



# Video Relay Service Breaks Down Barriers for Deaf Employee

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There's a problem, so your boss calls a meeting. Everybody has to hustle over. You're eager to help, and you know you could, except ... well, it just can't work for you on such short notice. The meeting goes by without you. And another. And many others.

Frustrating? You bet. That's how it was for Mark Call, a data warehouse analyst for LSI Logic in Milpitas. Call has been deaf since birth, which hasn't stopped him or slowed him down much anywhere – except work. To attend meetings, he needed to schedule a signing interpreter to come to his office to help. This required three days' notice. His other communication choices – instant messages, typing into a teletype machine or email – were also cumbersome. For quick calls he could ask co-workers to help, but he didn't like imposing.

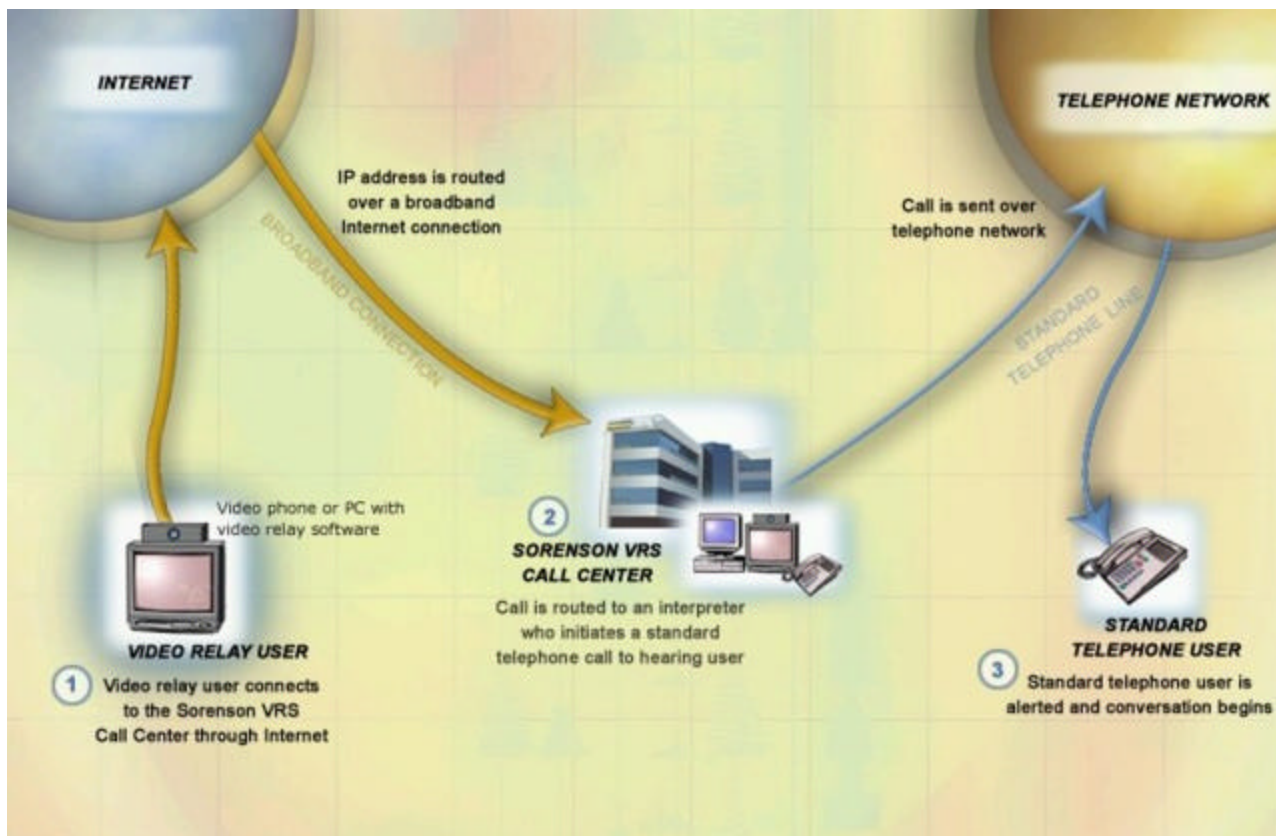
Now it's different. Why? Technology. That and a company with the foresight to give an employee the freedom to do his work well.

The solution is video relay service (VRS). It's simple, easy and less expensive than having an interpreter come onsite. For example, when Call wants to call a customer, he first places a call to the video relay service. On his desk a videophone relays his sign language to a VRS operator, who in turn initiates a voice call to the customer. The customer talks to the operator just as she or he would talk to Call, and the operator in turn signs the responses back to Call.



***"It's [the video relay service] a really great product. I can call anytime I need to."  
- Mark Call***

*Photo by Pamela Katen*



"In the past it was difficult to make sure Mark was involved in meetings, especially impromptu meetings," said Bruce Decock, LSI Logic chief information officer. "With this technology we can easily and quickly connect Mark into our audio conference and virtual meeting tools, and he can attend the meeting and participate interactively. This is great progress towards supporting our goal to have open communication in IT."



**A sign language interpreter serves as a bridge between Mark Call and anyone he needs to communicate with on the phone or in a meeting.**

*Photo by Pamela Katen*

Video relay service has changed everything, even at home. Call now gets to talk to his hearing relatives more frequently. It just makes communication easier, period.

"My parents are hearing, and my wife, my kids and I are deaf. Now, we chat with my parents often via VRS, which is much better than typing messages to them," Call said.

What LSI Logic gets out of the deal is a more productive employee.

"I think I'm working about 10 times better now," Call said. "It broke down barriers."

All it takes is the operator, enough bandwidth to support full-motion live video, a little bit of hardware and a company willing to let a worker live up to his potential.

This is as good for the company as it is for the worker. For example, arduous 30-minute calls now take five. No longer does Call have to interrupt co-workers to make calls for him when an interpreter wasn't available. Communication is much quicker than with instant messages or email. You can even interrupt if necessary, which sometimes is an important part of quick communication.

"Before it was very frustrating," Call said. "Very awkward and slow. Sometimes I just didn't have the patience to wait - sometimes people would go on for awhile. Now it all happens in actual real time. It's really fast. I can call any time I need to. It's a really great product."

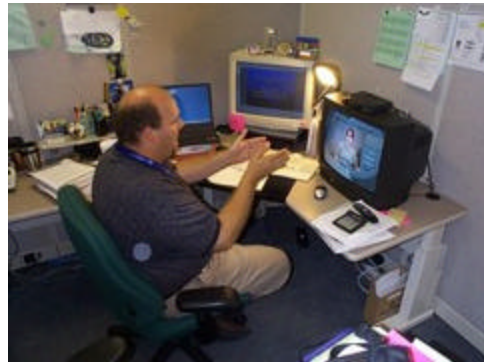
Though there are a variety of video relay systems on the market, Call said he gets best results with a company called [Sorenson](#). He said that with Sorenson VRS there are no grainy images, no jerky playback or complex hardware to install.

The interview for this article was conducted via the Sorenson system, and it proved easy – truly seamless. After awhile you forget you're talking to an operator. It's like you're talking with Call. It works best when you speak at a moderate pace, especially if technical jargon is being exchanged, because the interpreter has to keep up.

VRS is federally funded and administered by NECA (National Exchange Carriers Association), which funds traditional Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS). The money for the service comes via the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires functional equivalency in telecommunications access. Call believes video relay service is saving LSI Logic about 50 percent over the cost of interpreters.

Others at LSI Logic are just glad Call has been set free.

"How appropriate for IT to find a high-tech solution for accommodating persons with disabilities," said Pamela Katen, LSI Logic administrative assistant for Internet Business Technology. "Moreover, I was impressed with how our management staff acknowledged the need, followed up on Mark's thorough cost savings data and technical recommendations, and implemented the process. I give our management staff credit for their vision and consideration, but I also credit Mark Call for taking the initiative to pave the way for other employees with disabilities. What a profound effect his efforts will have on current and future employees."



**Mark Call says his productivity and effectiveness has improved about tenfold by using the video relay service.**

*Photo by Pamela Katen*

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