

Tuesday, May 01, 2012

As much as they would like to present themselves as the experts, many hearing care providers are much less than expert in the area of assistive listening systems. They, like the person who spoke to your group, are the ones telling their clients that loops and telecoils are "old technology" and not used any more - having been replaced by bluetooth and other technologies and they are simply not "up-to-date" on what is actually going on.

The simple facts are that, although some small hearing aids can't accommodate telecoils, 69% of hearing aid models being sold today do have or can have telecoils (up from 32% a few years ago) and over 50% of those being sold are so equipped. Both Siemens and Widex have added telecoils to their "streamers" so that they can pick up a loop signal and pass it on to the very small hearing non-telecoil equipped hearing aids they manufacture along with larger styles.

Bluetooth and some other advances are great technology and do lots of wonderful things. You can "stream" your TV signal to your hearing aids to keep the volume from the TV's speakers low. You can "stream" the voice of callers on your cell phone to your hearing aids. Same with an MP3 player BUT - that's only to your hearing aids. If you have hard of hearing guests watching TV with you, they can't access that "streamed" TV signal unless they have the same brand of hearing aids. With a room loop, anyone with telecoil equipped hearing aids from any manufacturer can access the loop signal.

More and more churches are installing loops. All in the congregation with telecoil equipped HAS can hear the service and others can do so with a headset. Bluetooth simply cannot work in that setting. Same with a theater or a council chamber. Last year at the Kennedy Center hundreds of hard of hearing people used the telecoils in their hearing aids to hear the Broadway show "Wicked." That could not have been done using Bluetooth or some other hearing aid company proprietary "streaming" system.

Just this month there were 15 library meeting rooms looped in one city in Wisconsin. There have been 14 live performance theaters looped in Sarasota Florida in the last year. One restaurant there has even looped some table and a Whole Foods store looped one check-out line. We have over six dozen churches here in New Mexico that have been looped in the last several years. They have just added loops to all of the new style taxi cabs to be sold in New York City. A Loop Seattle campaign just kicked off last week to join similar campaigns in cities throughout the U.S.

A major manufacturer and distributor of FM and IR assistive listening systems, Williams Sound, has just added a line of German made loops to their product mix. Another major distributor of such equipment has just added Ampetronic loop systems to their line of merchandise. Widex is currently testing a new model telecoil that senses a looped room and turns itself on. Several years ago there was only one hearing loop manufacturer in the U.S. - now there are several. Another company, Contacta, is conducting training sessions throughout the U. S. on loop technology for audio/visual employees and others to familiarize them the systems. They've trained hundreds in session in Atlanta, Reno, here in Albuquerque and elsewhere.

I could go on and on but it should be obvious that your "audiologist" was less than well informed. That's the reason, Dr. Pat Kricos (immediate past president of the American Academy of Audiology and a professor in the audiology department at the U; of Florida) got that organization to join with HLAA in the "Get In the Hearing Loop" campaign. A study done by Dr. Mark Ross (whose articles on hearing aids, telecoils etc. you have seen in Hearing Loss Magazine) found that less than half of the audiologists and hearing aid specialists in this country counsel their clients on loops and telecoils.

As for FM or IR, the new ADA rules require that new installations of that technology must make 24% of their receivers neck loops instead of headsets so yes - those systems can be part of the ["Get In the Hearing Loop"](#) campaign as far as I'm concerned. The two major performing arts halls in Albuquerque have both added neck loop receivers to their IR assistive listening systems and that, too, is happening around the country. For what I do with neck loops, see the article "In the (neck) Loop."

I hope you will pass this information on to your hearing and hard of hearing friends.

Best regards,

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