consumers, industry and lobbyists?

One thing is certain: If Ofcom doesn't get this review right, deaf people will be left further behind in their fight for "functional equivalence" – or even reasonable adjustment. And Ofcom will only get it right if deaf people – and those who represent them – explain what they want in clear, unequivocal terms. An integrated, accessible, affordable service won't happen overnight but it will happen much faster if the deaf community works together to provide a wish list of services and actions that make sense across the deaf spectrum and moves solutions from the present text systems to Internet technology and beyond. This review is a watershed, the golden opportunity of the decade, to let regulation lead the way to exciting new developments for deaf people. It will only happen if deaf people work together to make it so.

**Jan Walsh**  
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## BT Age & Disability Action is 20

### Pam Chidley of BT A&D marks "a milestone on a journey"

**This year BT Age and Disability Action (A&D) celebrates its twentieth birthday. The team was established in 1984 to allay fears of some customers, organisations and politicians that the newly-privatised BT might lose interest in helping disabled people in its drive for profit. Twenty years on the team remains committed to consultation, informing and research whilst balancing legal, commercial and social obligations.**

One of the main aims of A&D is to ensure that customers are advised of products and services that may help alleviate problems they experience with telecommunications because of age or disability.

#### Deafness and disability networks

Our team members maintain a network of contacts with professionals in healthcare, caring organisations and support groups such as Social Services Sensory Impairment Teams, Deaf Societies, Societies for the Blind and Disability Living Resource Centres. These close working relationships can lead to joint workshops where advice and information is given on new services and products. Often A&D offers a free loan of equipment to professional contacts, employers and resource centres offering an opportunity for their clients to gain hands-on experience before purchasing.

The relationship between A&D and its professional contacts is not just one way. We act as a point of contact, enabling them to air their views on our products and services, which we can then refer to product managers throughout BT.

#### User feedback

We are also keen to meet the public face-to-face and frequently participate in exhibitions large and small throughout the country.

BT's commitment to consulting with disabled people in the development of new

products and services helped in the design of the Relate 3000 telephone, the latest product in BT's 'Design for All' scheme.

This year saw the launch of the BT Disability User Panel where BT employees with a range of disabilities provide regular feedback on new products and services.

The celebration of A&D's twentieth birthday does not mark the end of an era, but is a milestone on a journey. We want to use our experience and skills to ensure everybody has the 'freedom to communicate' through inclusive communication.

We believe that communications make a difference to the quality of people's lives. Together with research, development and input from healthcare professionals caring organisations, and our customers we can improve access to communications and help deliver those benefits to more people in our society.

**Pam Chidley**  
**BT Age & Disability Action**  
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#### BT A&D Timeline selected highlights

- 1984 'BT Action in the Interest of the Disabled' set up. First target: wheelchair access to payphones.
- 1985 BT and RNID start Telephone Exchange for the Deaf Project (TED).
- 1986 Tactile phonecard for visually-impaired customers.
- 1991 TED Project re-launched as Tynetalk.
- 1998 BT launches a new 'Design for all' Big Button Phone.
- 2001 BT TextDirect launched; offers UK's first rental textphone.
- 2002 Mainstream TV advertising of disability products.
- 2003 BT supports European Year of Disabled People.

Ofcom's Television Access Code means that seventy of the most popular TV channels must meet new subtitle targets.



The new NDCCS Listening Bus launched in October 2004.

Deafax joins TAG in October 2004.



# Look for the text sign on payphones

## BT trials new branding to promote usage

[TAG website](http://tag.org.uk)

[telecomsactiongroup.org.uk](http://telecomsactiongroup.org.uk)

**If you see the international textphone symbol near a BT payphone, it's a text payphone from which you can use BT TextDirect.**

BT TextDirect has been available on 1500 text-enabled BT payphones across the UK for a number of years, but the use of the service from these payphones has shown a steady decline.

After discussions with TAG, BT has agreed to try to raise awareness of the text payphones and the availability of the BT TextDirect service. (These text payphones automatically route callers through TextDirect. They are distinct from the Multiphones which do not provide this access.)



The international textphone symbol is already displayed on the instructions in BT text payphones on all 1500 sites, and BT now plan to display it in a much more prominent position so that customers can easily recognise them when they are out and about. The new branding (yellow signs in the photographs) will appear on approximately 100 BT text payphones across the UK to raise awareness of the TextDirect service.



During the trial BT will monitor the effect of the new branding on usage and these results will guide the decision whether this branding should be rolled out nationally on all text-enabled BT payphones.

Ruth Myers, Chair of TAG, welcomed BT's initiative: "I urge deaf people to make use of text payphones. Payphones provide a valuable safety net for everyone. TAG welcomes BT's commitment to making sure deaf people can use them too."

## Sequel distribution

If you would you like to receive *Sequel*, contact:

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Chorleywood  
Rickmansworth  
Herts WD3 5QQ  
email [r.myers@merula.co.uk](mailto:r.myers@merula.co.uk)

## Stay in touch

Ricability's new updated guide to telephones and services for older and disabled people has just been published.

It is available in print, large print, on tape, in Braille and on the web.

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

For a print copy of the guide, send an A4 self-addressed envelope with 58p in stamps to:

Ricability, 30 Angel Gate  
City Road, London EC1V 2PT



## Survey Summary in BSL, print & e-format

Free copies of the Summary of the recent Text Communication Survey are available in print, electronic form, and in BSL on an 18-minute video (VHS or CD-ROM or DVD). Contact:

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