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Accessible communications for everyone – regardless of functional capacity

Much of modern society is centred on communications. This not only applies to work, education and training but leisure activities and democracy as well. For instance, we are making more use of telephones and the Internet, involving everything from reading a newspaper and booking tickets to contacting a doctor or submitting a tax return. More public information and services can be found on public websites.

PTS would like to make communications accessible for everyone and for this reason we are working to ensure that people with disabilities can use important electronic communications and postal services. We are supporting projects to test and develop new communications services. We are also working to improve the general level of accessibility within electronic communications and postal services in the long term.

Here you will find further information about some of our services and projects. We also explain how we are working to produce the communications services of tomorrow.

About PTS

The Swedish Post and Telecom Agency (PTS) monitors the electronic communications and postal sectors. The term 'electronic communications' includes telephony, the Internet and radio.

The Agency works with consumer and competition issues, efficient utilisation of resources and secure communications.

PTS reports to the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications. Read more at www.pts.se.

Services for you

The Government has assigned PTS to ensure that people with disabilities have access to important services within electronic communications and postal services. At present PTS has procured eight different services. We are also in permanent dialogue with suppliers to make sure that these services function as well as possible. Most of the services procured by PTS cost nothing to use, although there are exceptions.

More information can be found on the PTS website:
www.pts.se/funktionshinder.

Here are some of the services for accessible communications on which we are working.

People who need support during telephone calls

It is not always easy to understand a conversation or make yourself understood. For example, people who find it difficult to express themselves or take in information may find it a challenge to call their doctor. The risk of not understanding what is being said, or of not being able to communicate what you wish to say, may mean that you would rather avoid making the call at all and consequently miss out on important information.

PTS ensures that there is a service that can help you in this kind of situation. This service is called **Teletal**.

The way in which Teletal works is that there is an interpreter present during the call who is able understand speech that many find difficult to understand. This interpreter can help to interpret what, for instance, a doctor is saying and will clarify what the person with the disability wishes to communicate. The interpreter may also assist by taking notes and help the person to keep to the main thread of the conversation.

Teletal can be used regardless of who you wish to call. For example, Teletal works just as well for a normal call between two friends as it does for a call to a public authority. Teletal helps people to communicate and make themselves understood in many different situations. The service helps to promote a more accessible society.

People who would like to communicate on equal terms

Many sign language users confirm that it can prove very difficult to communicate with people who are unable to use sign language. This may involve ordinary everyday situations, such as buying a ticket for a concert.

PTS has procured the **Bildtelefoni.net** service. This is a service where sign language is used to provide interpretation assistance in all conceivable situations. Bildtelefoni.net functions for sign language users who want to contact hearing people and vice versa. All that is required is a videophone or a normal 3G telephone.

Bildtelefoni.net means that two people can stand opposite each other and have a conversation, despite not being able to communicate in the same language. You can also get help from an interpreter if you would like to talk to someone by phone. The interpreter will then convey what is being said during the telephone call and translate what the sign language user wants to say into the other handset.

People who wants to be able to read in a different way

Being able to go to the library and borrow an exciting book is a natural part of life for many people. However, there may not always be such a diverse range on offer at the place where you live if you have reading and writing difficulties. Nor is it particularly easy to get to a library if you are blind or have a visual impairment.

PTS provides a service that makes it possible for libraries, organisations and people with visual impairments or other reading difficulties to send and return literature for the blind free of charge, such as talking books and Braille. It is also possible to send recorded personal letters. This service is called **Freepost dispatch of literature parcels for the blind** and can make everyday life much easier for a large number of people. Anyone who wants to read an exciting book or interesting newspaper should have the potential to do so.

However, no service is that good that there is no room for improvement. PTS is funding a project to develop possibilities for borrowers to receive talking newspapers and talking books on their mobile telephones or computers through digital dissemination. This technology will complement the freepost dispatch of literature parcels for the blind service.

More services

PTS has procured a number of additional communications services for people with disabilities. More information about these services can be found on the PTS website, www.pts.se/funktionshinder.

The [Frukträdet](#) [Fruit Tree] association aims to assist people who are deaf-blind and people with a severe loss of vision. Among other things, this service means that via databases users can participate in discussion groups, retrieve information and send and receive e-mails in a way that is easily accessible and adapted to the needs of the user.

[Free directory enquiry services](#) mean that people who cannot use the printed telephone directory are able to get free directory enquiry services.

[Texttelefoni.se](#) is a service that among other things enables people who are deaf to call hearing people through the operator relaying the call between speech and text. Text messages can also be sent via this service. Texttelefoni.se also functions so that late-deafened adults can use their voices and receive text and people with speech impairments can send text while hearing what is being said.

[Payment services for elderly people and people with disabilities living in sparsely populated areas](#) targets people who have reached the age of 80 or have a disability and who do not use, for instance, the giro services provided by banks. This service means that people can pay bills using cash, giro cheques or payment advices from PlusGiro. It is also possible to withdraw money using giro cheques or payment advices from PlusGiro.

[Postal services for elderly people and people with disabilities living in sparsely populated areas](#) aims to assist people who are unable to collect their post from the normal post box owing to their age or disability. This postal service means that post is taken to the boundary of an individual's property or, in exceptional cases, to the house where the person lives. It is also possible to order the collection of outgoing letters and parcels and the sale of stamps.

Our projects for you

PTS is funding development projects and preliminary studies that demonstrate new technical opportunities and which may result in new services. Our objective is for these projects to be

designed so that as many people as possible can benefit from them without any special adaptations having to be made, although special adaptations are sometimes necessary. We try to ensure that the projects reflect the communication needs of everyone. Around ten different projects are generally running at the same time.

Here is a sample of the projects for accessible communications that we are supporting. More information on all of the projects can be found on the PTS website, www.pts.se/funktionshinder.

People who want to be able to read with multiple senses

People with dyslexia or other reading and writing difficulties often find it difficult to read in the usual way. For instance, they may find it easier to read text if it is being read out or highlighted at the same time.

PTS is funding the **Läsaren** [Reader] development project. The aim of this project is to give adults and children the opportunity to read with multiple senses. This is done by presenting the content with an optional combination of text, audio and images. In Läsaren, the text is highlighted at the same time as it is being read out. Läsaren can also display pictures if these are necessary to further improve the reading experience. The material must be produced according to the international Daisy standard. The Läsaren software can be used on computers, mobile phones and on televisions connected to the Internet. The project simply aims to provide users with a reading experience regardless of their situation and individual circumstances.

The technology that enables Läsaren to function is currently being tested in real-life situations. Some of the disability associations are working to adapt Läsaren to their target groups. It is also hoped that public authorities, municipal authorities and county councils will eventually start to use Läsaren.

People who want to be able to make their own way around towns and cities

It may sometimes be difficult to make your way around an urban environment. Streets in every possible direction, temporary roadworks and pavement cafes can all be difficult to keep track of and this can be particularly troublesome if you also have a visual impairment.

PTS is one of the main funders behind the **e-Adept project**. This project is evaluating opportunities for people with disabilities to independently make their own way around urban environments using digital maps and GPS technology.

The ambition is to develop a service with the capability of guiding users to a particular destination via a mobile phone or handheld computer linked to a GPS and 'gyrocompass'. The information must be kept up-to-date, be very precise and be able to point out where there are temporary obstacles along the route. The aim is that different municipalities will be able to use this service to make their urban environments more accessible.

There is still some work left to do before the service is ready, but the technology has already been tested in Stockholm as well as in other cities. The City of Stockholm and the Swedish Transport Administration are also involved in the project.

People who want to be able to call someone when something is wrong with their computer

Everyone knows how irritating it can be when your computer is not working. Sometimes you have no idea what the fault is, which can be particularly problematic. It can be especially difficult if you are perhaps older and not used to technology or if you have a disability.

Wouldn't it be great if you had just one number to call for help, regardless of whether the fault is due to software or because there is a problem with a cable? Wouldn't it be good to get help on the same number when surfing the Internet?

PTS and the Swedish Inheritance Fund are financing the **IT support at home project**, which targets elderly people and people with disabilities. The aim of this project is to set up an IT support service that takes greater responsibility and provides assistance, regardless of the cause of the fault. For example, you should be able call the support service if there is something wrong with your mobile phone, if you want help to set up a digital box for your television or if you are finding it difficult to get your visual aids to work with certain software.

A trial operation was started in Bromma and Norrtälje on 1 December 2009 and people living in Mölndal were also able to call this service from 1 March 2010.

It is hoped that this project will be able to propose possible business models for a national IT support service. The Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology is responsible for this project.

People who would like to get help if the worst should happen

112 is a vital number that most people are aware of and many of us are quite clear about what to do in the event of a serious accident.

However, people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment do not find it quite as easy to contact SOS Alarm.

For some years now, PTS has been funding the **SMS 112** development project. The aim of this project is to enable people to reach SOS Alarm via text messaging.

We would like to improve SMS 112 further and for this reason are currently evaluating the project to see what can be improved. It is undeniable that accessible communications are never as important as when the worst happens.

We are looking to the future

Today's communications services do not function for everyone and for many people they do not function at all. This is why PTS is procuring services that have been specially designed. However, our objective is that we will not have to do this as often in the future. The hope is that the information society will already be adapted to many different needs from the outset.

PTS is working to improve the general level of accessibility within electronic communications and postal services. One of the ways of doing this is to participate in international fora that discuss issues concerning usability and accessibility. We are also monitoring standardisation work. For example, PTS participates in the ETSI organisation, which is an international standardisation organisation whose work includes accessibility in relation to e-services.

Another example of how we are working to encourage general solutions is **PTS's innovation competition**.

PTS is organising an innovation competition in 2010 to produce smart solutions to increase work and training opportunities for people with disabilities. Innovative companies, researchers and organisations can apply for funding to develop services and products. PTS will then choose the proposed projects that we

believe have the best chance of becoming useful services that will work in the market. These projects receive funding from the Agency. During the innovation competition, PTS will be looking for special ideas that would apply to many different user groups.

We intend to hold more innovation competitions in the future, which may have other themes and criteria.

We are learning and cooperating with others

It is important for us to be perceptive and be able to talk not only to consumers but public authorities as well. Cooperation affords us an opportunity to find out what is going on. It also gives us the chance to inform others about our work and gain support for our ideas in the wider world.

PTS regularly holds consultative meetings with the Swedish Disability Federation to discuss current and pressing issues. We also cooperate with other public authorities and government stakeholders. For example, we have been working with Handisam (the Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Coordination) to produce an action plan for e-inclusion. We also regularly cooperate with the Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology on various matters, such as the IT Support at Home project and the Bildtelefoni.net service. PTS and Handisam also jointly run the Council of Useful and Accessible Information and Communications (TIR). This is a network that, among other things, works to enhance awareness about the need for accessible and useful information in society.

Would you like to use PTS's services or find out more information?

Perhaps you or someone you know would benefit from the services procured by PTS. There are different ways of accessing the various services. Some of the services only require you to dial a telephone number, while others require you to register first.

Information about how to use the services is provided on the PTS website, www.pts.se/funktionshinder. The website also has information about PTS's work involving accessible communications.