Background

Hearing loss is prevalent in the aging population with one out of three adults age 65 or older being affected by their hearing impairment.1 Hearing aids work well in small groups at close distances, but they are technically limited in large, crowded spaces such as public forums due to difficulties in deciphering point sources in ecodgenic atmospheres with multiple sound sources. Hearing loops overcome the limitations of hearing aids by transmitting sound from the PA to telecoils in hearing aids and cochlear implants. Where installed, hearing device users can wirelessly connect and hear the facility audio directly in their ears. Though this technology has been available for decades, awareness is poor. Hearing loops have been installed in two locations in St. Joseph, including the Missouri Theater, but lack of awareness has led to underutilization.

Methods

- Announcements were recorded and played before productions at the Missouri Theater
- An educational event about hearing loop technology and availability was brought to the Missouri Theater
  - The audio was delivered over a hearing loop so attendees could sample the technology
  - Listening devices were provided for those without hearing aids
  - The event was recorded by Missouri Western State University (MWSU)
- Public service announcements and a live interview were created for the event and broadcast by local TV station KQ2
- Letters were sent to patients with hearing loss and to facilities that could benefit from audio loops
- 159 pre-surveys and 94 post-surveys completed by Missouri Theater attendees assessed awareness of the technology as well as ratings of clarity and intelligibility of hearing loops

Results

253 surveys completed
52 reported hearing loss
201 reported no hearing loss

Looping Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before initiative</th>
<th>After initiative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of survey responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unaware of looping technology</td>
<td>116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aware of looping technology</td>
<td>43</td>
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Impact of Looping on Listening Experience

- Very Positively 62.5%
- Positively 25%
- No Impact 12.5%
- No Impact 12.5%

Pictures

- Juliette Sterkens speaking at the Missouri Theater
- L to R: Dave Neumann, Juliette Sterkens, and Zack Treat
- L to R: Zack Treat, Dave Neumann, and Amber Smith at KQTV

Conclusions

- Many of those who attend productions at the Missouri Theater report having a hearing impairment
- Use of hearing loops improved the experience in audience settings for most people with hearing impairment
- The educational event and preceding publicity significantly increased awareness of audio loops in St. Joseph, Missouri
- Success of the event prompted five new locations to bid for hearing loop installation
- The film program at MWSU is including this initiative and those involved in a hearing loop documentary

Acknowledgements

- Dave Neumann, Juliette Sterkens, Pat Dillon, Kathy Brock, Pam Nelson
- KQTV

Citations

1 Hearing Loss Association of America HLAA
2 KQTV