



## **Board Views**

**Dr. Roy E. Miller**  
**TDI President**

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## **IP Relay: Another Telecommunications Access Route**

Someone recently asked me “Why is Internet Protocol Relay” (IP Relay) important? What can a deaf or hard of hearing consumer do with IP Relay that they can’t already do with traditional relay services?” That’s an excellent question, and one that I had to think about for a minute before trying to answer.

Of course, the quick answer that comes to mind is that for the present all domestic IP Relay calls are free - both local and long distance. This means that deaf and hard of hearing consumers living in the United States can call their hearing relatives anywhere else in the United States and “catch up” on family gossip without running up a big bill with the telephone company. Although that is definitely a nice current feature of using IP Relay, that surely cannot be the only benefit that it provides.

Using IP Relay also provides a few benefits that derive from using a computer rather than a TTY. For example, with the click of a mouse the user can increase or decrease the font size, a feature that may be extremely useful for relay users with low vision. Within limits, the user can control the choice of text and background colors, a feature that may benefit some relay users. And, of course, IP Relay conversations can be saved as computer files, rather than long narrow white strips of paper that tend to yellow or fade rather quickly, and like all computer files they can be printed out on standard size paper, archived, searched, edited, and otherwise manipulated as desired. In addition, IP Relay typically provides a split screen capability, and allows the user to do neat things like paste preprepared text into a conversation, interrupt the other party, and even participate in simultaneous multiple conversations with several people (if your brain is agile enough to keep track of multiple conversations!).

IP Relay may reduce the problems of “noise” or electrical interference on some telephone lines. Certainly there are consumers with hearing loss who live in relatively isolated rural communities that are still served by small telephone companies using old if not archaic equipment. And some deaf and hard of hearing consumers may even still be served by “party” lines, a situation that may present its own problems for users of traditional relay services.

Deaf and hard of hearing travelers within the United States will increasingly benefit from IP Relay services as more of them acquire communication devices that can access the web from almost anywhere, such as a web phone or personal digital assistant. For example, using IP Relay, deaf people can place telephone calls to hearing people while stuck in traffic or while sitting in the doctor’s waiting room. With IP Relay and wireless access to the Internet, consumers with hearing loss are no longer limited by the availability of a TTY, an RJ11 jack, and an active telephone line. IP Relay users who are deaf or hard of hearing can enjoy the almost unlimited freedom of calling that hearing people enjoy with cell phones.

It should also be mentioned that with IP Relay deaf and hard of hearing consumers now can exert the power of consumer choice when it comes to vendors. They are no longer “stuck” with the vendor that their state has chosen to provide relay services. Rather, they can choose the vendor that in their judgment provides the best services.

In general, there are many potential benefits to using IP Relay - for some consumers in some circumstances. And that is perhaps the biggest benefit of IP Relay. In the “big picture” it adds one more means of providing telecommunications access to deaf and hard of hearing people. And the more access routes we have, the more independence we have, and the more we are able to participate in the social, economic and political affairs of our nation. And for that, TDI greets IP Relay with thunderous applause (hands waving wildly in the air). The more accessible telecommunications become, the better life becomes for deaf and hard of hearing people! **SK**