

## Project Report: In the Loop

### in the loop

Are you deaf or hard of hearing?

Are you interested in attending theatres,  
concerts, exhibitions and festivals?



If the answer is **yes**, we would like to know!!  
Sign up now at [www.audiencesni.com/inthelooop](http://www.audiencesni.com/inthelooop)

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Image: artwork for In the Loop leaflet and artslistings advert

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## Background

There are 219,000 deaf or hard of hearing people in Northern Ireland equating to 13% of the population<sup>1</sup>. Audiences NI felt this represented a significant audience development opportunity for our members. While many organisations routinely programme interpreted events, the marketing of these events is under-developed for two main reasons. Firstly, identifying and tracking deaf and hard of hearing audience members is difficult as many deaf customers do not identify themselves as such by taking up the concession rates or requesting specifically allocated seats. Secondly there is a lack of awareness of the spectrum of communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing people or how best to meet these.

In January 2006 we were successful in obtaining a grant from Awards for All for £4990 to run a research project to determine appropriate communication and interpretation channels for deaf and hard of hearing people and build a database of individuals who wished to receive information about arts events.

## Methodology

We worked closely with the main deaf representative groups: RNID, Deaf Association of Northern Ireland, Northern Irish Deaf Youth Association, National Deaf Children's Society as well as the Arts & Disability Forum, Adapt NI and Stagertext. This approach ensured that we were catering to the full spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing needs in terms of design and copywriting, as well as allowing us to maximise penetration into multiple deaf communities through formal and informal networks.

The project was branded 'In the Loop' and launched in April with a leaflet campaign supplemented by advertising, direct mail and PR. Twelve thousand leaflets were produced, of which 5000 were direct mailed. The remainder were distributed across outlets in Northern Ireland and via the deaf representative groups. Full colour adverts

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<sup>1</sup> Source: RNID Northern Ireland

were placed in two issues of artslistings magazine, of which 20,000 copies of each were produced. Media releases were issued at both the launch and finish of the project.

Primary data was collected through self-completion questionnaire. The questionnaire was available in two formats: a tear-off Freepost card on the leaflet or online at [www.audiencesni.com/intheloop](http://www.audiencesni.com/intheloop).

A total of total of one hundred and twenty usable questionnaires were completed. A prize of £50 worth of Marks and Spencer vouchers was offered as an incentive to generate responses by a closing date of 30 September<sup>2</sup>.

## **Research Findings**

The age profile of the respondents broadly reflected that of the general NI population, with a concentration (31%) aged 55 + and a minority (9%) under 24. It proved difficult to ascertain types of deafness, with respondents selecting multiple options eg Deaf and Hearing Aid user. However the combined figure for those who selected Hard of Hearing and Hearing Aid user was double that of those who selected Sign Language User. This would seem to suggest a prevalence of acquired hearing loss linked to age rather than profound deafness.

The findings showed that patterns of arts attendance among deaf people are similar to those of Northern Irish arts audiences in general: cinema is the most attended art form followed by theatre and exhibitions, while dance was cited by fewest respondents. (Obviously the prevalence of cinema could have much to do with its accessibility through subtitles.)

Correspondingly, in terms of types of interpreted event, subtitled film was the preference by far, selected by 77% of respondents. Sign interpretation and

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<sup>2</sup> The winner was Kathleen McLroy of 12 Monaville Drive, Lisburn.

captioning were both chosen by 56% of respondents. (Captioning's popularity was somewhat surprising, given that it has only been programmed once in Northern Ireland; clearly this demonstrates demand for more.)

In terms of preferred information (marketing) channels, good old-fashioned post won out by a long stretch, with 64% specifying post only and a further 20% specifying post along with other methods. Email was selected by 32% of respondents (even though 48% provided an email address), while SMS was selected by just 10% (and always in combination with another method). This was surprising given the perceived popularity of SMS as a communication channel among the deaf community. Similarly postal booking came out as the preferred method of booking tickets, while in person and online had equal weighting.

A practical indication as to channel preferences was given by the response to the survey itself: an overwhelming 92% of respondents chose to fill in the questionnaire by hand and put it in a post box rather than go online to complete an automated survey. This would seem to suggest that the use of new technologies to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing audiences is not appropriate at the present time, and that traditional methods are still effective.

## **Outputs**

As well as the research findings the project generated a database of deaf and hard of hearing individuals who are actively interested in receiving information on arts events directly. The database can be segmented by geographical area, drive-time, art form preference, interpretation and communications preference, and is available to all Audiences NI members. The agency can also offer guidance on preparing marketing materials targeted at deaf and hard of hearing audiences as well as practical ways of

reaching this group. The database was piloted in association with QUB Arts & Culture Unit and Grand Opera House in September 2006. Three other agency members (Belfast Film Festival, Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival and Millennium Forum) have requested access to the database and guidance on attracting deaf audiences. Coverage in Arts Professional generated a number of emails from UK arts organisations expressing interest and requesting further information.

### **Media Coverage**

A press release was issued at the launch of the project and generated the following coverage:

Arts & Disability Forum Newsletter Summer 2006

Network e-bulletin 22 May 2006

AMA email bulletin 5 May 2006

Newsletter 10 April 2006

Culture Northern Ireland [www.culturenorthernireland.org](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org) May 2006

Voluntary Arts Ireland News 13 April 2006

Belfast Today [www.belfasttoday.net](http://www.belfasttoday.net) 11 April 2006

A press release was issued in October 2006 and generated the following coverage:

Yahoo Deaf User Group e-bulletin 4 October 2006

Culture Northern Ireland [www.culturenorthernireland.org](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org) October 2006

Belfast Telegraph Digital 12 October 2006

APEmail 5 October 2006

An article on the project *Keeping Audiences in the Loop* was published in Arts Professional Inclusive Marketing issue 129, September 11 2006.

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