



# RNIB Audio Description App Trial



In partnership with  
MovieReading

September 2015



Supporting people  
with sight loss

In February 2015 RNIB launched a trial of the MovieReading Audio Description App in the UK. The aim of this user trial was to gather views and feedback on the use of an app-based audio description (AD) delivery system. 198 existing users of AD participated in the trial, which was part of a wider project that proposes to investigate the various aspects of introducing this type of service into the wider market.

In order to use the app, users were asked to download the AD track for a film or a TV programme that they wanted to watch on their personal device – smartphone or tablet – then play it while watching their chosen content. The microphones embedded within the user’s personal device listened to the soundtrack of the film/TV programme, identified the exact point in the content and then played back the downloaded AD track in sync with the original soundtrack.

All trialists were self-selecting, existing users of AD and smartphone or tablet owners. We know there are some people it won’t work for but that doesn’t detract from its value to the targeted demographic.



# MovieReading app by Universal Media Access

The trial was carried out in partnership with the Universal Media Access Team and their existing app, MovieReading. This app is currently available to cinema goers in Italy. Users can choose to access captions or AD depending on their requirements.



## Summary of feedback from users

Overall, most participants responded positively to the app and their first experience of using it as an alternative means for getting AD.

The main benefit they reported was being able to access the track on a personal device. Users who watched films or TV programmes with family or friends commented that they enjoyed the option to filter the AD track through their phone or tablet into headphones. This means they can avoid disturbing friends and family who don't need the AD.

App users also highlighted other benefits such as being able to use a video on-demand service of their choice, at their preferred time and place.

Some of the users also said that they enjoyed listening to the AD track at the same time as enjoying the original sound track in surround sound, an experience that has been restricted to cinema space up until now.

## Scope of this development

By its very nature, any new technology offers opportunities. In objective terms, these opportunities offer easier access to content and the form in which this content can be delivered and used. These opportunities also have the potential to offer a wider spectrum of personal benefits such as independence, personalisation and inclusive living.

At the time of the launch, our main aim was to gather feedback on the app from regular users of AD, and to find out if it was something that they could use to bridge the gap while watching content on select video on-demand services;

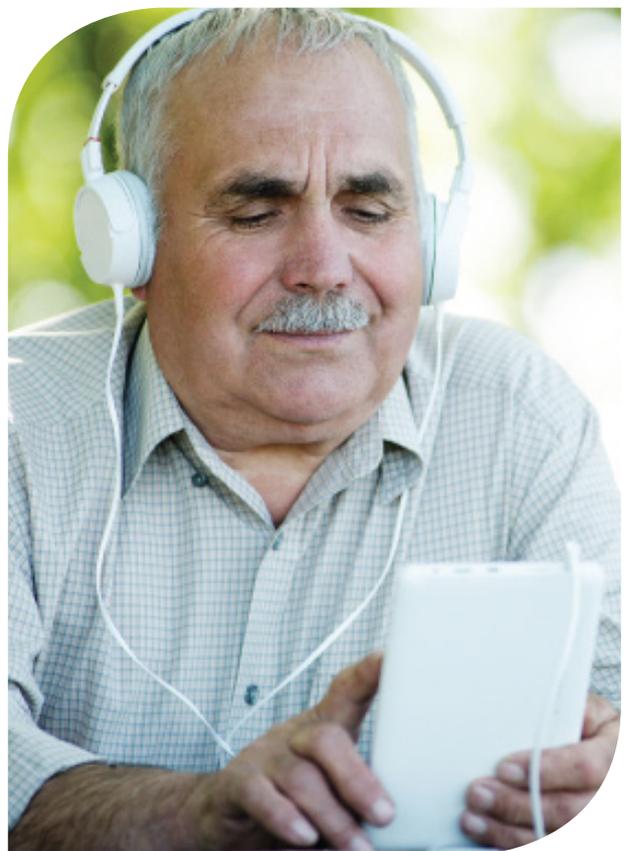
services that don't currently deliver AD. Having investigated the acceptability factor of using an app to receive AD during this user trial, feedback from our participants alerted us to other benefits, some that we had not even considered.

## The ability to stream and filter AD on a personal device – anywhere

Our users found this feature particularly useful, and this is what they said about being able to filter the AD track directly to their personal devices:

### Tom said:

“I can watch movies not yet available on DVD, and also I can watch the same showing as my sighted friends without them needing to be put through the description. We have a young sighted daughter, and making her watch Frozen with the AD always annoyed me: thanks to this app, that's no longer necessary. I also like how easy and convenient it is to use, that it works both with and without earbuds (my blind fiancée and I can share an iPhone for description, or I can listen completely on my own) and it's a very clever use of the technology that I'm proud to have had the chance to try.”



### Amy said:

“I loved the fact it wasn't bothering anyone else, it was like listening to the film with a friend sitting by my ear telling me what was happening. I struggle watching films without audio description. I would have loved to try taking it to a local cinema – to have the freedom to join in films 100% would be amazing.”

NB: Tom and Amy are not the participants' real names

## The ability to push barriers and pull access features into any environment

Some of our participants imagined a completely new world, where a user of AD would select a programme or a film to watch, find out if it has AD, and if not, log on to a registered server, download the AD track and stream it via a smartphone or a tablet.

The AD track would sync with the film or the TV programme using the app. As the AD is not integrated, it's not the user's preferred option, but it is available at a time that suits the user and on a service that they use all the time.

### Nick said:

“I wanted to watch Casablanca when it was on TV the other day but it did not have AD. Mostly such films do but this time, it didn't. If the track on the app was available, I could've downloaded it and watched it with everyone. I know the film has been described so why not put it somewhere where I can use it, when I want?”

### Lee said:

“I like that it is available across several different platforms as until now I have only used audio description on the iPlayer website and built-in on my television. Most of what I want to watch now I want to watch on demand so being able to download a specific track for a program is a really useful tool to have and will allow me to have much more independence while watching television.”



## Ability to choose a suitable audio track, even a home territory rendition of the AD track, or just the audio commentary

Such an app could open up a whole new dimension for viewers who would prefer to watch films or TV programmes in an alternative language and give viewers the option to switch language tracks like they switch subtitles on DVDs and Blu-rays.

These alternative audio tracks could be AD tracks in multiple languages produced in different parts of the world or even original soundtracks for the content. These would be particularly useful for those who would want to watch films in their preferred language.



# Report on the user trial and more information

A full research report will be available on the RNIB website. Please email us if you're interested and we will send you a copy when it is published.

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We would like to take this opportunity to thank Disney UK, 20th Century Fox, ITV and Sky for supporting our trial and making content available for our participants to use.



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“...The biggest improvement I can suggest is content, I think. The app does its job very well, but the only way it will really hold its own is if the descriptions available match content currently on-air. Personally, I’d find it brilliant if the television networks opened up their archive of descriptions to the app as well. I’d love to see that a repeat of Poirot or Doc Martin was coming up and know that I could fully engage with it, or be able to join in with the in-law as she catches up with Downton Abbey on her own. It’d be but a trifling inconvenience to have to pause and resync this description between ad breaks. There’s much this app can offer, these have just been a few of my own thoughts. But I’m merely a consumer...”

**Audio description app trial participant**