

**“The most important thing
in communication is hearing
what isn’t said” (Peter Drucker)**

VRS

Video Relay Services

Companies and the public sector spend millions of pounds a year communicating with their clients. They routinely run loyalty schemes, focus groups, and advertising surveys, trying to get to know more about what their customers want.

Making the user happy makes good business sense.

So does talking to the tens of thousands of people who can’t be reached in the usual way. Clients who can’t hear and who use a different language to you.

Imagine the frustration of not being able to report a credit card stolen, the distress of being unable to make an emergency medical appointment, or the frustration of not being able to seek advice about your bills.

Deaf people face predicaments like that every day. Now, however, you can easily contact and support the many Deaf people who are your customers using the simple technology of Video Relay Services.

Video Relay providers in the UK offer almost immediate access to registered and qualified sign language interpreters. They provide a service that makes it possible for Deaf and hearing people to talk to each other in real time.

This is done using video conferencing over the Internet between the interpreter and the Deaf person. For the hearing person it’s just a phone call.

The secure systems operated by the Video Relay providers mean that discussions and data are kept confidential, and that you will only be charged for the minutes actually used on the customer call. The screening of interpreters assures you that communications between you and your Deaf sign language customers is handled professionally and to a standard.

Video Relay providers will supply your organisation with detailed management reports which are essential in your quest for customer satisfaction. A sample can be found at the UK Council on Deafness web site: <http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk/deaf-access-to-communications.html>

The service is available now. It’s already being used by the NHS, banks and telecoms companies, giving Deaf sign language users the kind of access that hearing people take for granted.

A list of video relay providers can be found at the UK Council on Deafness web site: <http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk/relay-providers.html> for further information contact c.long@deafcouncil.org.uk

Overleaf are some sample questions and answers...



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What is VRS?

VRS allows hearing and Deaf people to use video technology to communicate to you via a sign language interpreter. The usual setup is: Deaf person with webcam/videophone/mobile signs to Sign Language Interpreter; Sign Language Interpreter then speaks (via phone) to hearing person; hearing person replies and the Sign Language Interpreter signs the response to the Deaf person (who can see it on their computer/TV/video screen). Various different configurations are possible.

Why should I invest in VRS?

Besides ensuring your customers/clients can contact you, under the Equality Act 2010 there is a requirement to make reasonable adjustments or treat disabled people better than non-disabled people in order to meet their needs. It also helps your organisation to meet your Corporate Social Responsibility targets.

How can I ensure the provider I contract with meets VRS standards?

The VRS provider(s) you select should meet the VRS Code of Conduct and your VRS Client Specification. You will want to consider items such as call handling/response, the providers ability to meet demand, quality of interpretation, security and confidentiality, reporting, investment in future technology, and the cost of calls which is likely to be given as a price per minute. More information on helping you purchase a service can be found at the UK Council on Deafness website: <http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk/deaf-access-to-communications.html>

How should I go about purchasing a service?

It is always best to shop around before purchasing a video relay service. Some of the bigger public sector organisations have gone out to competitive tenders, others have a framework contract giving the Deaf person choice in selecting a VRS provider from two or three 'approved suppliers'. As you are purchasing a new communication service, an important interface with your customers, we recommend careful consideration before choosing the best route for your organisation.

How will Deaf sign language users know I have set up a video relay service?

This is a very good question. Some companies have rushed into setting up a video relay service without giving any thought to how their Deaf customers will know the service exists. When you speak to providers you need to discuss the various marketing communications options available, and also what training they can provide for your staff, as well as for your Deaf customers.

How are video relay services regulated?

A regulatory framework to ensure quality of service and has yet to be established. It is important that the deaf and hearing consumer is protected and service purchasers have reassurance. Government organisations already fulfil this function in other markets including but not exclusively: Citizens Advice, Trading Standards, Ombudsman services and OFCOM. Meanwhile, service purchasers are encouraged to check that providers meet or exceed the UKCOD VRS Specification and Code of Conduct available at the UK Council on Deafness website: <http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk/deaf-access-to-communications.html>