



Listen Up!

Tips and advice to help you welcome customers with hearing loss



ACTION ON
HEARING
LOSS



VisitEngland

VisitEngland has worked with Action on Hearing Loss, the largest charity representing deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK, to develop this information booklet for tourism businesses. Action on Hearing Loss (the new name for RNID) is an expert provider of impartial and confidential support on all matters relating to deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus.

They work to improve the customer and employee experience by providing communication services, tailored deaf awareness training, customised accessibility consultancy services and supplying, installing and maintaining products to help communicate with customers with hearing loss.

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With more than 10 million people in the UK with some form of hearing loss, or 1 in 6 of the population, taking action to attract and retain these customers makes good commercial and legal sense.

The population is ageing, which means that the number of people with hearing loss is increasing, so investing in hearing support is investing in the future of your business. Your staff are just as important as your customers, so any improvements you make will also benefit members of your team with hearing loss.

This booklet contains information and top tips to help you and your business become more accessible for people with hearing loss.

A survey in 2007 of British hotels found that 80% of UK hotels did not have the basic level of services to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing guests*.

* Fireco Ltd

Safety

One of the biggest concerns for people with hearing loss when staying in hotels and B&Bs is safe evacuation during an emergency. Alerting guests with hearing loss at night is particularly important as they will take out their hearing aids when sleeping.

“I was once staying in a hotel and unbeknown to me the fire alarm went off. I decided to pop out and was surprised to see the fire brigade, guests and staff outside. Luckily it was a false alarm. If my room had a strobe light fire alarm and vibrating pad for night time I would have felt safe in the knowledge that should the fire alarm ring, I would evacuate immediately with everyone else.”



Ruthy Fletcher,
deaf traveller

Small hotels and B&Bs

A domestic paging system, such as the Bellman Visit 868, is appropriate for B&Bs and hotels that are no bigger than a large house. The system consists of a pager receiver, a pager charger, a vibrating pad and a suitable number of smoke alarm transmitters for the size and shape of your building.

The pager receiver clips to clothing or fits in a pocket and will vibrate to alert customers if the smoke alarm transmitters detect smoke. The smoke alarm icon will also light up on the pager to show the customer what they're being alerted to. At night they would put the pager into the pager charger, plug in the vibrating pad and then put the pad under their pillow. If the smoke alarm goes off at night then the pad will vibrate.

Cost depends on the number of detectors required. For example, a pack that includes one ionisation smoke alarm for

the downstairs hall, one optical smoke alarm for the top of the stairs and one for the kitchen costs from £416 (Excl. VAT).

If your accommodation has several hallways then you will need additional detectors. For complete equality you would also need to include ionisation detectors in all the rooms (£59.45 each Excl. VAT).

It may be possible for a technician to fit a transmitter to an existing smoke alarm system. The benefit of this would be that you would not need to purchase any Bellman smoke alarm transmitters.

Another option is to provide a portable acoustically triggered alerting device for use in hotel bedrooms, such as Deafgard www.deafgard.com. The unit is activated when the fire alarm sounds, alerting guests when they are awake and asleep. However, these devices can be prone to false triggering by other loud noises.

Large hotels and attractions

For larger premises, the traditional approach to cater for deaf people has been to install flashing lights (beacons) linked to the fire alarm in those areas considered at high risk. However, it is recommended that they are located throughout the building to prevent discrimination.

A commercial paging system, such as Deaf Alerter www.deaf-alerter.com, may be more cost effective. The building is fitted with a radio transmitter, which alerts the deaf person via a personal receiver when the alarm sounds. In hotels, the system can work with a vibrating pad to alert guests when they are sleeping.

Top Tips

- Encourage guests to make you aware if they have hearing loss so you can discuss and arrange the necessary evacuation arrangements.

“If you may have difficulty hearing the fire alarm it is important that you let us know so that we can best meet your evacuation needs”

- Consider offering guests with hearing loss a room near to the exit, possibly on the ground floor.
- Ensure your Fire Risk Assessment addresses the evacuation needs of deaf guests.

Room service

The simple task of waiting for a room service delivery can be problematic and stressful if the guest cannot hear a knock at the door. A door beacon is a simple device that hooks over the guest's bedroom door and flashes if someone knocks. From £20.44 (Excl. VAT).



Customer contact points

Customer-facing points such as information desks, ticket & retail counters, reception desks and other service counters can be noisy environments, making verbal communication with hard of hearing customers difficult. But often these locations are key areas of initial customer contact. The right equipment and informed staff can make an enormous difference to your customers' first impression.

Hearing Loops

A hearing loop is a piece of equipment that allows a hearing aid wearer to hear more clearly over background noise. Even a very small amount of background noise (like the hum of a fan) can be very distracting for a hearing aid wearer and can mask the speaker's voice, because hearing aids amplify all sounds, whether you want to hear them or not.

Loops work by staff members speaking into a microphone which transmits the amplified sound to a hearing aid that's switched to the hearing loop setting/'T' programme.

Since the staff member's voice is going straight from the microphone to the hearing aid it reduces the impact of background noise, such as 'unwanted' speech from other conversations. This enables clearer communication, particularly through glass screens. Tourism businesses such as hotels, attractions and tourist information centres should have a loop system at each counter and a minimum of one loop at counters with multiple customer contact points.



Installed counter loops are mains-powered and discreetly fixed out of view, with only the microphone visible. So long as you keep them switched on and in working order they're always available for use, so users can simply switch their hearing aids to the hearing loop setting/'T' programme to benefit from them. Wherever you have a regular need for hearing support, a permanent installed system is the best option.

Portable counter loops such as the LoopHear consist of one portable unit. They have a rechargeable battery and can be mains powered. You can move them wherever you need them and, because they require no installation, they're good value for money. They are placed on a table or desk so require more space than installed systems

and you'll need to ensure they're charged and available at all times for customer use. The coverage of a portable loop is often less than 1 metre, so the hearing aid user will need to be close to it. Also, the microphone is usually built-in so staff members may need to speak closely into it.

Where possible, an installed counter loop system is preferable to a portable loop. You can buy induction loop systems from a range of suppliers in the UK. Prices for supplying and installing a counter loop start at £450 (Excl. VAT), depending upon your location and requirements. A portable counter loop can cost as little as £115 (Excl. VAT). Action on Hearing Loss can discuss your loop requirements with you.

A study of 20 top London attractions by Action on Hearing Loss found that: 11 advertised loop provision, 7 actually had a loop and only 3 had a loop in good working order

Top Tips

- It's crucial that hearing aid wearers know that a loop system is installed and where it is. In the case of a reception area, for example, a sign should be positioned where the loop is effective.
- Train your staff about the need for, and the function and use of, induction loops.
- Check loops regularly to ensure they're working properly. We recommend they are checked weekly, along with your fire alarm. Staff can use a loop tester (such as a Sonido Digital Listener). Sonidos are available from Action on Hearing Loss for £56.68 (Excl. VAT) and headphones for £14.78 (Not VAT exempt).

Can you hear at the back?

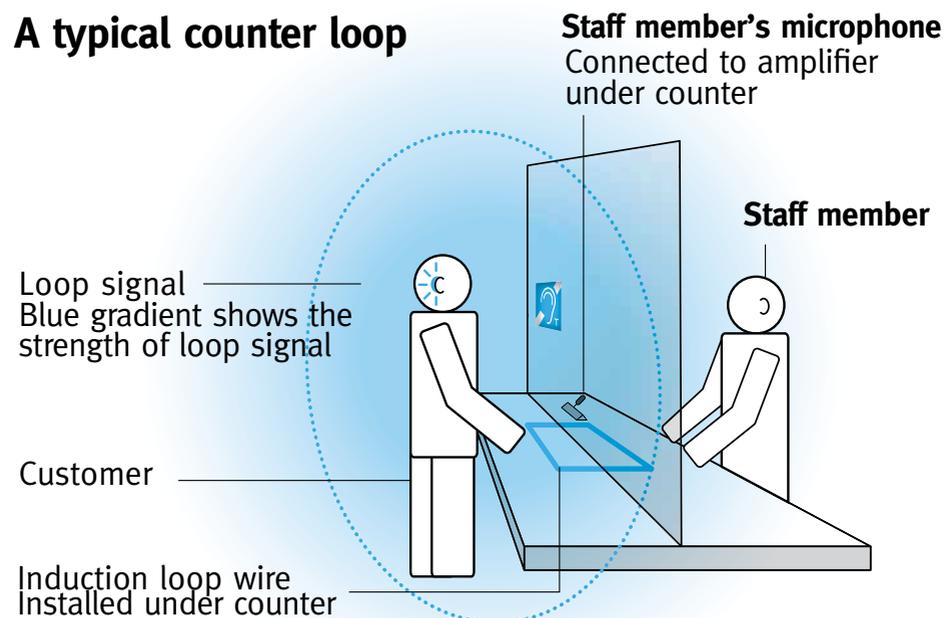
Loops can also help hearing aid wearers hear effectively when at a distance from the speaker, for example at the theatre or in a conference/meeting room.

An infrared system is an alternative to a loop system. The signal is transmitted by invisible infrared light rather than by magnetic field. Theatres such as The National and The Curve use this system and people who want to use it borrow receivers to benefit from amplified sound anywhere in the area covered by the transmitter.

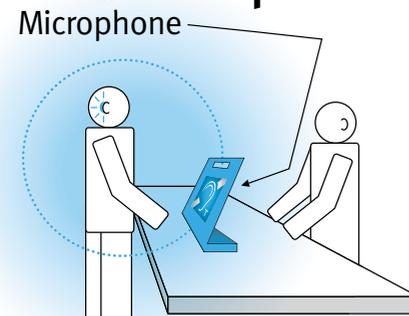
Infrared systems are an increasingly popular alternative to loop systems. Unlike an installed loop, there is no need to run a cable around the room, so the system is easier and quicker to set up.

Infrared is the best option if confidentiality is an issue and where more than one system is being used in close proximity. This is because the sound cannot be picked up through walls.

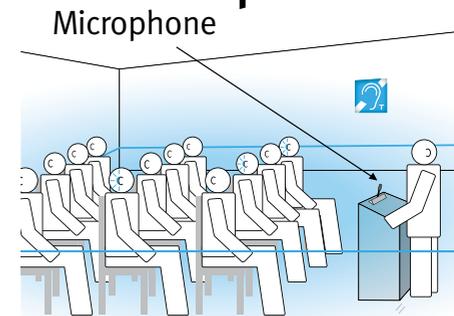
A typical counter loop



Portable loop



Room loop



VisitEngland quality assured attractions can ask their VAQAS assessor to demonstrate hearing loop testing during their annual assessment visit.



Tour Guiding

Visitors on a guided tour as part of a group may find themselves at a distance from the guide. Background noise and distractions may also be an issue on tours around towns, busy attractions and factories.

The Tour Guide System ensures visitors don't miss any information by transmitting the tour guide's voice to hearing aids, or headphones for non-hearing aid wearers. From £380 for a single user up to £884 for 6 users (Excl. VAT).

“Since we purchased the Tour Guide System visitors can now hear the tour guide clearly, without disturbance from background noises in the craft factory environment. We have received excellent feedback from visitors who have benefited from the system, as they now fully participate in the tour experience no matter where they stand in the group”



Andrea Holmes
of Denby Pottery

Telecommunication

Do you know how you would manage a call with a deaf or hard of hearing person?

Text Relay

Users with communication difficulties (deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired) have a specially adapted telephone with a keyboard called a textphone. Highly trained relay assistants mediate between textphone users and telephone users. The service is discreet and completely confidential. There's no additional charge for using the service and hearing users don't need any specialist equipment. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365

Top Tips

- Ensure staff are trained in the use of the Text Relay service and confident to use it.
- When buying telephones for guest bedrooms and public areas, ensure they have voice amplification and are hearing aid compatible.



Top Tips

- Display a free window sticker that states you welcome registered assistance dogs (Contact Assistance Dogs UK 01844 348100).
- Remember, the Equality Act 2010 obliges tourism businesses to welcome assistance dogs.



www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/visitengland



Guide Dogs ✓
Hearing Dogs ✓
Assistance Dogs ✓

Assistance dogs

Although you may typically associate assistance dogs with guiding people who are visually impaired, they can also perform many important roles for those who are deaf and hard of hearing. These dogs can be identified by a distinctive burgundy jacket.



Ann Ramsden and her assistance dog, yellow Labrador Max, travel regularly: “Max has been tuned into sounds I can’t hear – including the doorbell and smoke alarm and he gives me confidence to manage tricky situations. My best experience was at a hotel where I was allocated a ground-floor room with easy access to a grassed area, the restaurant staff moved a table so there was plenty of space for Max and the chef sent out a selection of meats for him!”



www.visitengland.org/access



Are your staff deaf aware?

More than 70% of hearing aid wearers said that having deaf aware staff would encourage them to choose one business or service over another. Deaf awareness training improves staff communication skills and confidence when dealing with customers who are deaf or have hearing loss. This means better customer service for up to 1 in every 6 of your customers.

Action on Hearing Loss provides training covering all aspects of working and dealing with people who are deaf or have hearing loss: Deaf Awareness, Deaf and

Disability Awareness, Start to Sign, British Sign Language (BSL) Level 1 and textphone/Text Relay training.

“It makes my visit so much more enjoyable when staff understand how to communicate with deaf people. I lipread, so if they know to look at me when speaking to me, rather than turning away to focus on their till or computer screen, it really helps!”

Trish, Bristol



Courses can be delivered at your business or for smaller organisations there are open courses held regularly nationwide where you will be trained alongside staff from other organisations, providing you with the opportunity to network and swap ideas (from £50 Excl. VAT) www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/training.

Other disability awareness training for tourism staff that covers deaf awareness includes: Online course by VisitEngland and DisabledGo www.disabledgo.com/tourismtraining and classroom courses such as Welcome All www.welcometoexcellence.co.uk and WorldHost Customers with Disabilities www.worldhost.uk.com.

Top Tips

Tips when speaking to someone with a hearing loss

- **Always face the person you're talking to**
This enables them to hear you more clearly and allows them to lipread you if they need to.
- **Repeat yourself if necessary**
Always repeat yourself if the person hasn't understood. You could also try saying it in a different way to help them understand.
- **Speak clearly**
Speak clearly but not too slowly and use natural facial expressions and gestures. A person who lipreads understands people best when they speak normally.
- **Use clear, concise language**
Be careful not to 'waffle', or you'll be harder to follow.
- **Don't shout**
It's uncomfortable for hearing aid wearers and can look aggressive.
- **Find a quiet place with good lighting**
You'll be easier to hear in a quiet environment and good lighting will help the person to lipread you if they need to.

Case Study Radisson Blu Edwardian

As a company we are passionate about providing excellent customer service to all of our guests. We have procedures for fire evacuation and equipment such as hearing loops but we wanted to look at what more we could do to ensure guests with hearing loss have a more comfortable stay.

In 2012, we signed up to work towards the 'Louder than Words' Charter Mark. This helps us to improve our offer and demonstrate our commitment to being a responsible business. We are in the process of reviewing our equipment, policies and procedures so that we can go that bit further and ensure guests with hearing loss have a really great stay.

One of our key goals is to improve how our employees communicate with guests, making them aware of the importance of good lighting for lip-reading and the impact background music can have, for example.

With approximately 10 million people in the UK having some form of hearing loss we know that it makes sound business sense.



Theresa Taylor,
Radisson Blu
Edwardian



How can I inform customers of our services for people with hearing loss?

Access Statement

An access statement is a written description of a venue's facilities and services to inform people with access needs. It is the most important means of communicating information on your accessibility so include the following details for customers with hearing loss:

- Provision of hearing loops, equipment such as vibrating alarms & amplified telephones, and services such as subtitles on TVs
- Specific details of evacuation for people with hearing loss
- Any staff that have undergone deaf awareness training and/or use British Sign Language

National Accessible Scheme (NAS)



The National Accessible Scheme rates the accessibility of visitor accommodation throughout England. Accommodation businesses can follow the criteria to better meet the needs of guests with mobility, visual and hearing impairment and use recognised logos to promote their true level of accessibility.



Louder than Words™ charter mark

Action on Hearing Loss provides support on accessibility matters to businesses and public services across the UK. They can benchmark your business against a predefined list of quality standards that help demonstrate a commitment to fair and accessible service provision.

This in turn provides core recommendations to overcome any cultural, environmental

and service barriers and can set you on the way to achieve the Louder than Words™ charter mark.

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/ltw

Access Marketing toolkit

If you have taken steps to improve your accessibility, then read the VisitEngland Accessibility Marketing Guide to learn how best to market your accessibility credentials.



The prices quoted in this booklet relate to Action on Hearing Loss products. Other suppliers may be available. Prices at March 2013, excluding VAT.

For more information, advice and to purchase equipment contact:

Action on Hearing Loss, quoting 'VisitEngland'
01733 361199
solutions@hearingloss.org.uk
www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/visitengland
1 Haddonbrook Business Centre,
Orton Southgate,
Peterborough,
PE2 6YX

For a list of competent assessors who can test and assess hearing loops for correct operation and performance visit <http://www.isce.org.uk/afils-scheme>. Some ISCE members also provide loop installation.

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