



## **Maintenance programme ensures Next stores remain accessible to the hearing impaired**

Next plc is a British multinational clothing, footwear and home products retailer, the largest clothing retailer in the UK. The first Next shops launched in 1982 expanding to 500 stores in the UK and a further 200 across Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Contacta have worked with Next since 2007, installing 1-to-1 hearing loops and maintaining the systems in stores across the country. Following changes to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (which came into force fully in October 2004 in the UK), Next took steps to ensure their stores were compliant with the Act. They incorporated low-level service counters to improve accessibility for disabled customers in stores and specified one hearing loop system on each accessible floor of a store, improving the experience for hearing aid wearers.

In 2018 a programme was introduced to upgrade the system microphones in store when Contacta engineers carried out planned maintenance visits. The original microphones have been replaced with the newer STS-M74-1 microphones. The new Halo microphones are compact, unobtrusive and feature an LED light indication at the base of the stem. The LED lights up green when the system is working correctly and red when a fault is detected, making it easy for staff to identify if there may be an issue with the system.

The higher quality Cardioid technology built-into the new microphones delivered a clearer audio signal to the hearing loop systems and crystal clear communication for customers.

As well as the upgrade to the microphones, new signage was added which is specific to Next and complements their store aesthetic.

Contacta's specialist planned preventative maintenance programs are designed to protect investments and ensure equipment is inspected and maintained to the highest standards and compliant with all industry regulations. It offers a fault call service if problems arise at any time and Next have been extremely pleased with the professional service Contacta offer, which includes advice and guidance on standards, compliance and legislations they should be meeting.

Next aim to provide a high level of service to all of their customers, including those with disabilities. On accessibility in store, the retailer has said that "It works tirelessly to make sure the customer's shopping experience is fun, friendly and above all, accessible to everyone".

Contacta continue to install hearing loops in all Next UK stores as well as carry out annual maintenance to ensure the systems optimal performance and positive customer experience are retained.