Digital and Mobile Communications for Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing Students

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As its name suggests, the term “social media” refers to digital media that are used to interact socially. Examples of social media include: microblogs (essentially, an online “diary” with brief descriptions of events, opinions, views—the most popular microblogging platform is Twitter); social networking (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+); photo sharing (i.e. Picasa, Flickr); blogs; and vlogs (videoblogging, shared on sites like YouTube).

Some popular applications of social media that would be useful for Deaf and/or hearing impaired persons are instant messaging services (such as Windows Live Messenger, AIM, Yahoo! Messenger) and texting via mobile phone. Not only are the online services free, one is not required to type ga to indicate “Go Ahead” or sk to end the conversation. Another difference is that with messaging systems, more than one person can communicate at the same time.

We, at the Adaptech Research Network, recently completed a study to determine the social media and mobile technologies that post-secondary students with disabilities use. This study looked at whether students found these discussed technologies useful and easily accessible, or if they found limitations. 722 post-secondary students with disabilities responded to our survey in 2009-2010. The following are some responses of the 51 students surveyed who self-identified as Deaf (10 students) or Hard-of-Hearing (41 students).

In terms of cell phone usage:
▶ 38 out of 51 respondents (75%) used a cell phone or mobile device
▶ In total, 29 respondents used a cell phone without adaptations and 9 used a device with adaptations
▶ Of those 29 respondents who used a cell phone without any adaptations, almost half (48%) wanted a device with adaptations

When asked what type of adaptation they used, students reported the following:
▶ Hearing aid compatible technologies
▶ iCom Bluetooth
▶ Neckloop telephone
▶ Amplifier

Key problems with cell phones and Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing students:
▶ Poor reception
▶ Poor speech clarity

Difficulties with phones are not a new issue, and go as far back as the 1980s, when organizations such as CHIP were advocating for T-coils. Since phones provide the greatest barrier for hearing aid users, it is not surprising that young adults with hearing impairments would want adaptations to these technologies.

Today in Canada, mobile phones

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are not regulated and do not have to be hearing aid compatible. However, in the USA there are rating scales for cell phones. The scale starts at M1 or T1 (poor), and moves on to M2 or T2 (fair), M3 or T3 (good), then finally, M4 or T4 (excellent). There is an opportunity for the Hard-of-Hearing communities to advocate for unlimited access regulated mobile devices.

If you are listening but not hearing, CHIP can help.

At CHIP we make the most of the hearing we have — and you can too!

► Visit our Resource Centre and try out the latest technology and assistive listening devices that can help you hear better
► Come to the HEAR program and learn how to cope with your hearing loss
► Improve your communication with friends and family through lipreading and Signed English classes

Enjoy life and make friends at CHIP’s workshops.

Make a difference – Become a CHIP volunteer

Membership is only $10 a year.

Donations to CHIP are tax deductible and receipts will be issued

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