

The Story of Deafstation

The idea of Deafstation news arose from a project in the Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol. The WISDOM project was an EU funded technology project linked to the development of 3G mobile telephony. It was realised early on in 2004, that we could use video technology in a flexible way using the Internet and could with our staff resource, provide the news in BSL everyday. Not only that, we were able to “push down” the previous day’s news into the database so that it became a library of content, which was searchable. This was an intelligent search and based on the search terms used, the system offered a chain of possible news videos.

Because special software was developed, Deafstation was portable and recordings could be made outside of the studio. We were then able to cover the Melbourne Deaflympics 2005 by having Mark Wheatley (now at the EUD in Brussels) film some of the competition, interview the athletes and upload the BSL video from his hotel room direct on to Deafstation. Because of the time difference his video upload in the evening reached Deafstation UK in the morning and deaf people could check in on events happening that same day. We also covered the General Election of 2005 with a weekly poll of deaf voting intentions, interviews with deaf people about the manifestos and then finally live streamed a programme on the morning with the results and guests in the studio.

All of this was before YouTube became established of course, in the USA, for them, it was possible to get large amounts of funding ... but not in the UK. We talked to the television companies in UK and Wales and we offered the Deafstation concept to SKY/BSLBT (now the BSL zone). No one would take it up even though we knew from research that deaf people’s priority was to have the news that hearing people had and that subtitles were inaccurate and delayed and not effective.

Deafstation had over 6,000 registered users (all free) before we just made it completely open. Deafstation operated from 2004 until 2011 in the Centre for Deaf Studies. Although the University promoted the work of the Centre in reaching the community whenever there were visitations/inspections, the Centre became part of a restructuring/rationalisation and then pressure on finances, led them to instruct the Centre to stop varying out “community

work” and to focus on research. By 2011 the pressures increased on the Centre and the University decided to close the whole research and teaching operation (although that was not finally completed until 2018).

Our discussions on ways to spin out Deafstation as a commercial development had been overtaken in the end by the dominance of YouTube. Sadly, Deafstation finished and the team of news-signers and technological support was disbanded. Even though in the stages of its development, Deafstation had more video content than the BBC (hard to believe, nowadays) in 2011, Deafstation closed down.

In 2020, a new desperate situation has arisen. A virus which affects everyone and for which we have no protection has appeared. Frustration with the Government’s refusal to have interpreters present, onsite at the daily briefing and the lack of preparation given to the interpreters especially, the deaf presenters, a group of colleagues at the Deaf Studies Trust decided to begin again.

What is Deafstation in 2020?

The aim of Deafstation is to provide news to deaf people everyday. This news is designed to cover a wide range of events in the UK and in other countries. It separates general news for information and background, from news which is making an impact on the community in the UK. It aims to find news from other parts of the world. It will also provide updates on the current virus pandemic and explain the progress that is being made.

The news is not just about deaf people but rather is designed to give insight into what is happening all around in society. We believe that deaf people, as much as possible, should have access to the information that hearing people receive.

The information is constructed from a wide range of news sources. We prepare the news items so that they can be presented in BSL. We prefer not just to give out sets of links for people to explore other sites but where an item is of specific importance we may use text or video from there. We will indicate the source.

BSL video is tagged which means that it can be searched: by the topic, by the date and by most recent information. In this way, Deafstation is an expanding BSL video resource which allows you to search back and forth over time.

We also offer text and images on separate pages so that people who wish to read the information which is linked to the BSL, can do so.

Deafstation is meant to be simple to use. We have not created a flashy website with lots of moving images. We just want people to see the news, easily and quickly in BSL.

There are no fees to join as Deafstation is supported by the Deaf Studies Trust.

We are expanding the group of news-signers and in the present lockdown, all work is done from home. We are having to re-learn all the skills again will need to consider the construction of a sustainable business plan. However, for the moment the need for information is great and we will continue to deliver an open service as long as the deaf community find it useful.

www.deafstation.co.uk

Prepared by the Deaf Studies Trust, in Bristol.