Resources Abound for People Who Are Deaf and Hearing-Impaired

By Dr. Mei Kennedy

If you experience hearing loss, do you feel that you want to optimize the electronics you currently have to better meet your communication needs? Do you want to optimize your participation in your community through technology? If your answer is yes, here are some fabulous suggestions.

**Hearing Aid:**

For those who use a hearing aid and enjoy listening to music, you can now tune out background noise and tune in to the songs by using—a wired yet hands-free headphone that connects to a standard 3.5mm headphone socket. Now you can get back to grooving!

NOiZFREE also offers a wireless receptor/microphone called Beetle H-3ST that is compatible with hearing aids. This Bluetooth microphone allows you to receive and make phone calls via your cellular phone, as well as participate in Skype calls on your computer. In addition, you can enjoy listening to music and DVDs on your computer without distracting background noise.

If you have an Oticon or Phonak hearing aid, you may want to look into the Oticon Streamer or the Phonak ComPilot, which are both similar to the NOiZFREE Beetle H-3ST. They both provide you with a wireless and Bluetooth audio solution. Others may wish to look into the Beltone Direct system, which creates a personalized wireless system that allows you to listen to TV, PC, stereo, phone and other audio sources while filtering out background noises.

Wearing a hearing aid in a hot climate or when playing sports can be a nuisance. Check out Ear Gear or Sweat Band for specialized fabrics that cover the hearing aid to prevent humidity and moisture from entering the device. Unfortunately, this still does not mean that you can swim with your hearing aid!

**Smartphone/Tablet:**

We practically live in a smartphone world now, though some of the following apps listed below are also available for laptop or computer use as well. Please be sure to read the available reviews prior to purchasing any of the apps, as I am unable to verify their effectiveness.

**Relay**

There are numerous relay service providers available for you to choose from. Relay service providers provide 24/7 operator service for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to make/receive calls via text or American Sign Language at no charge. Be sure to look into the features of each provider to help you determine which is the best fit for you. You
may choose more than one provider. Here are some companies you may wish to check out.

**IP-Relay (iPhone, iPod, BlackBerry, Android, Computer)** – text-based relay service.
**Convo (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Computer)** – video/text relay service that is deaf-owned.
**Sorenson (iPhone, iPod, iPad, BlackBerry, Android, Computer)** – video/text relay.
**Purple (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, Computer)** – video/text relay.
**ClearCaptions (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, Computer)** – hear/read your calls via free telephone captioning service.
**The Z (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, Computer)** – video/text relay.

**Movie**

As we wait for movie theaters to get up to speed and begin providing captioning on all movies, here are some temporary solutions.

**Subtitles (iPhone, iPod, iPad)** – access a large library of movie subtitles, for the newest movies as well as older movies.
**Captionfish (iPhone, iPod, iPad)** – search engine of local captioned movies.

**Music**

For those who enjoy reading the lyrics while listening to music, check out these apps.

**TuneWiki (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, BlackBerry, Computer)** – shows lyrics for the songs you are listening to.
**SoundHound (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, WindowsPhone)** – another app that shows lyrics for the songs you are listening to.
**Shazam (iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android, BlackBerry, Nokia, WindowsPhone)** - will detect the song you are listening to and if you choose “Lyric Play” it will show you the lyrics to that song.

**Communication**

Think about the devices you already use everyday. You have the ability to communicate right there at your fingertips! Here are some potential tools.

**Fring (iPhone, iPad, Android, Nokia)** – group video calls or texting.
**eBuddy (iPhone, iPad, Android, mobile, PSP, Nintendo DS)** – messaging app with the capability to communicate with numerous messaging interfaces.
**imo (iPhone, iPad, Android, BlackBerry, Nokia)** – another messaging app that allows you to communicate with numerous instant messaging systems.
**Dragon Dictation (iPhone and iPad)** – a voice-recognition app that shows text instantly as the person speaks.
**Signtel (iPhone, iPad, iTouch, Android)** – an ASL translator app translating words into sign language.
Speak It! (iPhone and iPad) – text-to-speech app with various voice choices.
Voice Generator (iPhone and iPad) – a free alternative to the Speak It! app.

Emergency Alert

Global Alert Network (iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry, Android) – be in the know whenever there are traffic and weather alerts.
Disaster Caster (iPhone) – keeping yourself and your family informed and connected during a disaster. A location alert, disaster plan communication and contact emergency numbers are features available on this app.
Close Call (iPhone) – a custom wallpaper image app with your emergency phone number and crucial information (name, your hearing loss, allergies, or medications).

Others

Tap Tap (iPhone, iTouch, iPad) – an app designed to vibrate and flash to alert you of a loud noise nearby. Sensitivity can be adjusted. Various comments on how this could be a useful app can be found at the link provided below.
soundAMP R (iPhone, iTouch, iPad) – amplify the sounds around you through this app. You can also record audio to review (via speech-to-text app).
Ear Trumpet (iPhone, iTouch, iPad) – similar to soundAMP, but the app performs a hearing test on you to help you set up your ideal sound enhancement.

Captioning:

Despite the rapid growth of vlogs (video blogs) posted on YouTube, many are not accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. There is a simple website, CaptionTube, to add real-time synced caption to the videos. The site also supports captions in multiple languages.

There are thousands of captioned videos and DVDs available for free via loan to the educational community at Caption Media Program.

Keen Guides launched a pilot program in five states providing mobile-captioned video tours at various museums. Check out the map to see if you can experience this during your next museum visit!

Use Captionfish to look up local captioned movies. Cinemark is the first movie theater to provide captioning for nearly all the new movie releases with the use of CaptiView equipment. All other theaters usually show one captioned movie at a time or with rear-view caption.

Remote Accessibility:

Remote accessibility provides you with the freedom of accessing spoken information through the Internet. For instance, in your place of employment, using a remote real-time
captioning service for regular weekly or monthly meetings can help you better follow the flow of the conversation. Some companies offer access to a hard copy transcript afterwards, which could also serve as the minutes from the meeting. Here are some companies that offer remote real-time transcription service: CapVidio, QuickCaption, and TextSpeak Captions.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) is becoming a popular alternative to receiving interpreting service within short notice due to a shortage of interpreters at some locations. The interpreter(s) are not physically in the room, but connected via video conferencing equipment while the deaf or hard of hearing client is in the same room with the hearing person. Here are some companies that provide VRI: Purple, Z, SignOn, Interpretak, and AccessAmerica.

**Videoconferencing/Videophone:**

As mentioned earlier, you do not have to choose one video relay service provider. However, because you are required to register for a ten-digit phone number to serve the purpose of location detection for 911 calls, the proprietary technology that you receive from the provider would be tied to their services and the ten-digit number. Some of the video relay service providers mentioned earlier provide free videophones for deaf and hard of hearing customers:

Sorenson recently released ntouch videophone providing HD quality video with various features. Sorenson has historically released several videophones, including the VP-100 and VP-200. The Z provides the following videophones, Z-20, Z-340 and Z-OJO, which give the customer the option to choose a videophone that best fits his or her needs.

You may want to contact your local Telecommunication Devices Access Program (TEDPA) to inquire about their equipment distribution program. Some states distribute assistive technology at no charge to individuals with disabilities.

**TEDPA:** [http://www.tedpa.org/](http://www.tedpa.org/)
Telecommunication Devices Access Program
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243
800-342-8359 ext. 179
1-888-276-0677 (TTY)
[http://www.state.tn.us/tra/consumerfiles/tdapform.pdf](http://www.state.tn.us/tra/consumerfiles/tdapform.pdf)

Last, but not least, scroll through those websites for some updated information – DeafGadgets and Accessible Technology Coalition. Do check out those assistive technology catalogs for some tools that you might find useful -- SoundBytes and AbleData, as well as resources that are available through the Mid-South Access Center for Technology.
Interpretek VRI (http://www.interpretek.com/services/video-remote-interpreting.php)
AccessAmerica VRI (http://accessamericavri.com/)
Sorenson Videophones (http://www.sorensonvrs.com/products)
Z Videophones (http://www.zvrs.com/products/hardware)
SoundBytes (http://www.soundbytes.com/)
AbleData (http://www.abledata.com)
DeafGadgets (http://www.deafgadgets.com/)
Accessible Technology Coalition (http://atcoalition.org/category/deaf)
Mid-South Access Center for Technology (http://www.memphis.edu/act/services.htm)