

IDRIS NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1 NEWSLETTER DATE DECEMBER 2008

Issues Raised by Participants in the User Innovation Day

Mobile phones are a 'fashion accessory' rather than being seen as a communication device. When they were 'bricks' they were undoubtedly more accessible for some disabled people. The main issue is size and slipperiness of the back. The 'fashion accessory' trend was seen by participants as a barrier for disabled people.

Nadeem, a Deaf consumer said that in his experience mobile phone companies do not have disability awareness. He got his mobile via RNID and describes it as 'very old'. Whilst the modern ones have loads of facilities like Sat-Nav, it is very difficult to find the right one and there are no specialist services in mobile phone shops for Deaf or disabled customers. There is a general lack of awareness of the needs of people with visual im-

pairment from the high street mobile phone shops.

A man with dual sensory impairment told of his friend's experience in buying an expensive (300 GBP) mobile phone but could not understand how to work it. No help or training was available so the person sent it back. Training is often necessary to be able to use complicated items, but frequently missing. This person's wish was for a computer that typed and read Braille.

Stuart from the Macular Disease Society said that he cannot see small buttons on mobile phones and does not want 'fancy' facilities as he cannot use the camera. His motto is 'keep it simple'.

George McKewan from Tayside Deaf Association raised the point that when a Deaf British Sign Language user buys a mobile phone the instructions are in English, (which is difficult

THIS FIRST *IDRIS NEWSLETTER* REPORTS ON A HIGHLY SUCCESS 'USER INNOVATION DAY' HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE ON 7TH OCTOBER 2008, ATTENDED BY DISABLED PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL, SENSORY, MULTIPLE IMPAIRMENTS, LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND/OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, MAINSTREAM AND SPECIALIST SERVICE PROVIDERS, DESIGNERS, ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS. THIS WAS PART OF THE ESRC PROJECT ON THE USE, ROLE AND APPLICATION OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY IN THE LIVES OF DISABLED PEOPLE.



for BSL users to understand). Also to register the phone, you need to call the central service, but they cannot hear (obviously).

Stuart from Hagger said that mainstream marketers are not interested in plugging these gaps as there is not enough profit in the mobile phone to repay the research and development time required. There is no law to compel mobile phone companies to make phone accessible and compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Brian from McKinnon Centre raised the point that the DDA does not seem to have 'teeth' as it covers goods and services but disabled people still cannot gain access to them. Chris Lofthouse from Ricability said that when the DDA was being introduced his organisation combined with the Disability Rights Commission to argue that 'universal design' as a concept should be included in the law but this did not take place. The DDA does not cover design of products or force designers to make them accessible, so it is possible for companies like mobile phone companies to say their *services* are accessible, even if their *products* cannot be used by disabled people. It was noted that this could simply mean that a disabled person can enter their shop.

Some technology users at the Day especially valued the choices that landline and mobile phones gave them and the flexibility and ease of communication. Many disabled people rely on phones to summon assistance from others. Lillian from BT noted that a phone is not classed as a utility like water, gas and electricity services, but is seen as a luxury item. This means that if a disabled person has a problem paying for a utility, it is unlikely to be cut off, as there are other sources of funding, but their phone could be cut off, leaving them unable to summon assistance. Mark, a local government employee asked 'Why are mobile phones classified by governments as a 'luxury'? To disabled people they are a necessity.'

'WHEN DEAF
SIGN LANGUAGE
USERS BUY
MOBILE PHONES
THE
INSTRUCTIONS
ARE IN ENGLISH

A Deaf customer wanted to know how disabled people can get information on the different makes and models of mobile phone and find out whether they are suitable for their requirements. He also said the instructions are complicated. Chris from Ricability said that consumer testing information is not generally available and consequently consumers are lost about models and finance. Even RNID do not necessarily know which phone works with each software product. People have very specific individual requirements.

Billy, a hearing impaired consumer would really like to see the innovation of a mobile phone service like Typetalk (that works on land lines) so that he can talk to a caller and the caller's answers can be typed back to his mobile. Stuart from Hagger Electronics said 'Products are out there – people don't know about them' and David Fullerton raised the point that there is no standard for designing for accessibility.

Participants were in general agreement that the internet has revolutionised social networking for disabled people. Computers and the internet are a boon for disabled people. One Deaf participant (George) said he uses the internet a lot to communicate with his friends, both Deaf and hearing. He has found it helps him improve his command of English as they sometimes correct him and this is seen as helpful. It was also noted that computers have allowed disabled people to be creative, making videos, designing gardens and so on.

In the Highlands and Islands, broadband speeds can be quite low, which can be a barrier. The Scottish Government updated all exchanges to get minimal speeds, but the reality is in the Highland and Islands minimal speeds are possible only. This problem will not be getting better in the short term.

David Sloan from the University of Dundee raised the point that web accessibility traditionally meant making your site accessible so that users can access the information. Increasingly, the task has changed to the accessibility of creating the information. A lot of people think accessibility is just about text, forgetting that other people would rather see a video than read. UTube could be seen as an accessible medium to some people. David urged the use of video as a communication medium. The web is a democratic place to publish – people can contribute to the web, but there is little support to assist people to publish in an accessible way. It was noted that too much text on a home page can be a barrier for people using voice recognition software.

George noted that most web sites are not accessible for BSL users and there is a need for much more sign language on the web. David agreed there is not enough thought given to BSL users' requirements. He noted that text must be converted to video and this is expensive and takes time and expertise. Sites such as 'Avatar' which aimed to use a composite human producing BSL proved inaccessible, owing to lack of facial expression. George said there is no substitute for a BSL interpreter on video. Lillian noted that an added issue is that sign languages are regional, and this creates further issues for those designing information for web sites. George said he has been approached by companies who want to make their sites accessible and to put information in BSL video, but when they discover the costs they quickly change their minds.

A general point noted was that disabled people not in education or employment do not have access to funds for technology such as computers. Megan from Sense Scotland noted that there is also a postcode lottery with long waits for essential equipment (such as 4 years for a wheelchair). Sense Scotland assists individuals to fund raise for essential items when they cannot access public funds. The DDA is only being addressed in spirit – real equality is about having the same opportunities as non-disabled people.

Chris from Ricability said that disabled people can write and contribute views on products they use, both mainstream and specialist at www.products-reviews.org.uk

David from the University of Dundee said that we need to reach a situation where the standard quote for work to provide a web site includes BSL interpretation video and subtitles. He noted that when designing a building, we cannot make fire escapes optional so the web site work is a similar culture change. Ewen noted that the costs of updating software are prohibitive and there are increasing problems with achieving 'fit' with newer items, if not updating them.

Raymond from Access Equality noted that the User Innovation Day organisation had been 'fantastic', with BSL interpreters and all access requirements provided, although the addition of a Palantypist (sadly unavailable) would have been ideal. Organisers of similar events need to consider the requirements of the people attending – they do not need to get for example a BSL interpreter when no-one attending needs it. It is just about making information accessible.

THE DISABILITY
DISCRIMINATION
ACT (2005)
DOES NOT
COVER
PRODUCTS OR
DESIGN



THE INTERDISCIPLINARY
DISABILITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

University of Dundee
Nethergate
Dundee
Scotland
DD1 4HN

Phone: 01382 381403
Fax: 01382 384000
E-mail: j.a.z.harris@dundee.ac.uk

WWW.IDRIS.AC.UK

CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE
AND VIRTUAL LIBRARY (FREE ACCESS)

Solutions and Ideas raised in the User Innovation Day

Nokia make a neck loop which is very affordable (15 or 16 GBP) and it fits most mobile phones and is used like a 'wired hands-free' device. Con Evans is the company supplying this product - raised by Stuart from Hagger Electronics. Hagger Electronics specialises in easy to use mobile phones <http://www.hagger.co.uk/>

RNIB can assist users with visual impairment gain access to information on which mobiles with work with 'Talks' software. Also, there is a knowledgeable company called Computer Room Services, Hertfordshire.

Chris Lofthouse from Ricability said a guide to telephones was published by that organisation called 'Stay in Touch' and looks at ease of use of phones in 2004. They did not test phones as they change so fast, but looked at features on phones and information on availability. They advise people to use the information from RNID and RNIB. Chris said that there is very little disabled consumer testing of equipment in the UK. The report is still available on their website: www.ricability.co.uk

Innovations users specifically wanted to see developed were:

- Mobile phone service similar to the Typetalk service
- An 'interpreter in the pocket' for BSL users
- A radio that is useable by a deaf person

DID YOU KNOW?

THE USER INNOVATION DAY WAS ORGANISED BY PROFESSOR JENNIFER HARRIS, THE DIRECTOR OF IDRIS AND DAVID FULLERTON FROM ACCESS EQUALITY: (WWW.ACCESSEQUALITY.COM)



More Solutions and Ideas:

A device called a T-link fits into a phone and is only around 15 GBP, however this only works on landline phones (contributed by Lillian from BT) www.bt.com

A company called Emporia brought out a new phone which is easy to use and accessible. Dorro make a small phone that has large buttons and this just does phone calls and text messages (basic send and receive) costing around 110 GBP. These are available through RNIB and Hagger Electronics.

Lucy from Humanware described a small laptop with a Braille display and speech output that will act like a mobile and notetaker. This will be available later in 2008, www.humanware.com

Zootext and iZoom are magnification products (the latter is free). Firefox add-ons can customise computer screens. Oatsoft also has free software available and the company tries to encourage others to make software freely available.

Guide software (available from Hagger Electronics) can run over the top over the operating system and creates a simple interface, useful for people with visual impairment or dyslexia. The Guide Hands Free software guides you through the system, can be used with Dragon Naturally Speaking too.

REMAP will design and produce items for disabled people when there is no commercially available device on the market www.remap.org.uk

Edinburgh Macular Disease Society have produced a cheap device that turns TV into CCTV via scart; this works like a magnification device, anything you put under a camera comes up on the screen. It was made by a member in his garage. Visual magnifiers can cost thousands of pounds – this sells for £50 and he has sold 532 in 2 years; www.maculardisease.org.uk

Please visit the IDRIS website, watch videos from the User Innovation Day and contribute your views to our public town hall debate!
www.idris.ac.uk