

Let Your Fingers Do The Talking

Free Telecom Services Empower Deaf And Hard Of Hearing To Communicate

(NAPSA)—Camera phones, wireless walkie-talkie-style services and voice calls sent over the Internet are just a few of the latest developments in communications technology that many people are familiar with. But the growth in innovative communications also has helped the 24 million-plus Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability communicate better via the Internet, wireless devices or new types of phones that use voice-recognition software to provide “almost instant captioning” of a conversation.

As a leading provider of assistive technologies for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, Sprint has 14 years of experience in providing relay services, as well as a reputation for offering emerging technologies to make communications more natural and accessible for anyone who has a hearing or speech disability (see www.sprintrelay.com for information). Customers say the innovative services have given them better options in communicating with friends, family and co-workers.

“My husband and I are both deaf and have used TTY since 1977,” said Elizabeth Radcliffe, a Kansas resident and Sprint Relay customer. “TTY was helpful, however, we love video relay and can’t live without it now. We can better understand the emotions in the conversation, and communicate faster and more naturally with our



Video Relay Service allows those who are deaf or hard of hearing to use American Sign Language for faster, more natural conversations.

family and friends, and with our son who is in college and learned sign language when he was eight months old. We have several setups in our home because it is affordable and easy to use.”

Video Relay Service (VRS) was first launched by Sprint and Communications Services for the Deaf in the spring of 2002. VRS allows deaf individuals to use sign language to communicate via video conferencing equipment (i.e., Web cam or videophone), a high-speed Internet connection and a video interpreter, who relays the conversation by voice to the hearing party and signs responses back to the deaf user. VRS conversations average 100 to 150 words per minute, allowing for a much faster and more natural conversation versus a traditional typed relay conversation (which is closer to 60-80 words per minute).

“When we started using video

relay, we were in the middle of refinancing our home mortgage. Using TTY to communicate with the bank was tedious and frustrating. Then we used video relay to talk with the bank which allowed us to use sign language to ask our questions and clarify issues. We could better understand what the bank needed to complete the process,” said Radcliffe.

To communicate while on the go, there are now wireless relay services that provide an easy way to make a relay call. Sprint Relay WirelessSM, powered by GoAmerica, enables users to connect to a relay operator from virtually anywhere, using a choice of wireless handheld devices and pagers such as a RIM Blackberry or Sidekick device.

While many relay services are best suited for individuals who are deaf or have lost most of their ability to hear, one new service is available for individuals who are hard-of-hearing, have experienced hearing loss later in life or for deaf individuals with good vocalization skills. Using advanced voice recognition software, CapTelSM Relay Service essentially provides live captioning of phone conversations, allowing users to ensure they receive and understand the full context of any call. CapTel tests to gather information and feedback began in 2002. In 2004, the service was launched in many states as well as for retired and active federal government employees. CapTel satisfies all FCC requirements.