AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF INC.

Recommendations for the National Relay Service 2006 Tender

BACKGROUND

Since the inception of the National Relay Service (NRS) in Australia in 1995, NRS has grown in strength and Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) currently provides the following services:

- Text to Voice & Voice to Text
- Hearing Carry Over (HCO)
- Voice Carry Over (VCO)
- Emergency Relay Service (106)
- Reverse Charge Calls (RCC)
- Personal Relay Service (PRS)
- Speech to Speech Relay (SSR)

The Emergency Relay Service (106) was added at the beginning of 2000, offering a world first national text-based emergency service.

Australian Association of the Deaf Inc (AAD) acknowledge the significant impact the NRS has made in Deaf and hard of hearing Australians' lives. Ordering a pizza was never so easy and it enabled families to get in touch with loved ones.

At the end of 2004, the NRS is almost up for another tendering process and AAD would like to thank the Department of Communications, IT and the Arts for their willingness to consider our recommendations for the new NRS 2006 Tender in its current writing stage.

THE NRS IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT

The NRS was established before the telecommunications industry was deregulated and during the infancy of digital telecommunications. The telecommunications of today continues to increase in diversity and range of services. Broadband services are fast becoming the 'norm' in home computing. Broadband phones are not far away to being mainstreamed into Australian telecommunications. 3G mobile technology is about to take off with Telstra, Optus and Vodafone entering the 3G market in 2005. Video telephony over Internet protocol, 3G and ISDN is becoming widely available and convergences between technologies are not far off.

National Relay Services internationally have significantly evolved from the basic provision of text to voice & voice to text via telephone typewriters (TTYs) with more services now including Video Relay Service, IP Relay and SMS Relay.

To keep up with the changes in today's telecommunications environment for the needs of Deaf people, we recommend that serious consideration be given to the following NRS Service Performance Standards and Community Outreach Program performance indicators as well as allowing for new services as part of the standard National Relay Service that will see Deaf people continue as active participants of today's rich multicultural and mainstream Australian society.

NRS SERVICE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Currently the following service performance standards are covered:

1. Call blockage (less than 5% of calls receive a busy signal);
2. Call answer time (90% of calls answered within 10 seconds);
3. Complaints as a ratio of successful calls (less than 2% of total successful calls)
4. Text emergency (106) call blockage (less than 0.5% of calls receive a busy signal); and
5. Text emergency (106) call answer time (99% of calls answered within 10 seconds).

One needs to consider that the NRS currently operates calls on a speed of average 40-50 words per minute for text to voice & voice to text calls. Technically many of the TTYs on the market are fitted with turbo-code which handles an average of 100 words per minute and quite a large number of Deaf people are fast typists (having had to use TTYs as part of their life from an early age for communicating over the telephone).

AAD would like to see some improvement made in the speed of call delivery i.e. increasing to an average of say, 80 words per minute, to be negotiated between DCITA in consultation with ACA, NRSCC and NRS Provider and expanded over the lifetime of the current contract.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

AAD would like to see the addition, where possible, of the following performance indicators:

a)

- *NRS Provider will actively conduct a national awareness campaign through media, deaf, hearing and speech impaired organisations and others to promote the NRS, including new services.*

Reasons for new performance indicator:
This indicator needs to be clearly expressed rather than covered under the umbrella term of community awareness. Past national campaigns have been ad-hoc and not a constant which has contributed to slowness of community acknowledgment rate about the NRS. Past media campaigns have also been a bit ambiguous about what the service actually is. They need to be less coy and more explicit.

b)

- *NRS Provider make publicly available on its website quarterly report information about its performance, including outreach and complaints handling, as required by contract.*

Reasons for new performance indicator:
As is common practice for overseas Relay Services and local government services, information on the performance of the NRS should be regularly accessible to the public so they are better informed.

c)

- *Requests for NRS Provider information and support services via the Internet, email, and customer hotlines will increase by at least five per cent as compared to the previous year.* ***NRS Provider to include downloadable videoclips showing relevant NRS information in Auslan.***

Reasons for new performance indicators:
This enhances further accessibility to a wider audience who are also heavy users of the NRS.

d)

- *NRS Provider will survey the satisfaction with the NRS of each of its key consumer groups, achieving statistically reliable results wherever possible and report annually on the result for each of the groups (survey to be conducted by an independent agency and report made public). Seventy-five per cent of respondents to the satisfaction survey or surveys will rate the service as 'satisfactory' or above.*

Reasons for new performance indicator:
This enhances further accessibility to a wider audience who are also heavy users of the NRS.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEAF TELEPHONE USERS

AAD fully supports the ACIF Any to Any Text Connectivity Working Party's final reports to DCITA including the Business Model for a Text Server. Surely it would be an opportune time for this to be included in the new NRS Tender?

In addition to the Text Server, in the United States and Europe, video telephony continues to dominate as the preferred choice of telecommunications for Deaf people with more and more video relay services and video relay interpreting becoming available. One thing to also consider, is that the United States will take up 3G technology next year, and there is considerable buzz in the American Deaf community that it is the next big thing. Convergence between 3G video phones and PC's with webcams has started in Sweden.

AAD through the Deaf Telecommunications Access & Networking Project (DTAN) has remained active in the telecommunications environment through funding provided by the Department of Communications, IT and the Arts Consumer Grants. In our activities during the 2003/2004 funding year, we generated 4 discussion papers, one of which covered the area of Broadband.

Shown below is an extract from our discussion paper. A copy can be downloaded from our website http://www.aad.org.au/download/BroadbandDiscussionPaper.pdf

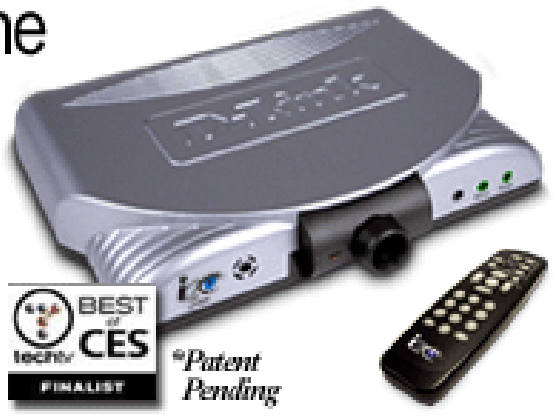
'Recently, in America and the United Kingdom people have started using a special device called a D-Link Broadband Videophone that can turn any TV into a broadband videophone. It does not require a computer but is connected into your TV set and it delivers up to 30 frames per second for smooth video. It is also compatible with some flashing lamp systems.

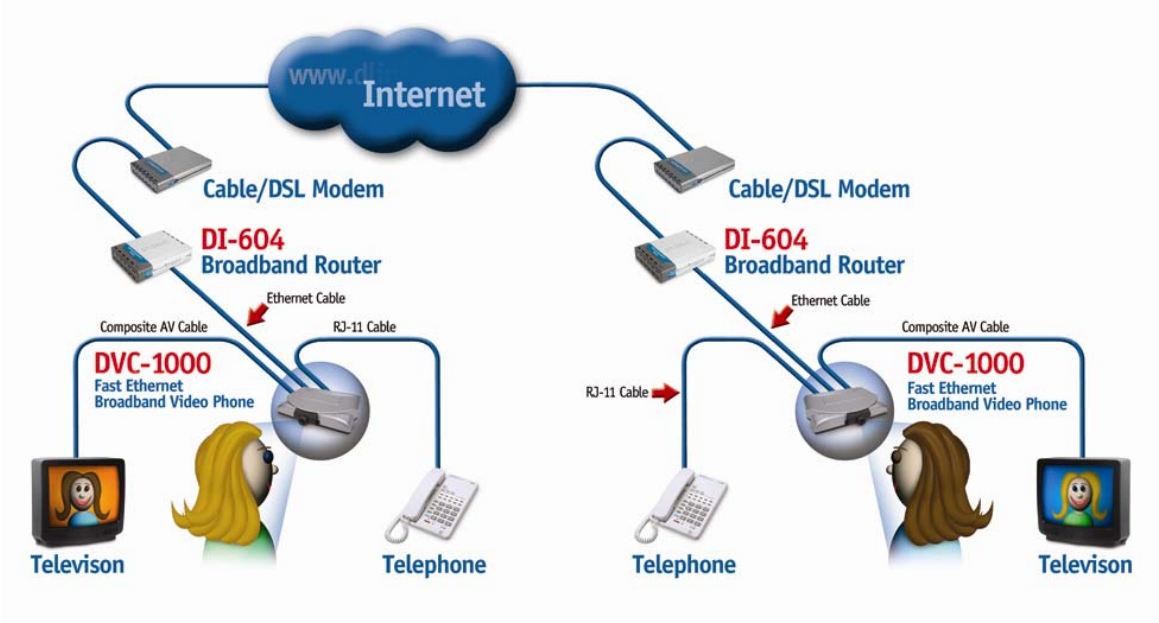
Broadband Videophone

DVC-1000

The Future is Now...

Easily turn your TV into a Broadband Videophone





Seeing is believing for Grandma

Peek-a-Boo.....I See You

Picture source: http://www.dlink.com/products/?pid=8

This is now available in Australia and we are going to ask you some questions about this

product in the questionnaire. Your comments will greatly help us to advocate for a similar product in Australia in the future.'

Feedback to date from DTAN's Broadband Discussion paper shows that the Deaf people are most interested in this new technology (shown above) and would prefer this over the current TTY technology.

It is not known at this stage whether or not this technology can converge successfully with 3G technology or with PC's and webcams.

AAD DTAN intends to put together the findings from the Broadband discussion paper later in the year and making this available in 2005.

Auslan is a language that is not spoken VERBALLY but through SIGNING. You can well imagine the benefits of video telephony using the above technology, not just for Deaf people but for the mainstream community.

Will the NRS of today handle this? No.

ACE, as the current NRS Provider has done research into Video Relay and SMS Relay. Both these findings show the need for both these Relay Services.

Therefore, we would like to recommend that DCITA consider the following new services for inclusion into the new Tender.

NEW SERVICES FOR CONSIDERATION IN NEW TENDER

1. NRS Provider to establish an **IP and ISDN-capable Video Relay Service** within the first 12 months of the contract

    - (ISDN VRS service component to be phased out within 24 months of establishment).
    - Initial operating hours to be negotiated between DCITA in consultation with ACA, NRSCC and NRS Provider and expanded over the lifetime of the current contract

2. NRS provider to establish an **IP-Relay service** within the first 12 months of the contract.

    - Initial operating hours to be negotiated between DCITA in consultation with ACA, NRSCC and NRS Provider and expanded over the lifetime of the current contract

3. NRS provider to establish an **SMS Relay service** within the first 12 months of the contract.

    - Initial operating hours to be negotiated between DCITA in consultation with ACA, NRSCC and NRS Provider and expanded over the lifetime of the current contract

4. NRS provider to establish a **Text Server service** within the first 12 months of the contract.

- DCITA to consider this, in consultation with ACA, NRSCC, ACIF and NRS Provider and maintained over the lifetime of the current contract

Service Performance standards for new services

To be developed by DCITA in consultation with ACA, NRSCC and NRS Provider within the first 12 months of the contract.

DEFINITION OF STANDARD TELEPHONE SERVICE

Section 6 of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999* defines the standard telephone service (STS) as being:

- a telephone service fit for the purpose of voice telephony, or
- if voice telephony is impractical for a person with a disability, a form of communication that is equivalent to voice telephony.

As the sole universal service provider, only Telstra has the obligation to provide an STS to all people in Australia under its universal service obligation (USO), but other telephone companies may also provide an STS.

For most people, the STS means the basic fixed telephone used to speak with people in other locations. Telephone companies are required to provide certain features with an STS. These features include access to:

- local, national and international calls
- 24 hour access to emergency service numbers, free of charge
- a unique telephone number with a directory listing, unless the customer requests otherwise
- operator assisted services
- directory assistance and
- itemised billing, including itemised local calls on request.

For people who are Deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, an alternative form of communication, such as communicating by text using a teletypewriter (TTY) or modem, is a form of communication considered to be equivalent to voice telephony.

It will not be long before Standard Telephone Service covers Mobile Telephony. Does anyone realize that the National Relay Service is not equipped to handle Mobile Telephony?

For the NRS to become flexible and in keeping with the fast growing technology, we recommend that the:

1. NRS Service Performance Standards be updated
2. Community Outreach Program performance indicators be updated
3. Inclusion of the Video Relay Service.
4. Inclusion of IP Relay Service.
5. Inclusion of SMS Relay.
6. Inclusion of Text Server Service be considered.