



Features

Posted on: January 23, 2012

Are your clients in the (neck) loop?

BY: Stephen O. Frazier - Hearing Loss Support Specialist

The number of ways a neck loop can be used is limited only by the number of devices into which it can be plugged.

I don't have rings on my fingers and bells on my toes like the old nursery rhyme but I do have music wherever I go. I have the music because I'm loopedneck looped that is, and my neck loop goes wherever I go.

Living room and even much larger sized induction or "hearing" loops have received considerable coverage in this and other journals even before the beginning of the Hearing Loss Association of America/American Academy of Audiology "Get in The Hearing Loop Campaign." Since then they have even been reported one in the NY Times, the Chicago Tribune and other major newspapers and magazines around the country. In none of those articles, though, did the neck loop get much, if any, mention. I think that's unfortunate.

As a long time hearing aid wearer I was amazed and delighted when, at a Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) convention some time ago, I tried on a neck loop in the cacophonous exhibit hall and discovered I could hear and understand the person I called even with all of that background noise. That I was hearing him in both ears was just frosting on the cake! After previously having had to seek out a quiet spot to make a call and then sometimes still struggle to understand, this was a revelation to me. I bought the loop on the spot.

Our local HLAA chapter uses a looped room for meetings and I had long followed the proceedings using the telecoils in my hearing aids but my new neck loop opened up a whole new world of hearing possibilities for me so I now try to spread the word. A national survey found over 80% of HLAA members have and use telecoils and I'm

working to make sure they, too, have discovered the neck loop.

With my introduction to the neck loop my hearing aids became a versatile and sophisticated personal listening system. The loop dramatically increased the functionality of my hearing aids and it did so at a minimal cost. I already had the telecoils in my hearing aids. I already had a cell phone, an iPod and a number of other grown up toys that produced sound.

Audiologist Bill Diles of Kenwood Hearing in Santa Rosa, California has been a big supporter of hearing loops for years. At a presentation to our local HLAA chapter he told us that this increased functionality for his client's hearing aids translated into their being much happier with their hearing aids and much happier with his services. He said returns from first time hearing aid buyers dropped dramatically. Being a former retailer I can appreciate the positive impact this had on his bottom line. I know you would have an even bigger battle on your hands if you wanted to take my hearing aids away now than you would have had before I discovered the neck loop

At HLAA meetings we always have some newcomers whose hearing aids don't have telecoils and they are surprised and disappointed to learn that we can hear when they can't just because of a little copper coil. It turns out some of them do have telecoils but they don't have a manual control for them so they are still disappointed. Still others don't have a manual volume control on their hearing aids and the loop may be too loud or too soft. I won't repeat what they say about their provider when these situations arise but suffice it to say, they're not happy campers.

They might experience the same problem with a neck loop if it doesn't have its own volume control. For their cell phone or MP3 player they might be able to adjust the volume using the control on that device but there would be instances where that's just not possible.

When people ask me about my neck loop I explain what it is - that it's taking the place of a headset. I show them how, by simply pressing a button on my hearing aids, I turn the telecoils on. I always stress to them that to use a neck loop like mine their hearing aids must have telecoils and there must be a manual control for the telecoils. Though not a requirement, due to the varying strength of loop signals (some of which might not meet international standards) I tell them optimum loop/telecoil operation will be assured only if their hearing aids also have manual volume controls.

I go on to tell them how I use my neck loop with my cell phone, with an iPod, with my computer and other devices. I tell them how I can talk hands free on my land line phone and what great friends my neck loop and personal FM system are.

I've realized that the number of ways a neck loop can be used is limited only by the number of devices into which it can be plugged. I've heard of people who have installed a jack in the radio or CD player in their car to listen to music, the news - whatever. By turning off the mics in their hearing aids and using a neck loop to overcome the sound of the engine and the hum of the tires, they can enjoy a device, the car's sound system, that may have become almost useless to them before. That's my next project so I, too, can actually hear and understand the radio while driving 70 miles per hour.

But what about Bluetooth®?

Bluetooth® is an exciting and valuable addition to the mix of technology and devices available to the hard of hearing. I know it can do many of the same things as a neck loop and telecoils and even some things they cannot. Right now my neck loop and my many devices are meeting my needs and I'm not ready to invest more money in making the world more hearing accessible. My current hearing aids are Bluetooth® capable but I'm not - at least not yet.

I'm also aware that Bluetooth® isn't going to let me hear at HLAA meetings or at the looped Albuquerque Little Theatre, in churches or in workshops at HLAA conventions. I learned at the most recent such convention that even promoters of Bluetooth® are making accommodations for hearing loops. We were shown neck loops that made older, telecoil equipped but Bluetooth® *incompatible* hearing aids become *compatible*, "translating" the Bluetooth® signal into a magnetic induction signal.

Possibly the best example that Bluetooth and hearing loops can work together is the addition of telecoils to the gateway devices now available from Siemens and Widex (and possibly others I'm not aware of). Those devices not only connect hearing aids to a myriad of Bluetooth® devices, the telecoil installed in them also lets the wearers pick up electromagnetic loop transmissions with even some of their smallest hearing instruments - those too small to contain a telecoil.

It appears that hearing aid manufacturers are increasingly aware of and value the role that hearing loops, neck sized or room sized, and telecoils play in the overall experience of

hearing aid users. Hearing Review has reported that that almost 70% of all current hearing aid models have telecoils - up considerably from the 30% reported a decade ago..

Conclusion

Again as a former retailer, I feel if hearing care providers stocked and sold neck loops from their office there would be a lot more happy campers like me out there - thrilled with my hearing aids and delighted with my provider. I hope readers of this piece will consider doing so - both the stocking of and the counseling on telecoils and neck loops.

You wouldn't have to stock and sell neck loops if it's not practical. You can get an excellent Get in The Hearing Loop brochure on telecoils from HLAA (or download and print the same text in a fact sheet from the AAA) and then print a small handout with sources where neck loops can be purchased. You can recommend a neck loop with a mic and volume control and tell your clients to Google "neck loops" and order one on line. Also then please tell them to come back with their neck loop and you'll adjust the telecoils in their hearing aids to maximize their performance with it.

The U. S. Army recruits its members say telling them they can "be all that you can be in the Army." You might find that you can recruit new customers, customers who might previously have walked, if you demonstrate the use of neck loops and telecoils as part of your counseling.

As for their hearing aids, your clients will discover "all that they can be" and that will include hearing the music wherever they go.

Steve Frazier is the New Mexico Chapter Coordinator for the Hearing Loss Association of America, Chair of the Loop New Mexico Committee, and has completed the course of the American Academy of Hearing Loss Support Specialists. He was a member of the joint national HLAA/AAA "Get in The Hearing Loop" task force and now serves in at similar capacity for HLAA. He serves on the hearing aid dispenser licensing board in New Mexico, writes and produces a state wide newsletter for New Mexico HLAA chapters, and is webmaster for the New Mexico HLAA web sites.

