



Survey Confirms User Preference for Hearing Loops

BY STEPHEN O. FRAZIER

From Miami to Maine to Magdalena, New Mexico, more and more of the faithful who have a hearing loss are once again able to fully participate in church services thanks to the installation of a hearing loop in their chosen place of worship. The consumer driven campaign to make this the dominant assistive listening technology in this country, as it is in Great Britain, has resulted in untold thousands of churches installing hearing loops as their assistive listening system (ALS), or as a supplement to an existing system using other technology through the provision of neckloops in

using Survey Monkey and invitations to participate were sent to over 2,000 known hard of hearing recipients in New Mexico and around the US – folks with a hearing loss sufficient to get over 98% of them to invest in hearing aids or a cochlear implant, and savvy enough that over 90% have telecoils in their devices in order to connect to the electromagnetic signal from an audio frequency induction loop system (a hearing loop).

When asked, “If you go to a theater, place of worship, meeting room or other venue that has an assistive listening system where you must borrow a receiver and a headset, how often do you borrow the equipment?”, just under 19% of respondents

respondents who had telecoils and visited looped venues, 59% responded with “always”. That’s over three times as many as those who gave that response for systems requiring a headset, demonstrating an overwhelming preference for hearing loops over the ubiquitous but largely unused FM or IR systems found in so many churches and other public venues in America. In addition, with 27% reporting they “usually” or “sometimes” turned on their t-coils added to the 59% who “always” turned them on there’s a resounding 86% who were likely use the system That leaves only 14% of respondents reporting they “never” get in the

now being implanted have telecoils.

A substantial number of loop installations or conversions have been the result of members of the congregation advocating for it. Conversely, I have heard reports of people changing churches after experiencing hearing loop technology, and of churches removing (or not repairing) FM and IR systems after the installation of the hearing loop systems due to lack of users for the older systems. A final demonstration of the preference for this technology was the answer when survey takers were asked “...which would you recommend for a facility where a new or

HEADSETS SIMPLY WON'T WORK WITH THEIR DEVICES BUT ALL COCHLEAR IMPLANTS NOW BEING IMPLANTED HAVE TELECOILS

addition to headsets.

Advocates for the technology have claimed for years that a looped system is the preferred assistive listening technology for the hard of hearing, and that it is more apt to be used by them than FM or Infra-Red systems. However, documentation supporting these claims has been scant. Now there are some hard figures to back up these claims. The Committee for Communication Access in New Mexico (www.CCAnm.homestead.com/home.html) has just conducted an online survey on the matter that provides a picture of the behavior of the hard of hearing in regard to assistive listening systems. The survey was posted on the internet

reported always borrowing the equipment with 13% saying, “usually”, 23% claiming “sometimes” and a whopping 45% saying “never.” When asked the same question but with a neckloop instead of a headset being part of the borrowed equipment, the “Never” response goes down from 45% down to 31% - a significant increase in equipment users.

Over three times as many users

Further confirmation was recorded when participants were asked, “If you go to a venue that has a hearing loop, how often do you listen to the proceedings using the telecoils in your hearing aids or cochlear implant?” Among

hearing loop as it were and most of them also reported they don't have telecoils.

Why this demonstrated preference for hearing loops? Advocates will provide a long list of reasons with the fact that no equipment needs to be borrowed and returned as the biggest one, eliminating not just inconvenience but the possibility of damage or loss of their expensive devices. Users also express concern over hygiene with borrowed headsets or ear buds and for the customized sound, adjusted to match their audiogram pattern, that digital hearing aids can provide and ear buds/headsets cannot. For those with a cochlear implant, headsets simply won't work with their devices but all CIs

upgraded assistive listening system is to be installed?” A resounding 80% of respondents said a hearing loop system.

Stephen Frazier received formal training as a Hearing Loss Support Specialist from the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) and has over 20 years of experience providing support and advocacy for those with hearing loss as a chapter and state HLAA leader. He chairs the award winning Loop New Mexico initiative and is a member of HLAA's national Get in the Hearing Loop campaign task force.