Users informing users: a web 2.0 approach to information about accessible telecommunications for people with disability

This proposed presentation will open up discussion on a current Web 2.0 project intended to help address the information requirements of people with disability needing accessible and reliable telecommunications solutions.

Its genesis came out of long discussions between the authors about the effectiveness for consumers of the Communications Alliance industry code C625:2009 Information on Accessibility Features for Telephone Equipment. It was suggested by one of us, Robert Morsillo, that a Wiki based web solution that allowed users, carers, industry experts and others to share relevant information and recommendations, and actual experience on the accessibility of communications products and services in Australia, might allow consumers to act with greater confidence in the market, as well as influence that market.

Further, surveys among people with complex communications needs (CCN) and/ or severe communications impairments (SCI), by one of us, Rob Garrett, indicated that information availability was a high priority issue for these groups.
This new project, funded primarily by ACCAN, with in-kind support and funds from ACE, Telstra and Novita, is seeking to address this issue in a way that can be scaled to meet the information needs of all consumers with an interest in accessibility of telecommunications products and services.

Outline of the presentation

1. Background on the difficulties of gaining information on accessibility features for telephone equipment, the Communications Alliance industry code and the Mobile Manufacturers Forum GARI initiative.

2. Supply-side issues about information complexity and compliance, how do consumers make decisions, heuristics, guidance and word-of-mouth, published reviews versus detailed disclosure, ‘informed’ consent, the impact of Web 2.0.

3. Novita client surveys, information as critical, the highest priority issue, industry and academic work on consumer information challenges.

4. Survey of other solutions, including international, of solving this problem, or will this be a world-first?

5. Objectives and overview of the project, hopes and expectations for this demand side approach. ‘A community based website/ wiki that empowers individuals with CCN or SCI, as well as support organisations, to share information on available telecommunications solutions and to receive direction to known applicable resources.’

Biographical note: Rob Garrett is Team Leader, Research and Innovation at Novita Children’s Services in Adelaide SA. He has a long history of technological innovation and public policy promotion to meet the needs of people with CCN/ SCI. See, for example, Rob Garret and Gunela Astbrink, ‘Are we there yet? The struggle for phone accessibility information’, TJA May 2010.

Biographical note: Robert Morsillo is Group Manager Consumer Affairs at Telstra Corporation Ltd. He has an interest in user innovation in telecommunications, for example, ‘Indigenous culture and communications: Can stakeholders build a better telephone service?’, TJA May 2008, and with others, ‘Fixed and mobile innovation through user representation: Two case studies’, TJA Feb 2010.