People with visual impairments and communications services

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Why did Ofcom commission this research?

- Ofcom has a specific duty under the Communications Act to take account of the needs of people with disabilities when performing its duties

- This report is part of a series of studies looking at the needs of people with different sensory impairments

- Qualitative research

- Looked at use of fixed line and mobile telephony, radio, TV and internet.

- Sits alongside usability work

What did visually impaired people like?

Television

- Audio description (AD), mandated in Communications Act

- People who were aware of AD generally enjoyed it and wanted more of it

> *"…you go to bed and think, well I know what he or she did, or I know who did the murder, or whatever you know, and it's great, its another piece in the jigsaw and it helps." Male, 57, Profound, Acquired*

- However, fewer than half of respondents were aware of it

  - Ofcom awareness raising campaign

Radio

- Frequent announcements of radio channel name, helped when changing channel

- Radio through digital TV easy to navigate, but not widely used

Fixed line telephone

- Large button phones

- Phones with good colour contrast, dot on "5" button

- Free directory enquiries

What caused problems for visually impaired people?

Cost

- Cost was a barrier to obtaining specialist equipment and services, e.g. talking software

- Especially if on low income

- Students were made aware of financial aid to purchase equipment and services

- Other respondents lacked information about funding

- Limited opportunities to try software

Having to rely on memory

- Participants relied heavily on their memory for:

  - The **order** of contacts stored in their mobile phone

  - The **numbers** of TV and radio channels

  > *"…a lot of it is done on memory, as I say, because if you do something enough times, I'll memorise it. And with [   ] that annoys me because they move channels around."*
  > *Male, 42, Moderate, Acquired*

  - **Layouts**, e.g. of their remote control or mobile phone

- Reliance on memory can be a barrier to changing device

Devices

Good devices

- Enlarged buttons, font and screens, tactile aspects

- Talking menus

- Consistent layouts

- Easy to operate

> *"With the mobile phone, when it rings all I've got to do is flip it open. I haven't got to press any buttons to answer it which is a godsend because I wouldn't be able to see which one it is and I might get in a panic"*
> *Female, 45, Severe, Acquired*

Poor devices

- Flush, small and cramped buttons

- Several functions on one button

- Small, unclear displays

- Devices that cannot be tailored to suit preferences

- Poor software compatibility

Dealing with call centres

- Call centres were cited as a problem

- Staff lacked awareness of the needs of people with visual impairments

- Respondents were frustrated by being asked to read out serial numbers, look at on-screen menus etc

"…I told the woman 'I can't see' and she was telling me 'this should come up on your screen' and 'press that button' and so on. They were not really that helpful."
Male, 38, Severe, Acquired

- Call centre staff did not seem to understand that the call might take longer than average

Lack of information

- No one source of information for visually impaired people

- If impairment was congenital, tend to be better informed

- If part of a community, more aware of services available. For example, schools, universities and workplaces provided opportunities to try out equipment:

> *"That [Zoom Text] was from my University friend, my disability advisor, so she probably dug that one out for me. I tried it on one of their computers down there and I liked it, so they said they would arrange to have that installed on my one at home.."*
> *Male, 18, Mild, Congenital*

- Staff in retail outlets tended to have poor awareness of what would benefit these consumers

People did not want to stand out as visually impaired

- Some people were embarrassed about their impairment and didn't want to look different

  > *"I want to look as normal as possible. I don't want to be pulling a brick out of my bag; I want it to look like others."*
  > *Female, 35, Profound, Acquired*

- Embarrassment also led to non-acceptance of their impairment and reluctance to seek out further information

- Respondents were also reluctant to provide personal information about the nature of their disability to suppliers

What next?

Next steps for Ofcom

- Share findings of this research (http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/tv/reports/visual/)

- Learning disabilities research, will be published 24 November

- Usability is an ongoing priority for Ofcom

    – Usability conference 4 June 2008 (http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/usability/)

    – Scoping research on labelling

    – Review of assistive technology developments, missed opportunities?

    – Good practice guidance for call centres