

# Get in the loop: 'Looping' technology communicates directly with hearing aids

June 25 2013, by William Hageman

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Slowly but steadily, people with hearing loss are discovering looping, a simple way to enhance their theater, concert or worship experience - or just to make it easier to hear while riding in a taxi.

Simply put, looping takes a signal from a sound source - a television or a public-address system, for example - and transmits it through an amplifier to a wire that surrounds ("loops") the audience. That wire sends a magnetic signal to a person's hearing aid, which has a telecoil, a type of sensor. The hearing aid wearer then gets a direct, clear signal, one without interference from crowd noise. It's most commonly found in auditoriums, concert halls, places of worship, lecture halls and other public locations. Individuals can also have it installed in their homes.

"What the user is able to do," says Dave Myers, a professor of psychology at Hope College in Holland, Mich., "is push a button to activate this telecoil and their ([hearing aids](#)) are changed into wireless speakers expressly for them."

The idea has been around for decades, but in recent years has become more sophisticated and more popular. Myers, who is hearing impaired and is a looping advocate, says it's omnipresent in the U.K.

"There's signage everywhere: the back seats of all taxis, 11,500 post offices, every church with a PA system, the starter's boxes at St. Andrews."

It's been slower to catch on in the U.S.

"In the interest of making hearing aids smaller and smaller, which people in the U.S. demand much more so than in Europe, the manufacturers took the telecoils out of hearing aids," says Dr. Ronna Fisher, a Chicago [audiologist](#). "So most hearing aids in the U.S. didn't have telecoils ... until the last year, year and a half."

However, a person wearing a hearing aid with a T-coil in a looped venue could have trouble hearing a question from the person seated next to them. For that they have two options: turn the hearing aid back to normal mode, or if the hearing aid is equipped with a mic-telecoil (MT) setting, select that to hear both looped sound and close-up sound.

The cost to loop a place of worship, Myers says, is about the same as the cost of a high-end hearing aid. It can run from \$4,000 to \$12,000, depending on the type and size of the structure, but generally is between \$6,000 and \$8,000. Michigan State University looped its 14,000-seat basketball arena for \$120,000. Looping a room in your home will start around \$200.

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## TEST IT YOURSELF

To find looped locations across the U.S., go to [aldlocator.com](http://aldlocator.com), uncheck the FM and infrared boxes and insert a location. To learn about loop advocacy initiatives around the country go to [hearingloop.org](http://hearingloop.org).

## OTHER TECHNOLOGIES

Alternatives to looping technology include FM or infrared signals broadcast to receivers that users check out while in a venue (think of

those devices you can borrow in museums for audio tours). A person must take out their hearing aids to use these devices, whereas with looping, the user's own hearing aid is the device.

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