

# Barriers to Access: Everything but the Audio Description

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# Audio introductions (AIs)/ Pre-visit information (PVI)

Remael and Reviers (2013) noted five functions of an AI:

General (context)

Information (start time, duration etc.)

*Foreshadowing*

*Expressive (visual style)*

Instructive (e.g. adjust the volume of your headset)



# Functions subdivided

- Pre-show
  - context (for example information from the printed programme about how this production came about)
  - Information (duration, number of intervals etc.)
  - *Foreshadowing*
  - *Expressive (visual style)*
  - Instructive
- Pre-visit



- Pre-visit
  - context (physical: relating to the theatre)
  - Information (relating to your visit)
  - Instructive (e.g. what to do/where to go when you arrive)



# Information Function (PVI)

What do you need to know to plan your visit?

running time, ToTo start time,

Access information about the venue:  
ticketing policy, guide dog policy,  
assistance available



# VocalEyes

- venue access information (3mins) (usually supplied by the venue with input from the VE editor)
- Functional: how to get there (public transport options, parking etc.) Options for guide dogs, where to collect your AD headset
- Descriptive: appearance and layout of the front of house & auditorium



# Functional Information includes:

- Venue address
- Public transport links
- Venue postcode
- Venue telephone number
- Information about accessible toilets
- Information about refreshment facilities
- Taxi drop-off points
- information about guide dogs
- Taxi contact numbers
- Parking facilities



# Descriptive information includes

- Description of the foyer
- Description of the building exterior
- Description of the auditorium
- this descriptive info. is also functional as it helps you navigate the space once you get there. But sometimes the theatre itself is more breathtaking than the production:





# Sam Wannamaker Theatre

This Jacobean style indoor theatre is only 12 metres wide by 17 long. The stage is at one end and there's padded bench seating for 340 people. It is built entirely of wood, with hand-carved decorative elements.

The U-shaped auditorium is on three levels, a pit that is sunk below the level of the end-stage, a lower gallery and an upper gallery. Each of the galleries is supported on ten slender columns of oak. In the pit, the benches are placed either side of a central walkway.

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- Perhaps its most striking feature is the use of candles for lighting. Six elegantly curved black metal chandeliers hanging above the stage can be raised or lowered by ropes. Each holds twelve slender beeswax candles. Around each pillar supporting the galleries, leather straps hold curved sconces with beaten metal reflective surfaces. Each holds two candles. More candles line the front edge of the stage.



# Functional information example

- AD headsets can be obtained from the cloakroom, which is located at the rear left-hand corner of the foyer. The cloakroom will be open one hour before the performance. Toilets and a platform lift to all levels of the theatre are located beyond the cloakroom. Front of house staff will be able to assist you with the lift if required. There are three accessible toilets, with one located on each level of the theatre space.



# PVI order

- It is generally ordered following the logic of a visit:
- How to get there
- What the entrance is like:
- Foyer – appearance & facilities
- Getting to the auditorium
- Leaving the theatre
- Contact numbers



## 3 minutes - Is it too much?

- Online survey of people on the VocalEyes (VE) database, participation was voluntary
- 54 respondents
- age range 18-24 – 65+
- 81% registered blind
- 32% were 65+ years old
- 24% were guide dog users



# Which of the following do you appreciate?

- Venue address (88%)
- Public transport links (76%)
- Venue postcode (74%)
- Information about accessible toilets (66%)
- Venue telephone number (66%)
- Description of the auditorium (64%)
- Information about refreshment facilities (64%)
- Description of the foyer (58%)
- Description of the building exterior (50%)
- **Taxi drop-off points (42%)**
- **information about guide dogs (32%)**
- **Taxi contact numbers (24%)**
- **Parking facilities (18%)**



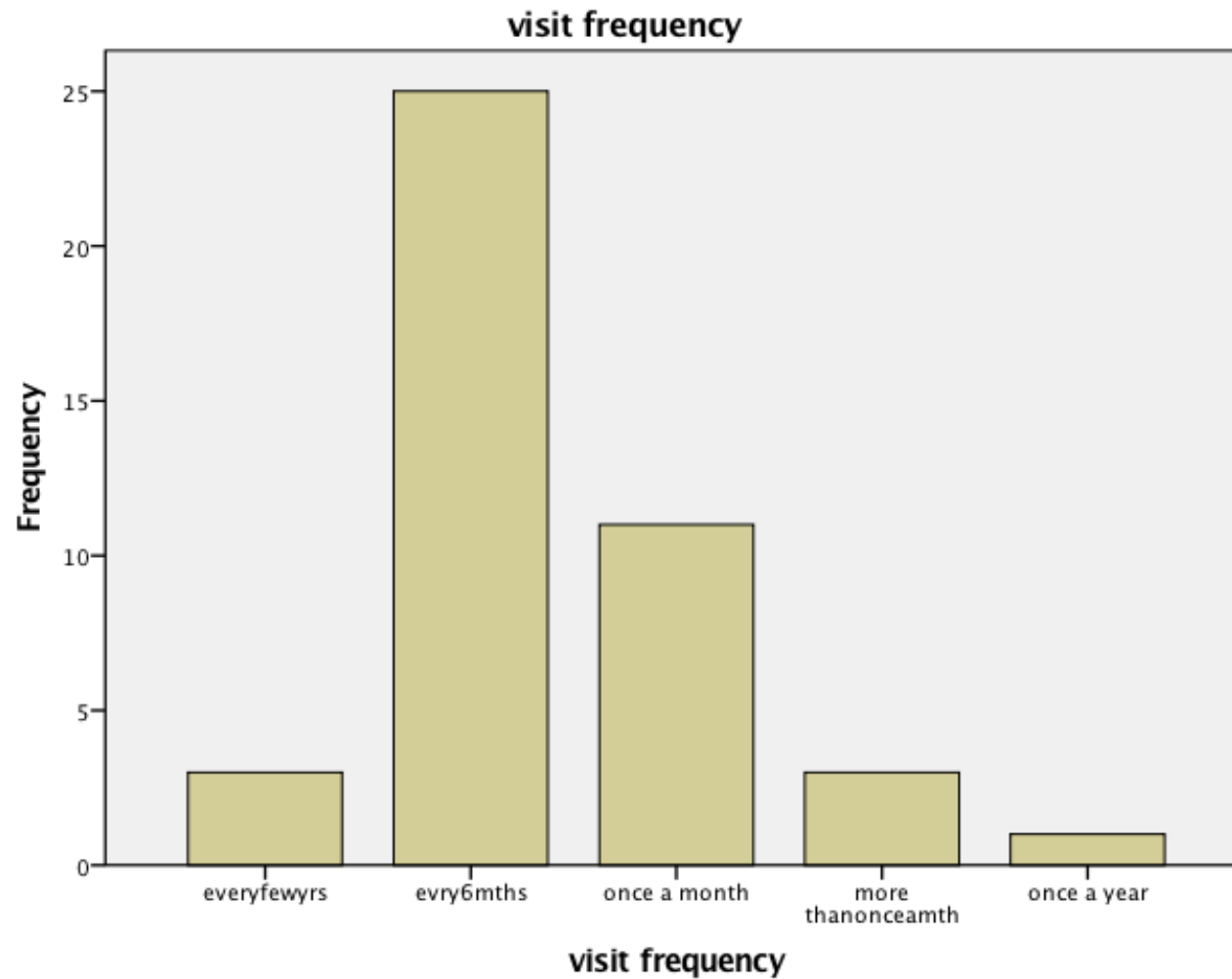
# Other questions

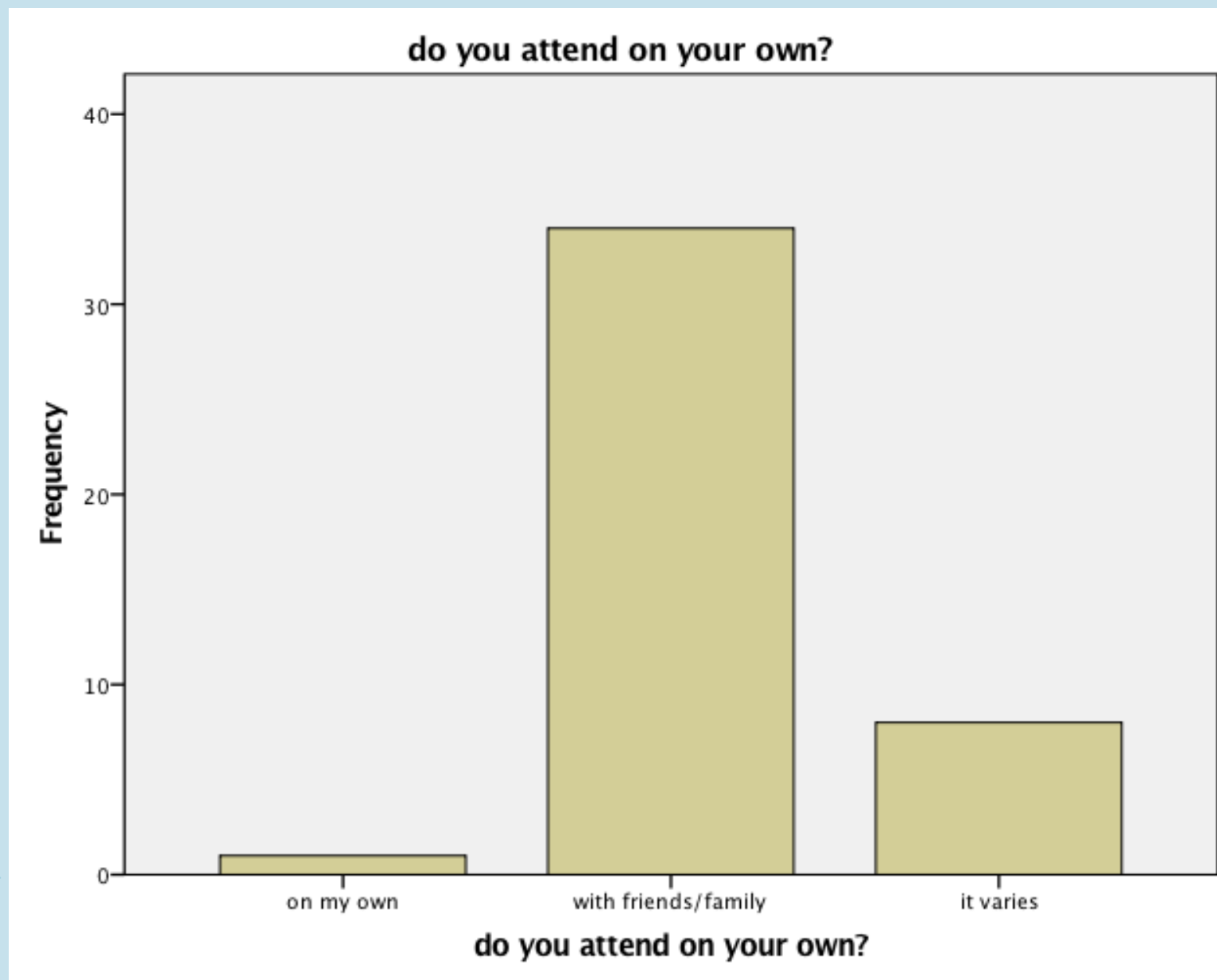
- How do you access the access information? (CD; download audio/text file)
- If VocalEyes stopped providing access information, how would you get it instead?
- Demographic information – visit frequency; visit alone?



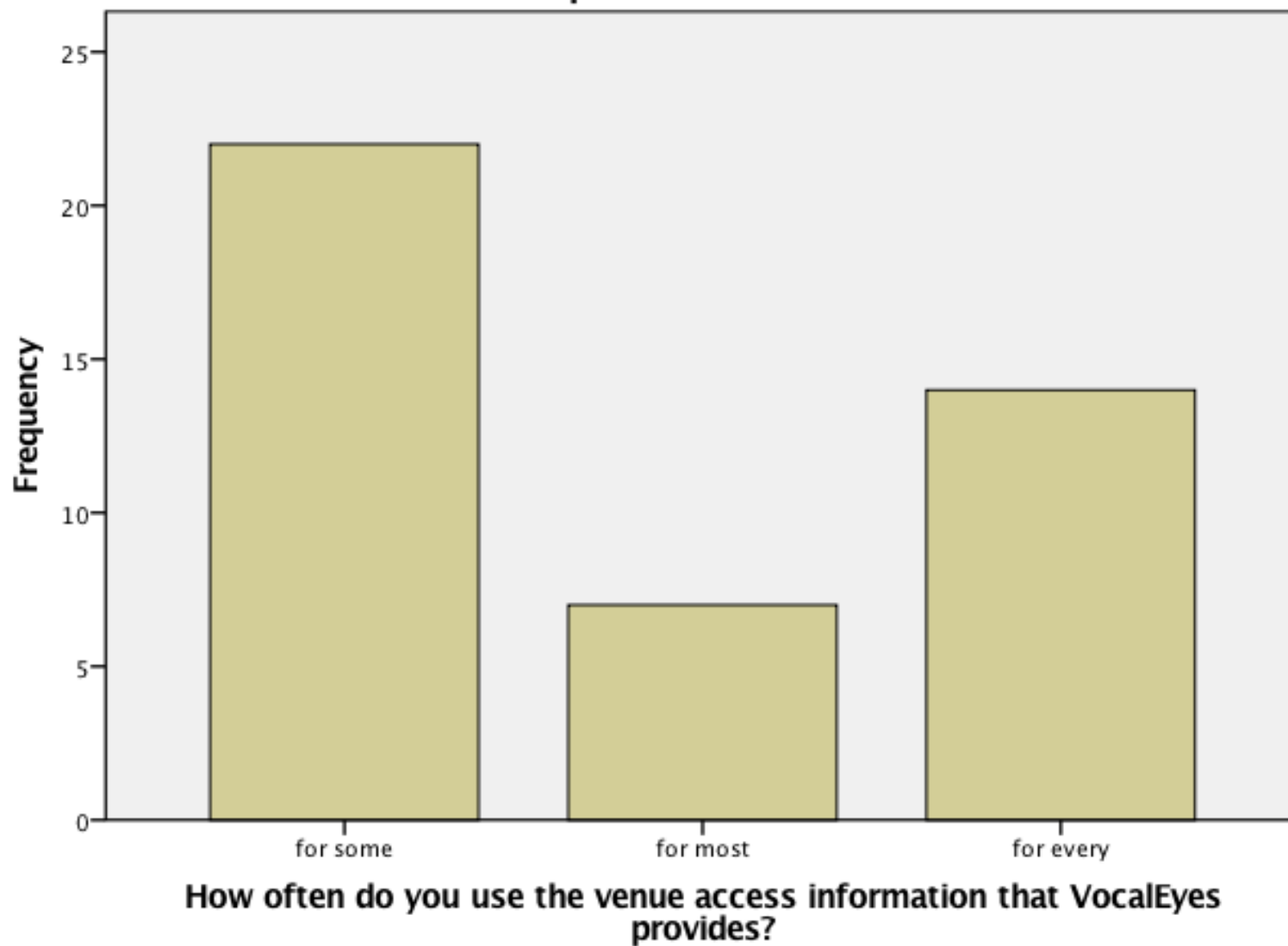


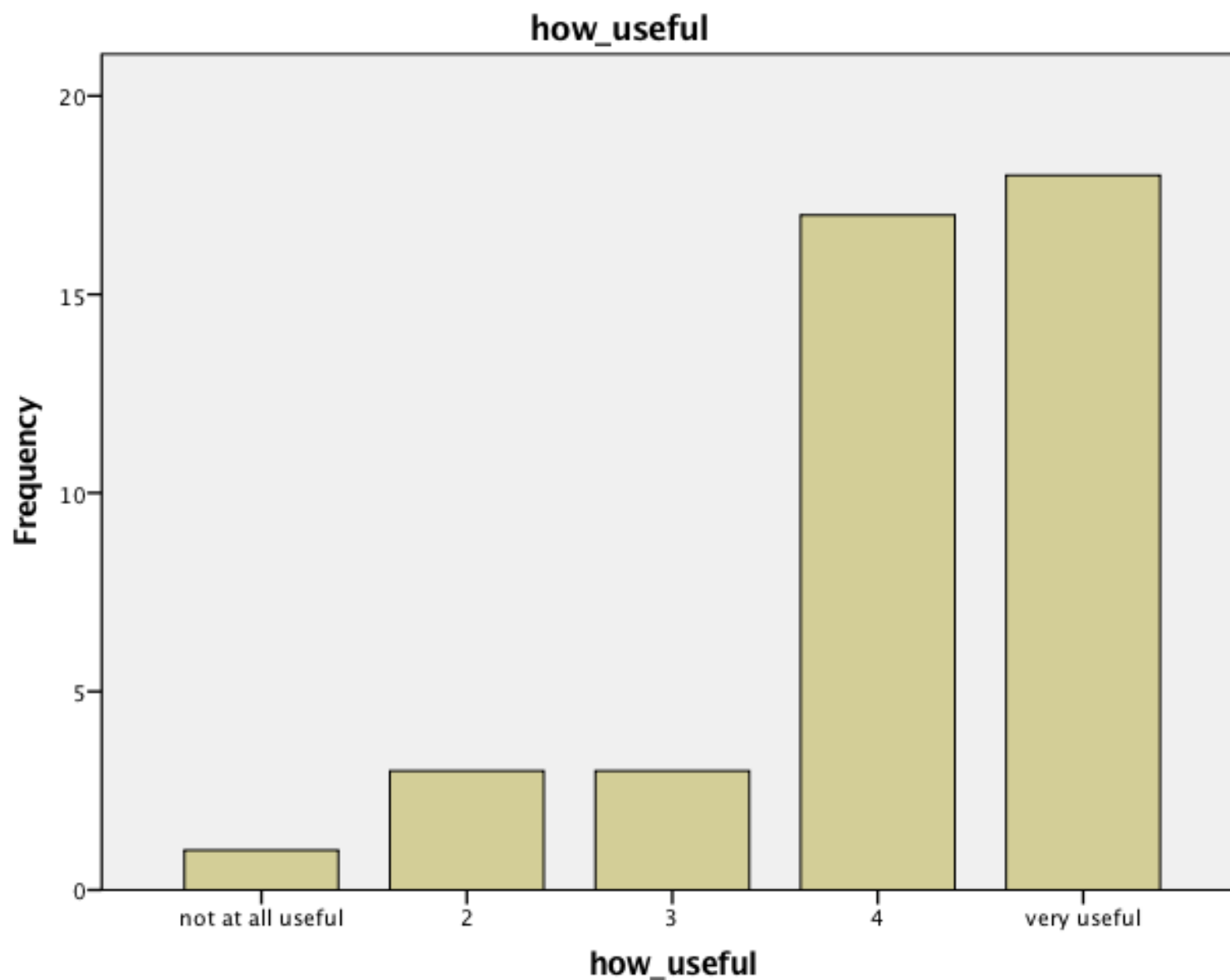
# Visit frequency





## How often do you use the venue access information that VocalEyes provides?







# People who never used it:

- not nearly enough detail
- VE don't operate in my area
- I have never received the CD prior to my visit
- familiar with local theatre



# Is there enough detail?

	percentage
not nearly enough	3.7
not quite enough	9.3
about right	66.7
slightly too much	5.6
far too much	1.9
Total	100

There was no correlation between amount of detail & age, type of sight loss nor attending alone or with others (including a guide dog).



# If VocalEyes stopped providing access info, what would you do?

- 71.7% rely on friends & family.
- 56.6% use the theatre website
- 56.6% telephone the theatre.
- 24.5% use a smartphone navigation app e.g. Google maps
- 7.6% use a website (DisabledGo.com or Euan's Guide an accessibility review website based in Edinburgh.)



# Qualitative comments

- “It’s more convenient to listen to everything in one go when one is about to attend the event”
- “There isn't a way to get it. Theatres will try to help but they are busy and do not understand the problems.”
- “Probably wouldn't go.”





- “It’s easier to get from Vocal Eyes as they know the kind of thing we need and are looking forward to helping us. Other people that do not know about visual impairment can be very vague which is useless.”



# Accessing the access information

- 18 respondents (40%) listened to the notes from the VE website
- 17 (37.8%) downloaded the notes as a word doc.
- 31 (68.9%) used the CD that is posted out when people book their tickets.



# Accessing the access info

- “Websites are simply too difficult and/or use too much of my energy to access, so I very much prefer a CD, which I often copy on an SD card, to play on my pocket player, without being restricted to a specific location.”



# If you don't use the access info – why not?

- My partner is sighted, so I don't use the access info
- I would generally have booked by phone and I would enquire at this point.
- Even if I don't use it - other people will benefit.



# The information has a social purpose

- “I hope you will be able to continue to provide Access information as having previous knowledge of venues allows some level of independence to visually impaired audience members.”



# AD of live events doesn't occur in a vacuum

- It takes place in a specific spatiotemporal setting.
- Our descriptions shouldn't be restricted to the production.
- They should extend to the whole experience if barriers are to be removed.



# It's not just me!

- “I think that what happens for a VI audience member before they come to the theatre and when they arrive is also really important.” Garry Robson artistic director Birds of Paradise Theatre Company, Glasgow(An accessible arts company that places disabled artists centre-stage)



# conclusion

- to make events accessible we need to do more than provide AD
- Need to remove all barriers including those to:
  - information
  - Independence

And barriers caused by:

- Anxiety
- Complexity of use





Thanks for listening

Any questions?

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