

Media Release

Service to improve access to mobiles for disabled and elderly launched in Australia

15 August 2013

Access to mobile communications has just become a lot easier for the almost one in five people who live with a disability with the launch of a new service to help identify which smartphones and tablets provide the critical features they need to communicate.

The new website - www.GARI.info – announced today at the M-enabling Australasia conference in Sydney is the latest update to the mobile industry's Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative (GARI) to help older people and those with a disability search for mobile devices that suit their specific accessibility requirements.

Mobile Manufacturers Forum (MMF) Secretary General Michael Milligan said users could now search for devices that run their favourite accessibility apps as well as more than 110 other features on the GARI database for people with mobility, vision, hearing, speech or cognitive impairments.

“For example, a person with vision impairment can now use the GARI website to search for a new smartphone or tablet that works with their favourite text-to-speech app that can read out emails and text messages along with other features they might be searching for like voice recognition software or a high contrast display,” Mr Milligan said.

Some of the most popular features to search for on the GARI database include:

- **Front-mounted cameras.** This simple feature may seem a novelty to some, but for many users with hearing loss it can make the world of difference allowing them to carry out a face-to-face sign language conversation using a video call or conferencing function.
- **Simplified display.** Smartphones and tablets have become so advanced that they can be too difficult or confusing to use for some older people or those with a cognitive disability. That's why some devices also come with the ability to simplify their user display showing you only the functions of the phone you want to use, hiding the rest out of sight.
- **Voice recognition.** Allows you to make and receive calls and access other features of a phone or tablet through simple voice commands. This feature can be particularly useful for people with mobility or dexterity problems or those with vision impairments.

“We have worked closely with the disability support industry since the GARI project started in 2009 and the change in technology since then to smartphones and apps has opened up exciting new opportunities for people with disabilities to take advantage of mobile technology to enhance their lives,” Mr Milligan said

“Improving access to mobile devices for older people and those with a disability is very important because these are the members of our community who can most benefit from instant communication with family and friends. Mobile phones and tablets have many features that can assist, and GARI is designed to highlight those and help people find a model that will meet their needs.”

Mr Milligan said with the rise of smartphones and tablets, accessibility is now tackled in a threefold way through integrated features in the hardware, the software or via applications.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) has been a strong supporter of the GARI project since its launch and through the AMTA.org.au website has provided access to the database which now includes information on 229 different mobile devices available on the Australian market.

AMTA CEO Chris Althaus said the new website is an important step in the industry’s commitment to breaking down the barriers that make it difficult for some members of the community to enjoy the benefits of mobile communication.

“Originally developed in response to requests from disability groups for improved information on accessibility features, the latest evolution of the GARI project shows the industry’s commitment to improve access to mobile phone technology for the people who can benefit from it the most, Mr Althaus said.

“The GARI project now includes a comprehensive 110 question template for mobile phone makers to detail key features of a new phone or tablet, from screen and font size to volume controls and software compatibility.

“The new GARI website provides consumers with a dedicated online resource designed as a one-stop shop for information about mobile device accessibility options.”

The new website allows users to search and compare devices based on their particular disability, or alternatively check the accessibility features of a specific model of phone or tablet they may be interested in buying.

ENDS

Media Contact information: Michael Milligan, Secretary General, Mobile Manufacturers Forum: +852 6204 6219 or michael.milligan@mmfai.org
Randal Markey, Communications Manager, Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association: +612 6239 6555 or +61 (0) 421 240 550 or Randal.Markey@amta.org.au

Note for Editors: The Mobile Manufacturers Forum is an international association of telecommunications equipment manufacturers with an interest in mobile or wireless communications. More information on the MMF can be found at www.mmfai.org

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) is the peak body representing the mobile telecommunications industry in Australia. Its members include carriage service providers, handset manufacturers, retailers and infrastructure suppliers.