Soundshuttle

Induction loop hearing assistance to go.

Text:/ Graeme Hague

Anyone who has worked with hard-of-hearing systems (HOH) will probably agree with me that, try as hard as you might, it's an imperfect science that rarely keeps everyone happy. First and foremost, hearing problems are very much a personal affliction and no two peoples' impairments are the same. Attempting to cater for everyone's needs with a single, standard solution such as headphones usually means nobody gets anything quite good enough.

As a result a preferred method of tackling the issue of providing some kind of HOH system is usually targeted at induction hearing loops, where customers and audience members can switch their own hearing aid to a 'T' (telecoil) or 'MT' mode and pick up the broadcast signal. The simple logic behind this is that every hearing aid is configured for the wearer's particular condition.

Unfortunately, from an equipment and installation point of view, hearing loops can be a daunting prospect. Real 'loops' of copper wire in a venue floor require a really significant amount of amplifier power to cover every seat. The same goes for shops, service counters and public areas. Delivering a HOH service to the entire area can be difficult and expensive, and usually ends up being below-par. Infrared and FM radio systems have made advances, but these still have shadowed areas and signal drop-outs. Instead, it would be better if the HOH area can be concentrated without compromising the experience of those who need it.

Humantechnik with their ViViD-Acoustics Systems have come up with a nifty device that can solve a lot of problems. Basically, it's a portable self-contained induction loop system I assume that within the hard, plastic case an actual 'loop' is in there somewhere. Combined with an in-built microphone and rechargeable batteries the Soundshuttle is a little larger than a portable CD player (remember them?) and comes in bright colours like yellow and blue, or you can opt for a not-so-in-your-face black.

TOO SIMPLE FOR WORDS

Set up is very easy indeed. Just turn the Soundshuttle on, make sure the microphone is facing the source you want to transmit … and that's it. There are no volume controls, no tone adjustment-only a green 'on' button and a red 'Off' button. If operating off the NiMH rechargeable battery it has run time of about four hours, but I imagine it will mostly be used in situations where it will powered by its plug-pack.

The Soundshuttle with its blatant logo announces to hearing impaired customers that a hearing loop is in place and that to hear the person behind the counter they need only switch their hearing aid to the 'T' position. That is, if it isn't an automatic thing since some modern hearing aids have that capability (apparently along with BlueTooth links to mobile phones).

The stated coverage of approximately four square mettres is limited which means the client needs be nice and close to guarantee reliable operation, but i nduction loops do need a lot of grunt to work well, so you can't demand too much from a portable device.

The 3.5mm external microphone connection will be handy for anyone wanting a more permanent setup or perhaps where an operator is sitting down behind a security screen or a service counter.

All in all the Soundshuttle is a clever idea. The only drawbacks are the sixteen hour charge time if the batteries go completely flat and the short operational range. It definitely makes providing service to the hearing impaired a complete no-brainer.

PRODUCT DETAILS

RRP $595 (GST Exempt)
Group Technologies: 03 9354 9133 or
www.grouptechnologies.com.au