



Universal communication tools for major events: 2016 Australia Deaf Games - a case study

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The Australian Deaf Games is the pinnacle multi-sport event for Deaf and hard of hearing people in Australia. It has been held every four years in cities around Australia since 1964 and now attracts more than 1000 competitors, spectators and visitors across Australia and the Pacific nations. It constitutes a major social and cultural festival for the Deaf community with its unique blend of social and sporting activities that together cater for diverse community needs.

Developed by Conexu Foundation to provide the one in six Australians who are Deaf or hard of hearing with a convenient text-based alternative to public loudspeaker announcements, OpenAccess Alerts is an accessible app for smartphone or tablet capable of providing a range of targeted notifications or updates which can be posted, read and shared by anyone registered to use the app.

The OpenAccess Alerts smartphone app will be the official app of the 2016 Australia Deaf Games, to be held in Adelaide, South Australia in February 2016. The app will be used to manage information targeted to, and shared within, a specific group of users.

The Australian Deaf Games will present a valuable opportunity to manage the communication within large groups of people who have varied information access needs, at public events, and assess its value as a communication tool for event organisers as well as a grassroots social sharing and communication tool.

Supported by a direct web service interface that allows Games organisers to manage messages by pushing targeted updates to event attendees' devices, the app enables instant easy communication with large groups of people, without delivering loudspeaker announcements across multiple sites.

Competitors, spectators and volunteers at the Games can take advantage of event updates such as activities on the social program, as well as official results – in real time. Each registered user can also post to the app, setting a geographical range for the information they are posting, as well as a time limit. Using the device's GPS the app locates the user and delivers posts that fall within the categories of interest they have set up on their device. Outside of the geographical boundaries of the Australian Deaf Games, users can receive local information on the app's map, such as public transport and weather updates.



Features include:

- Maps of the Games venue and surrounds
- Targeted closed group communication
- Visual and vibrating alerts

Available for free download on Android and iOS smart devices the app broadcasts sets of data that are targeted to the user's location, and are time-specific. This ensures information is both relevant and current for the user. Conexu Foundation will provide on-site user support and information during the event.

Last year Conexu Foundation also partnered with central body for emergency services, policy and management, Emergency Management Victoria, in Australia, to post all bushfire alerts sent across the state into the OpenAccess Alerts app. This partnership enabled vital emergency information to be accessed by Deaf and hard of hearing Australians.

Conexu Foundation will continue working to develop partnerships to open up further opportunities for accessibility across Australia and beyond.

Delivered at low cost, and often free for the user, apps are becoming indispensable communication tools that are capable of satisfying accessibility needs. The accessibility of readily-available smart ICT such as the OpenAccess Alerts app has the potential to truly break the communication divide between those who hear well and those who do not. The Australian Deaf Games presented an opportune testing ground for the capability of smart design to enable a universal communication experience.