Dis·IT
Disability & Information Technologies Research Alliance

What do Canadian disability advocacy organizations need to know about the telecommunications industry?

The Big Issues in Less than 30 Seconds

- The Canadian telecommunications industry is going through **radical changes** caused by new technologies, deregulation, and increased competition.
- In the face of all these challenges, making their products and services accessible to people with disabilities **hasn't been high on the agenda** for most telecommunications companies.
- People with disabilities have a variety of **avenues to complain** about inaccessible telecommunications equipment and services.

The telecommunications industry is going through radical changes

- New technologies and deregulation are undermining the dominance of Bell Canada, Telus, and the other companies that used to have regional monopolies on phone service in Canada.

New Technologies

- Wireless cellular phones, "VoIP" Internet-based phone services, email, instant messaging, social networking websites like Facebook, and other new technologies provide consumers with attractive alternatives to conventional phone services.

Deregulation

- Deregulation has allowed many new companies to enter the telecommunications market and compete with the companies that used to have monopolies.
- Deregulation may be setting the stage for allowing foreign companies to compete with or even take over Canadian telecommunications companies.

On the Horizon

- New technologies and deregulation are leading to convergence of the formerly distinct telecommunications, broadcasting, and publishing/media industries.
  - A single company (Bell Canada Enterprises) owns Bell Canada, the CTV television network, and the Globe and Mail news/media company.
- The domestic ownership of Canadian telecommunications companies is in flux.

New technologies have the potential to make telecommunications more accessible

- Canada's telecommunications companies are pre-occupied with market shares and profits, exploiting new technologies, introducing new products and services, and outsmarting their competitors.
- In the face of these challenges, most companies haven't put making their products and services accessible to people with disabilities high on their agenda.

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This is one of a series of fact sheets on telecommunications and people with disabilities produced by the Disability and Information Technologies (Dis-IT) Research Alliance. All of the fact sheets are available at www.dis-it.ca.

- That won't change unless people with disabilities and their organizations, as well as governments, put pressure on the companies to treat accessibility as a priority.
  - Most of the accessibility features provided by Canadian telecommunications companies resulted from battles that began as complaints from consumers with disabilities.

Actions

- What should people with disabilities do when they have a problem with the accessibility of their phone, Internet, or other telecommunications services?
  - Start by contacting the company about the problem.
  - If the company doesn't resolve the problem to your satisfaction, file a complaint with the telecom industry's new Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunication Services (CCTS)[1]
  - If the Commissioner doesn't resolve the problem to your satisfaction, contact the CRTC.[2]
  - If you think your complaint concerns a *systemic* problem—a problem that affects other people with disabilities—contact the Canadian Human Rights Commission.[3]
- Tips:
  - Keep records of all the contacts you make to resolve the problem, including dates, who you contacted (including phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc.), the responses you got, etc.

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[1] Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services
E-mail: info@ccts-cprst.ca
Telephone: 1-888-221-1687
Fax: 1-877-782-2924
Website: http://www.ccts-cprst.ca

[2] Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
Mail: Secretary-General, CRTC, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2
Telephone: 1-877-249-2782 (toll-free)
TTY: 1-877-909-2782 (toll-free)
Fax: 1-819-994-0218
Website: http://www.crtc.gc.ca

[3] Canadian Human Rights Commission
Mail: 344 Slater Street, 8th Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1
Telephone: 1-888-214-1090 (toll-free)
TTY: 1-888-643-3304
Fax: 1-613-996-9661
Website: http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca

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