2023 Accessible EPG Report Everyone TV: Freeview and Freesat

1. Introduction

About Everyone TV

- 1.1 Everyone TV is the joint venture leading the operations and strategy of the UK's two main free-to-air TV platforms, Freeview and Freesat. Owned and supported by the UK's leading public service broadcasters the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 we are the champions of free TV.
- 1.2 We are the organisation (f.k.a. Digital UK) responsible for running Freeview, the UK's largest TV platform. Freeview originated as a broadcast TV service delivered by aerial (digital terrestrial television, or 'DTT') and has evolved to also offer a hybrid broadcast/on-demand TV service, Freeview Play, now built into most connected TVs sold in the UK. Freeview & Freeview Play are used in 16 million homes or 60% of TV households and is the main platform in more than 10 million homes.
- 1.3 We are also the organisation responsible for providing free-to-air broadcast TV services by satellite (digital satellite television, or 'DSat'), under the Freesat brand since our merger in 2021. Freesat is the main TV service in around 1 million homes via set-top boxes and select TVs (e.g., Samsung, LG, and Sony).
- 1.4 The consumer offering for both Freeview and Freesat include mobile applications (for iOS and Android) and websites, which provide searchable TV channel guides and give audiences access to both live and on-demand programmes by linking to the channels' own TV websites and apps.
- 1.5 We are responsible for day-to-day operational platform management, including the Freeview and Freesat electronic programme guides (EPGs), and lead on developing platform strategy, working with our broadcast partners and industry. Everyone TV holds two Ofcom EPG provider licences for Freeview: a DTAS licence which covers service information (EPG data) that is broadcast via DTT, and a complementary TLCS licence for the enhanced service information delivered over IP for Freeview Play receivers, along with two TLCS licences for Freesat and Freesat HD.
- 1.6 In 2023, we developed a framework for a new future-facing next-generation platform that viewers will be able to use over the coming decade and beyond, and which will operate regardless of the technologies by which TV channels are distributed. The new TV service was formally announced in September, under the brand name Freely, and is set to launch on connected TVs in 2024. The expectation is that over time users of Freeview and Freesat will replace their existing devices with Freely ones, and that Freely will eventually become the predominant free TV platform in the UK.



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Background to Statement

- 1.7 Given their scale and universal availability, Freeview and Freesat aim to cater for the widest possible range of audience requirements, and Everyone TV is committed to delivering improvements in the accessibility of both platforms over time, both in terms of their technical capabilities and availability across devices.
- 1.8 In the case of Freeview, this is done in collaboration with our partners. We do not produce our own devices, but rather operate within a horizontal market with regards to Freeview-compatible TVs and set-top boxes. We define product operating rules for devices that include Freeview or Freeview Play, and then device manufacturers own the development of their native user interfaces (UIs), including EPGs.
- 1.9 This means that our approach to driving improvements is through careful cooperation and engagement with a range of partners – including manufacturers of receivers, content providers who make their channels and services available to our audiences, and increasingly third-party operating system (OS) providers to whom manufacturers may choose to outsource UI design.
- 1.10 By contrast, Freesat developed its own range of Ultra HD set-top boxes and is now the main supplier of devices after the withdrawal from the market of some older devices made by third-party manufacturers (some older HD devices are still available from third-party manufacturers). This has the advantage that we have greater control through our direct control of the software and hardware. However, the technical infrastructure on Freesat is different from that on Freeview platforms, and this poses particular technical challenges that have impacted the speed with which we have been able to progress our accessibility features roadmap for this platform.

Off-Platform Accessibility

- 1.11 We aim to provide our viewers with accessible services across all customer touchpoints, including the Freeview and Freesat websites and mobile apps and support services such as our Advice Line. The provision of accessibility features within these services means viewers have an alternative way of discovering content alongside the TV guides on their TVs and set-top boxes.
 - i. The linear TV guides for Freeview and Freesat are available on their mobile and web platforms, with flags for each programme indicating whether they offer audio description ("AD"), subtitles ("S"), and sign language ("SL") on Freeview.
 - ii. The websites are built to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 standard. The Freeview site's online EPG includes an accessible view, which allows users to highlight which programmes offer audio description, subtitles, or sign language.
 - iii. Accessibility, inclusive design and SEO best practice form a key part of our Business As Usual continuous improvement work sitewide. We also regularly benchmark site performance against Google's Core Web Vitals (CWV) metrics to ensure the best possible user experience via loading experience (LCP), interactivity (FID), and visual stability (CLS) of web page content.
 - iv. The Freeview and Freesat mobile apps are compatible with Apple and Android in-built magnification and high contrast display features. The TV Guide in both apps can become a talking EPG if the user switches on iOS Voice Over or Android TalkBack. Freeview's mobile app is designed to work with "Dark Theme" which is recognised as an accessibility feature.
 - v. Our support services include telephone advice lines, webchat and online FAQs/how to videos. Our contact centre staff have received disability awareness









training to better support those with accessibility requirements and have been fully trained to support the ATVG via the advice line, social media and email channels.

Future Development

- 1.12 The launch of Freely represents a major milestone for Everyone TV. It will be built into the next generation of connected TVs and other smart devices, rolling out initially with DTT and IP hybrid compatibility. DSat compatibility is planned to follow at a later stage.
- 1.13 The linear EPG will remain at the heart of the new platform: viewers will be able to browse and watch live TV channels in the same way regardless of whether channels are delivered via DTT, DSat, or internet ('IP-delivered').
- 1.14 The new platform will incorporate an Accessible TV Guide similar to the one developed for Freeview Play. We are aiming to cover Freely in future Everyone TV Accessible EPG reports.
- 1.15 We expect that existing Freeview and Freesat users will move over time to Freely as they upgrade their devices or buy new ones, and Everyone TV's future technical development efforts will therefore mostly focus on Freely.







2. Executive Summary

2.1 Everyone TV firmly believes in the need to provide UK viewers with fit-for-purpose, accessible TV on its platforms. This is the second joint Accessible EPG Report covering Freeview/Freeview Play and Freesat.

Freeview Play

- 2.2 Our award-winning Accessible TV Guide (ATVG) is the centrepiece of our accessibility provision. This additional programme guide is available on connected Freeview Play devices via channel 555 and is designed to comply with the four priority accessibility requirements outlined in Ofcom's EPG code: magnification, filtering, high contrast, and text-to-speech (TTS).
- 2.3 Working with device manufacturers, we have succeeded in ensuring that the full or modified ATVG is now available on 100% of connected Freeview Play devices. Of these, 75% offer the full version of the ATVG, with the other 25% offering a modified version without text-to-speech as we cannot back fit this feature on some older devices.
- 2.4 This year, we launched an innovative campaign with four Instagram influencers who are active in the Deaf and Blind communities, to help us raise the profile of the ATVG and the use of channel 555. The campaign was highly effective, reaching more than 400,000 people on social media. Usage of the ATVG rose by 15% month-on-month in January, to 17,370 unique users (up from 15,000 in December).
- 2.5 We now expect all future Freeview Play devices to meet Everyone TV's conformance requirements and provide access to the full ATVG. There should also be a small but gradual ongoing increase in the proportion of connected Freeview Play devices that offer the full ATVG as older devices offering the modified ATVG are replaced.

Freesat

- 2.6 Turning to satellite homes, accessibility on Freesat devices is provided through their native user interfaces and comprises audio description and subtitles (on live and recorded programmes), metadata flags for accessible services ("S", "AD" and "SL") as part of the programme details in the EPG, the option to provide an audio beep when audio descriptions are available for the highlighted or selected programme, and dedicated SUB and AD remote control buttons. 4K set-top boxes also include a high contrast user interface. Together, these features contribute to two of the four priority accessibility requirements outlined in the EPG code: a high contrast UI and, in a more limited way, easy discovery of programming with access services.
- 2.7 Technological challenges with the Freesat platform have meant that plans to implement a software update to the Freesat current 'G3' set-top boxes in 2023 with additional accessibility features have taken longer than we anticipated, leading to a delay in the roll-out of the update.
- 2.8 🔀
- 2.9 Over time, once DSat compatibility has been added to Freely, we expect many Freesat users will move over to Freely where they will be able to access the full ATVG.







3. Freeview Play

Overview

- 3.1 The "Accessible TV Guide" (ATVG) is the centrepiece of our accessibility provision in Freeview homes. Everyone TV developed and launched this accessible EPG solution over the last five years, in response to Ofcom's 2018 amendments to the EPG code, which added four priority accessibility requirements. The ATVG is an additional programme guide – separate from the standard linear EPG – that is available on connected TV sets and set-top boxes with Freeview Play. By offering a consistent approach across devices, the ATVG is our preferred means to deliver accessible EPG services to our viewers.
- 3.2 In recent years we have focused our resources on supporting and enhancing the ATVG service as the optimal means to deliver accessible EPG services to our viewers. Compatible Freeview Play TVs and set-top boxes are widely available across a range of prices and device features, and this year we reached our target of 100% of connected Freeview Play devices offering the full or modified ATVG.
- 3.3 Because the ATVG is not available on Freeview-only devices (as it requires an internet connection), in addition to offering ATVG on Freeview Play devices, we encourage our partners to provide accessibility features on their own native user interfaces although we do not control these UIs and cannot guarantee implementation.

The Accessible TV Guide (ATVG)

- 3.4 The ATVG launched in 2020 as an application built using HbbTV technology. It appears to viewers with connected Freeview Play devices as an additional channel accessed via keying 555 on a remote control. This channel number was chosen due to the raised node that often appears on the number 5 button of a remote control.
- 3.5 The ATVG was designed in collaboration with accessibility groups specifically for those with accessibility needs. It complies with all four priority accessibility requirements set out in the EPG code:
 - i. Magnification,
 - ii. Filtering (for easy discovery of programming with appropriate access services),
 - iii. High contrast user interface, and
 - iv. Talking EPG: text-to-speech (TTS).
- 3.6 We worked in close collaboration with accessibility user groups such as RNIB, DAC and AbilityNet throughout development to ensure the ATVG is effective in each of these areas. For more detail on how the ATVG meets these four requirements and to see accompanying visuals of the ATVG user interface, please refer to our website https://www.freeview.co.uk/555.
- 3.7 As part of our work with partners to make the ATVG available in more devices, we took a pragmatic decision to launch a modified version of the ATVG that excludes text-to-speech. Technical implementations of Freeview Play vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, and TTS poses technical challenges that make it especially hard to implement. We felt strongly that the complexity around the implementation of TTS should not prevent consumers from being able to access the other components of the ATVG.





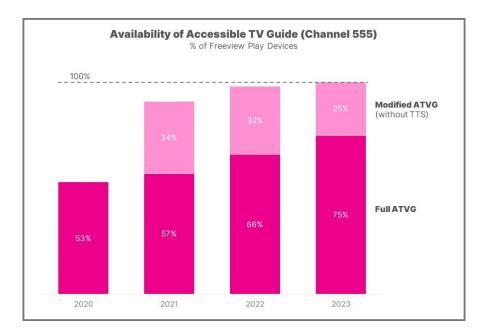




3.8 As with any accessibility interface that involves highlighting or filtering content, the success of the ATVG is reliant on the availability and accuracy of the metadata associated with the accessible content that is supplied by content providers. We continue to monitor the provision of metadata by channel providers that enables us to populate the accessibility flags to ensure comprehensive coverage, and alert channel providers if we detect any gaps in metadata provision.

Current State of Play

3.9 Availability of the ATVG has grown rapidly over the last three years as a proportion of connected Freeview Play devices.



When the ATVG launched in October 2020, it was only available on 53% of connected Freeview Play devices, with availability growing to reach 98% of devices by November 2022 (including the modified ATVG). We have since worked with device manufacturers to plug the remaining gaps to overcome some technical and commercial challenges. As of October 2023, the full or modified ATVG is available in 100% of connected Freeview Play devices- full version available on 75% of devices, with the other 25% of devices offering the modified version of the ATVG without TTS (a smaller figure than last year, as some non-TTS devices were upgraded this year to include this feature).

- 3.10 Consumers can see a full list of compatible devices on our website (also listed in Annex A). This differentiates between those models with and without TTS to enable consumers to make informed purchase decisions based on their specific accessibility needs.
- 3.11 As well as seeking to grow the availability of the ATVG, we recognised the need to drive awareness of the service amongst potential users both of its existence and how it works. In previous years we committed to improve the user journey by producing a demo video to help consumers understand the product functionality. Our demo video is available on YouTube and on our website https://www.freeview.co.uk/555.
- 3.12 This year, we launched an innovative campaign with four Instagram influencers who are active in the Deaf and Blind communities, to help us raise the profile of the ATVG and the use of channel 555.

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- 3.13 Over a three-month period, from November 2022 to January 2023, the influencers created a series of content for the campaign that they posted as Instagram Reels and Stories, with the content also reposted on the @freeviewtv account. The videos aimed to be informative about accessing and finding the ATVG, with videos and captions clearly mentioning '555'.
- 3.14 By engaging young talent active on social media, the campaign was effective in reaching target audiences and raising the profile of the ATVG in an entertaining manner. The campaign reached more than 400,000 people on social media, an impressive figure that is more than double the influencers' combined following of 187,000 people. Usage of the ATVG rose by 15% month-on-month in January, to 17,370 unique users (up from 15,000 in December), an increase that may be linked to the influencer campaign. Further details of the campaign are presented in Annex B.

Future Development

- 3.15 Having achieved our 100% target for connected Freeview Play devices on which the ATVG is available, our work on the ATVG has now been accomplished.
- 3.16 The limited power or configuration of most older TV sets that do not currently allow TTS means that it is not possible to upgrade these devices to enable TTS. We do not therefore expect to be able to convert the remaining 25% of devices without TTS to the full ATVG. Over time, we expect the number of devices with modified ATVG to naturally decline over time as older devices are replaced with more recent models that include full ATVG functionality. By this process we expect a small but gradual ongoing increase in the proportion of connected Freeview Play devices that offer the full ATVG.
- 3.17 The ATVG has been part of the Freeview Play conformance process (the device test that manufacturers must take before we give new device models the Freeview Play trademark) since January 2021. New device models may be rejected if they are unable to support this feature and provide access to the full ATVG. We will continue to update the list of compatible devices on our website accordingly as a resource for users.







4. Freesat

Overview

- 4.1 Freesat is our free-to-air broadcast TV solution for homes with satellite connections. The platform provides the same access service capabilities for linear TV channels – subtitling, signing and audio description – as on Freeview. The Freesat platform does not offer an equivalent of the Accessible TV Guide (ATVG) that is available on channel 555 on connected Freeview Play devices and is instead reliant on Freesat devices' native user interfaces for accessibility provision.
- 4.2 Everyone TV is the main supplier of the Freesat platform, on owned and third-party devices, which enables us to provide consistency in functionality across the range of available devices. Freesat-supporting 4K set-top boxes and TVs currently in the market offer the following accessibility functions:
 - i. All Freesat products offer audio description and subtitles for live and recorded programmes when they are provided by the broadcaster.
 - ii. When a programme is highlighted in the EPG, metadata flags are used to indicate if the programme offers subtitles ("S"), audio description ("AD") and sign language ("SL") support.
 - iii. When a user navigates the EPG or browses channels on one of the Freesat settop boxes, and has the feature enabled, an audio beep will sound to indicate when audio descriptions are available for the highlighted or selected programme.
 - iv. Dedicated SUB and AD remote control buttons provide an easy on/off toggle function for customers.
 - v. The Freesat 4K set-top boxes include the standard version of the full EPG with a contrast ratio of at least 7:1 (around 7.7:1), as well as a dedicated high contrast UI with a contrast ratio of at least 18:1 (around 18.15:1).
- 4.3 Together, these features contribute to two of the four priority accessibility requirements outlined in Ofcom's EPG code: a high contrast UI and, in a more limited way, easy discovery of programming with appropriate access services (with metatags in the EPG descriptions but without filtering capabilities).

Current State of Play

- 4.4 We mentioned in last year's report that the roadmap to roll-out a software update to existing Freesat 'G3' set-top boxes would be complex. We have been working on additional accessibility capabilities for Freesat since the acquisition of the platform in 2021, and have identified several technological challenges, as underlying software is significantly different from that of Freeview.
- 4.5 These technical difficulties have proved to be greater than we anticipated, leading to delays in the timeline.
- 4.6 The reliability and usefulness of the services on the platform are reliant on the availability and accuracy of the accessible content metadata supplied by content providers. We continue to monitor the provision of metadata by providers which









enables us to populate the accessibility flags to ensure comprehensive coverage, and alert providers if we detect any gaps in metadata provision.

Future Development

- 4.7 We will continue our work to implement the software update to existing Freesat 'G3' set-top boxes which will introduce additional accessibility capabilities.
- 4.8 🔀
- 4.9 As covered in this report, we anticipate that over time and once DSat compatibility has been added to Freely, many Freesat users will move over to Freely where they will be able to access the full ATVG with all four priority accessibility requirements outlined in Ofcom's EPG code.







ANNEX A: Freeview Play Device Models with Accessible TV Guide

Freeview Play devices as of October 2023 - live list of compatible models can be found at <u>www.freeview.co.uk/help/accessible-tv-guide</u>.

Brand	Full ATVG	Modified ATVG without text-to-speech
Altimo	All Freeview Play TVs	
Avtex	All Freeview Play TVs	
Bauhn	All Freeview Play TVs	
Blaupunkt	All Freeview Play TVs	
Bush	Some 2018 TVs; 2019 / 2020 / 2022 TVs	2016 / 2017 / some 2018 TVs
Celcus		All Freeview Play TVs
Cello	All Freeview Play TVs	
Digihome	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs
EDUK		All Freeview Play TVs
EGL	All Freeview Play TVs	
EKO	All Freeview Play TVs	
ElectriQ	2019 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
Emotion	All Freeview Play TVs	
Eternity	All Freeview Play TVs	
Ferguson	All Freeview Play TVs	
Finlux	2019 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 / 2020 TVs
Hisense	2016 / 2019 / 2020 / 2021 / 2022 / 2023 TVs	2017 / 2018 TVs
Hitachi	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs
Humax	All Freeview Play Boxes	
JVC	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs; 2021 / 2022 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs
Laurus		All Freeview Play TVs
LG	All Freeview Play TVs except 2022 K8LP models	2022 K8LP models
Linsar	Some 2018 TVs; some 2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / some 2018 / some 2020 TVs
Loewe	Al Freeview Play TVs	
Logik	2019 / 2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
Luxor	2019 / 2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
M&B	2019 TVs	2017 / 2018 TVs
Manhattan	All Freeview Play Boxes	
Marlin	2019 TVs	2018 TVs
Medion	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs	2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Andorid TVs
Metz	All Freeview Play TVs	
Mitchell & Brown	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs; 2022 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs

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Brand	Full ATVG	Modified ATVG without text-to-speech
Netgem	All Freeview Play Boxes	
Nordmende	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs	2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Andorid TVs
Panasonic	2015 / 2016 / some 2017 / some 2018 / 2019 TVs; 2020 non- Android TVs; 2021 / 2022 / 2023 TVs	Recorder box; Some 2017 / some 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs
Philips	2019 / 2020 / 2021 / 2022 / 2023 TVs	2017 / 2018 TVs
Polaroid	Some 2018 TVs; 2019 / 2020 / 2021 / 2022 TVs	2016 / 2017 / some 2018 TVs
RCA	All Freeview Play TVs	
Rediffusion	All Freeview Play TVs	
Sharp	2018 / 2019 / 2021 / 2022 TVs	2017 TVs
Smart Tech	All Freeview Play TVs	
Solas	All Freeview Play TVs	
Sony	All Freeview Play Android TVs	All Freeview Play non-Android TVs
TCL	All Freeview Play TVs	
Technika	All Freeview Play TVs	
Techwood	2019 / 2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
Telefunken		Al Freeview Play TVs
Toshiba	2019 TVs; 2020 non-Android TVs; 2021 / 2022 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs; 2020 Android TVs
UMC	All Freeview Play TVs	
Veltech	All Freeview Play TVs	
Visitech	2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
Walker	2019 / 2020 TVs	2016 / 2017 / 2018 TVs
WeByLoewe	All Freeview Play TVs	
Westinghouse	All Freeview Play TVs	





ANNEX B: Freeview Play Accessible TV Guide Influencer Campaign

The Challenge

The Accessible TV Guide (ATVG) is a unique resource to Freeview Play and not available on most competitors services, but we do not tend to regularly promote it in our mass advertising.

Therefore, Everyone TV launched an influencer campaign on Instagram to raise awareness in the Deaf and Blind community and promote the ATVG to new audiences and highlight its range of functionality. The campaign ran from November 2022 to January 2023.

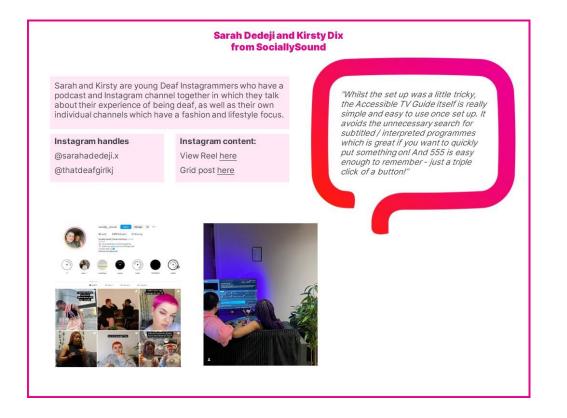
We chose Instagram as the main platform for this campaign as it has the largest and most diverse demographic base with audiences age ranging from 18-24 to 60+ and the largest growing demographic on the platform being 40+ males. This allowed us to find influencers from relevant backgrounds and demographics to reach our target audience. In contrast, Facebook tends to run older and TikTok younger.

We worked with influencers who were able to present the ATVG to their engaged and captive followers using authentic content that would resonate with them and help increase usage of the service.

The Campaign

We worked on the campaign with four Instagram influencers, who are active in the Deaf and Blind communities: Sarah Dedeji and Kirsty Dix from SociallySound, Lucy Edwards, and Harrison Greenham.

The influencers created eight pieces of content for the campaign posted across Instagram Reels and Stories, as well as content reposted on the @freeviewtv account. The aim of the videos was to be informative about accessing and finding the ATVG. In addition to the Reels, influencers created static posts and stories to further signpost to the ATVG. All captions and videos included key messaging around functionality and how to find the guide on channel 555.

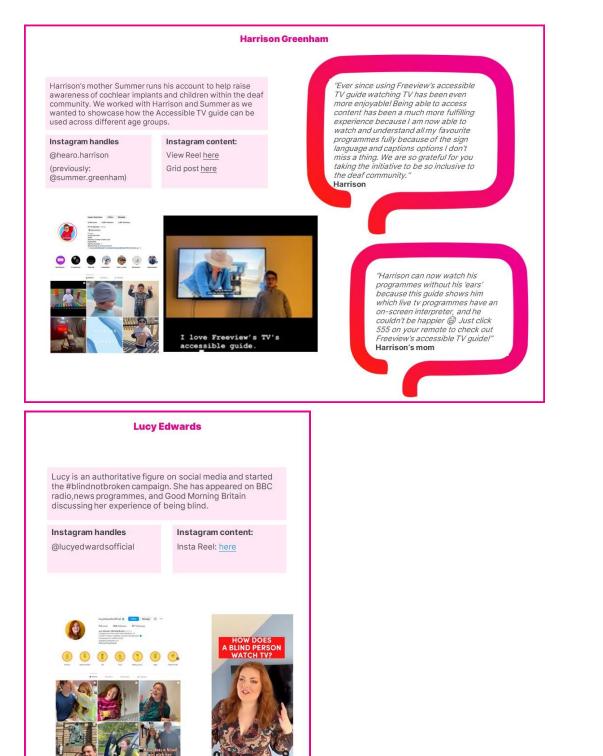


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Campaign Impact

The campaign was successful in driving a high engagement on influencers' posts including positive comments about the service and, critically, an increased use of the ATVG.

The campaign reached over 400,000 people on social media, more than double the forecast reach based on the influencers' combined following of 187,000 people. The top performing piece of content was Lucy Edwards' Reel, with 30,000 unique views.

The content together generated 56,250 engagements, with an engagement rate of 13.5%, well above average engagement rates on Instagram of around 3%. On the influencers' channels, the Reels had higher engagement rates than their own averages, with Lucy's Reel reaching a 16% engagement rate.

Usage of the ATVG rose by 15% month-on-month in January 2023, with users rising to 17,370. Previous levels ranged between 10,000 and 15,000.

Comments from users include:

- "And as the name implies, this service is free! It's not every day you don't have to pay for accessibility! Just simply ensure you have Freeview on your TV as well as access to live TV and then all you need to do is press 555." Socially Sound
- "Looking for subtitled and sign translated shows on Freeview has never been easier. (There's also audio described options for blind people!) Just simply tap in 555 and enjoy watching!" – Socially Sound
- *"It's so great that a free service like this is now accessible for blind people!"* Insta User
- "Will definitely be using this feature!" Insta User
- "This is going to be a game changer for a friend. Thanks for sharing." Insta User





