RPH
AUSTRALIA
the radio reading network

RADIO READING RESOURCES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Be heard
Social media, the internet and screen readers

Contents

Introduction

The internet is ubiquitous in all aspects of our society. Almost everyone has some kind of digital device with which they can access the internet, even though for some it may only be a phone.

Of the over 5 million Australians who listen to community radio, around 30% of them have a disability, while 11% of all listeners have a vision impairment or blindness[1].

According to a Vision 2020 report (2015) there are 575,000 people who are blind or vision impaired currently living in Australia, and that number is expected to grow significantly as our population ages.

People who are blind use screen readers to access the digital environment, essentially reading aloud web content to users, from top to bottom, with software such as NVDA or JAWS.
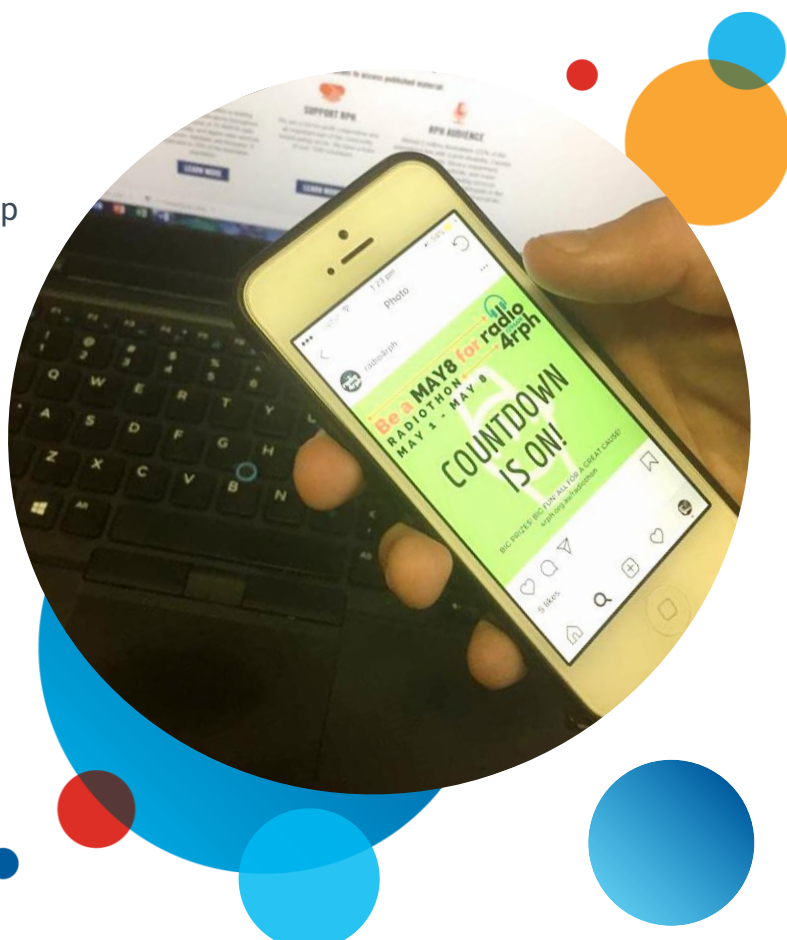
Screen readers are also used by some people with cognitive or learning disabilities who may find reading challenging, as an additional way to absorb content.

In this guide, we are going to look at some of the benefits, and challenges, online environments and social media have brought to the lives of people with disability.

We also look at how you, the community radio producer, can keep the listener who has a print disability in mind when promoting your content online.

Social media changes lives

Social media is connecting friends and family globally. It helps people find services in their communities, self-advocate, and also find new friends and interest groups to participate in. Because of the utility and rapid uptake of new technology, especially by young people, community radio needs to have a social media presence.

[1] https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets

On the 30th anniversary of the world wide web, a user, who is blind, was interviewed about her experience[2] She said she didn't have much contact with other people who are blind before she became a computer user.

Journalist Melanie Ehrenkranz writes:

"Lavant said that she now has a lot of close friends and colleagues with disabilities that she's never met in person. "We are able to connect by video call and by messenger and chat rooms, all of these options, that you don't even realize that you haven't actually physically seen them, touched them in person and it's all thanks to the internet," she said. "For folks with disabilities, that is incredibly significant."

Still, some of the web's potential for people with disabilities remains unfulfilled—and as the internet becomes increasingly central to people's lives, truly universal design online is more important than ever.

"I am still finding issues on websites that I was finding 20 years ago," Steenhout said. He lists problems with images, font controls, and content hierarchy, all features that can make it nearly impossible for people

People with Disability Australia
Yesterday at 09:53 · 🌐

The web has made a huge difference to many people with disability, but some of us are still being left behind.

How has the web changed your life? What accessibility problems affect you most online?

From Gizmodo:
"Lavant said that she now has a lot of close friends and colleagues with disabilities that she's never met in person. "We are able to connect by video call and by messenger and chat rooms, all of these options, that you don't even realize that you haven't actually physically seen them, touched them in person and it's all thanks to the internet," she said. "For folks with disabilities, that is incredibly significant."

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"I am still finding issues on websites that I was finding 20 years ago," Steenhout said. He lists problems with images, font controls, and content hierarchy, all features that can make it nearly impossible for people who use assistive technology to access websites."

[Image description: An old-fashioned computer monitor and keyboard with a person's hair and glasses visible at the side of the image. 30 Years of the Web logo.]

GIZMODO.COM
On the Early Web, People With Disabilities Found Community and Autonomy

👍 6

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➤ Share

[2] https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2019/03/on-the-early-web-people-with-disabilities-found-community-and-autonomy/

who use assistive technology to access websites."

[Image description: An old-fashioned computer monitor and keyboard with a person's hair and glasses visible at the side of the image. 30 Years of the Web logo.]

This story and the image description above, illustrate some of the facets of social media use we need to keep in mind when making social media for an audience who may be using a screen reader to access that content.

They come from a social media post (pictured above) from People With A Disability Australia[3], an advocacy group led by people with a lived experience of disability.

They highlight the fact that much of the internet is still not accessible, especially to people who use screen readers. Because of this we need to use work-arounds like the image description in this post.

We provide advice for improving the accessibility of popular platforms Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram for an audience that includes people with vision impairments on the pages that follow.

The accessibility of social media platforms

Access is a basic principle of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (United Nations, 2007) and extends to media access as both a consumer and a producer (Article 21). Despite widespread internet use, including by people with a disability, the quality of accessibility is variable (Ellis & Goggin, 2018; Goggin, Hollier, & Hawkins, 2017)[4].

Each social media platform or website has different elements that can inhibit or facilitate its accessibility.

While the social media giants like Facebook are working to improve access, user experience indicates that much still needs to improve to make these platforms fully accessible to people who are blind, and who

[3] https://pwd.org.au/

[4] A11y project. (2018). The A11y project: A community-driven effort to make web accessiblity easier.   Retrieved from https://a11yproject.com/

Commonwealth of Australia. (2013). Accessibility and inclusivity.   Retrieved from https://guides.service.gov.au/content-guide/accessibility-inclusivity/

Ellis, K., & Goggin, G. (2018). Disability and media activism. In G. Meikle (Ed.), *The Routledge companinon to media and activism*. New York: Routledge.

Goggin, G., Hollier, S., & Hawkins, W. (2017). Internet accessibility and disability policy: lessons for digital inclusion and equality from Australia. *Internet Policy Review, 6*(Issue 1).

United Nations. (2007). Convention of the Rights of Persons with a Disability: United Nations.

may not be able to access information any other way.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)(World Wide Web Consortium, 2008) were created to improve global web accessibility. This sets the standard for best practice in all web development. In recent years the Australian government has made WCAG guidelines a compulsory feature of their websites as more public services go online (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013; Goggin et al., 2017).

Recently a group of Twitter and Facebook users have turned to a mode of direct action that is almost synonymous with the internet.

Calling themselves allies, or #A11y (short for accessibility), these users are developing their own techniques to compensate for accessibility and utility deficits in these platforms, by writing their own image descriptions for users with visual impairments, and encouraging developers on all platforms to embrace the #A11y moniker (A11y project, 2018).

Good social media posts by organisations include a photo of people participating in the activity being promoted, accompanied by an image description.

Facebook

Facebook is still developing accessibility settings that will accommodate a variety of different users, including settings for people with visual differences, navigation settings for users with cognitive impairments, and advice for people using assistive technology. Facebook also uses recognition technology to provide descriptions for users who are blind if no description exists.

However, Facebook can be used by people using screen readers who are skilled with computers.

Images posted on Facebook will need to be captioned, such as that in the example below, taken from the Facebook feed of Bandmates Victoria, an organisation that brings music lovers with a disability together with "mates" they can go to gigs with:

"Kat and I really hit it off and stayed long after everyone had gone and had dinner together. You matched us really well and we're looking forward to going out to shows together. Cheers, Prem"

We love receiving messages like this! Our first day of matching Volunteers and Bandmates at the @northcotesocialclub was a success!! "

[visual description: two smiling faces looking directly at the camera][5]

[5]https://www.facebook.com/bandmatesvic/posts/1181884795327170:0

Similarly, this Facebook post from Vision Australia puts all its information about the 2019 Blind Citizens Australia National Convention in text, and describes the accompanying image.

Bandmates Victoria
21 hrs · 🌐

"Kat and I really hit it off and stayed long after everyone had gone and had dinner together. You matched us really well and we're looking forward to going out to shows together. Cheers, Prem"
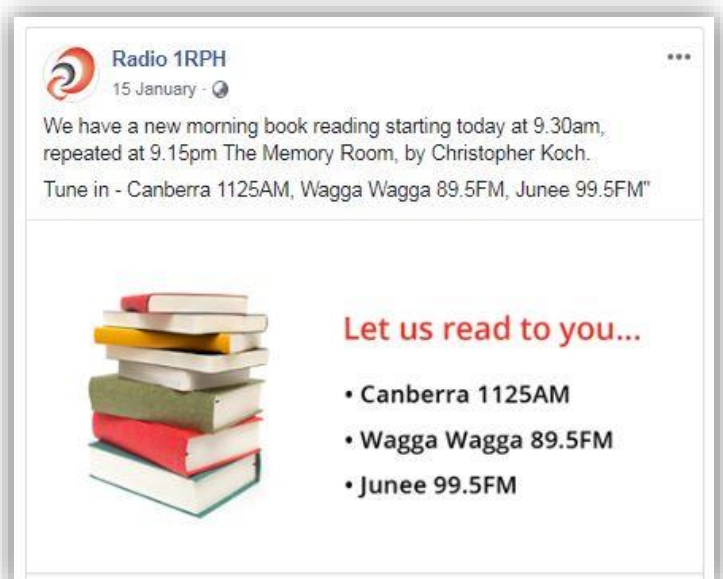
We love receiving messages like this! Our first day of matching Volunteers and Bandmates at the @northcotesocialclub was a success!! 🎸

[visual description: two smiling faces looking directly at the camera]

👍❤ You and 35 others

❤ Love   💬 Comment   ➤ Share   ⊙ ▾

Radio 1RPH
15 January · 🌐

We have a new morning book reading starting today at 9.30am, repeated at 9.15pm The Memory Room, by Christopher Koch.
Tune in - Canberra 1125AM, Wagga Wagga 89.5FM, Junee 99.5FM"

Let us read to you...

• Canberra 1125AM
• Wagga Wagga 89.5FM
• Junee 99.5FM

In the image that follows, Radio 1RPH shows how to best convey information to a screen reader when you have embedded it in an image (which is not screen readable). They repeat the important information, (the radio service frequencies), in the text of the post as well as in the image, so that all users may access the information.

Vision Australia
28 March at 18:44 · 🌐

The Blind Citizens Australia 2019 National Convention begins tomorrow. If you can't make it, find out how Vision Australia Radio can help you keep up with all the action from Hobart.

[Image shows a radion microphone in front of a mixing panel and on air sign.]

ON AIR

VISIONAUSTRALIA.ORG
VA Radio to broadcast BCA National Convention

👍 13   2 shares

Facebook tips:

1. **If you use photos, use photos of people and describe them in alt-text**
2. **Write any text used in an image in the text of the post as well, as screen readers cannot access the image text**

Facebook have an Accessibility Help Centre[6] for users with screen readers wanting to improve their use of it.

In 2014 Facebook commissioned research[7] into the experience of users who are blind. User who are blind were as active as other users on the platform and even "liked" the updates of others more than the average user. Users who are blind also accessed and uploaded a lot of photographs. The overwhelming majority of users of facebook who are blind, in this research,

talked about issues affecting blind users. The topic subjects included "blind", "braille", "sighted" "accessible" "audio" and "guide".
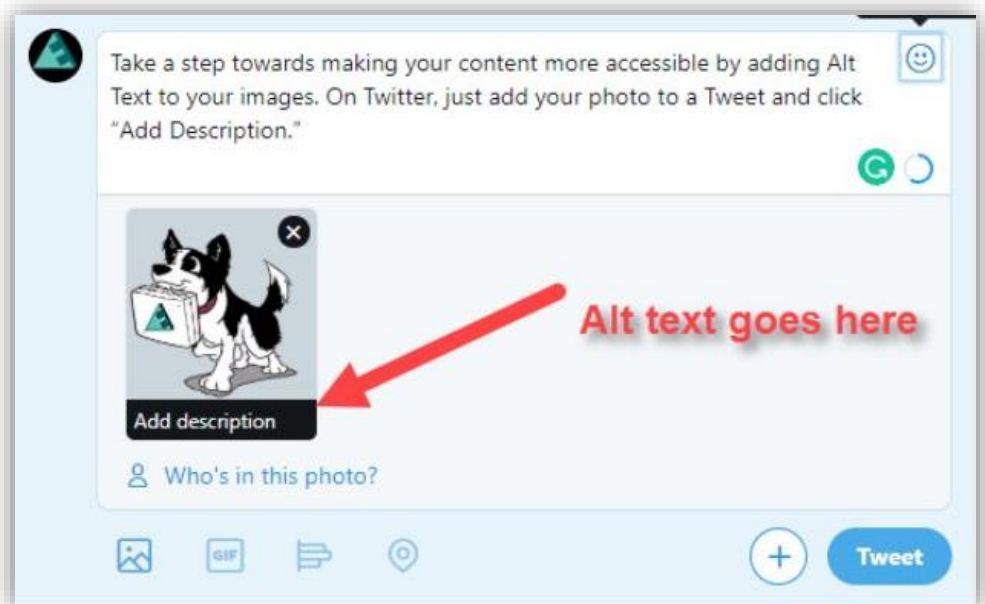
Twitter

Being largely text based, Twitter has been fairly accessible to screen readers since its inception.

Twitter is well used by people with vision impairments and blindness for this reason. It has been a locus of online activism too: Twitter campaign, "#CripTheVote" successfully drew attention to the use of digital techniques of social participation and self-representation by people with disabilities to assert social enfranchisement (Disability Visibility Project, 2016) You can add alt-text

Take a step towards making your content more accessible by adding Alt Text to your images. On Twitter, just add your photo to a Tweet and click "Add Description."

Alt text goes here

Add description

Who's in this photo?

Tweet

[6] https://www.facebook.com/help/accessibility

[7] https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-data-science/visually-impaired-people-on-facebook/10152143950893859/

descriptions, (invisible captions that are read by a screen reader for people who cannot see the picture), by choosing "add description" in the box that appears when you attach a picture to your tweet, as described in the tweet below:

Twitter provides a user guide for enabling image descriptions[8] on your Twitter profile.

They also have a 'Twitter Accessibility' account @TwitterA11y

Twitter tips:
1. **Add alternative text to images**
2. **Make your hashtags easy to read & capitalize the first letter of each word**
3. **Avoid using numerous emojis in your Twitter name or tweet**
4. **Describe animated GIFS in the body of your post**

#MakeItEasyToRead #a11y #accessibility

Instagram

In late 2018 Instagram, an image based social media, announced they will be adding captioning to their platform so that users who are blind may access their content.

This will allow screen readers to describe photos, either automatically using Artificial Intelligence, or by reading custom descriptions added by users. If there is no description, Instagram will automatically identify what's in a photo using object recognition technology.

Screen readers, including Voice Over (for iphone) and Talk Back (for Android) are both compatible with Instagram.

The help page[9] on Instagram tells you step by step how to activate this feature.

The power of the Web is in its universality.
Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect.
Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web

[8] https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions
[9] https://help.instagram.com/503708446705527

Websites

For websites to be accessible to everyone they need to be:

- **Perceivable** – users can view all the content
- **Operable** - users are able to navigate easily
- **Understandable** - not so complex that users can't understand how to use it
- **Robust** - users can use a wide range of devices, including assistive accessibility technologies, to use it.

Unfortunately, some web content is not compatible with screen readers, so is essentially invisible.

This includes:

- Flash animation, already invisible to iphones, is also invisible to screen readers

- Images with no "Alt" descriptions are invisible to screen readers

- PDFs that are heavy on graphics may be confusing or not easy to read by some screen readers

- Screen readers can also read in a variety of languages, so if you set

the "lang" attribute incorrectly, it will read the text in the wrong language.

- Links that are not accessible by using the TAB key (hover-over menus and links)

- Form fields that are not labelled properly

- CAPTCHA for preventing spamming of forms is inaccessible as it relies on graphics

- Tables for layout are a verbal nightmare for a screen reader

- Carousels or slideshows for images: if they are fast or not stoppable they can be unreadable even to sighted users, and invisible to users of screen readers

- Some widgets in Wordpress and other Content Management Systems (CMS)

- Low contrast between colours for those with colour blindness or low vision

The picture below, from Vision Australia's website,[10] is a good example of an accessible colour scheme. Their Document

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[10] https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/print-accessibility/what-is-print-disability
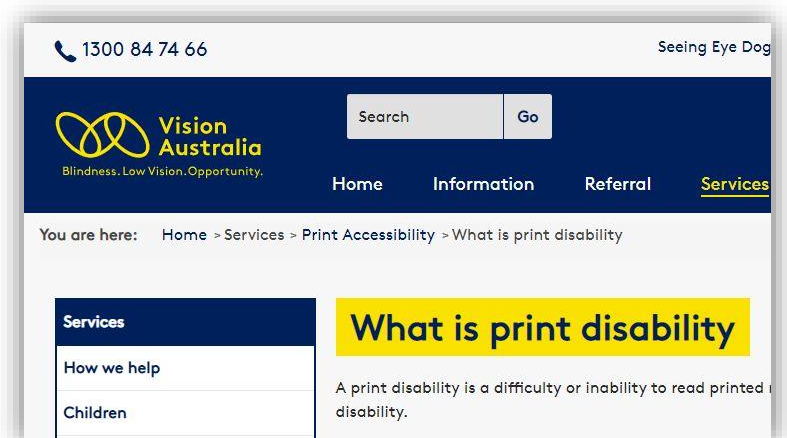
Accessibility Toolbar[11] can help you test pages in Word before publishing.

The good news is all these problems are easily fixed or avoided!

The simplest way to make your website accessible is to choose a Content Management System that supports accessibility. Joomla, WordPress and Drupal are generally pretty good according to Media Access Australia;

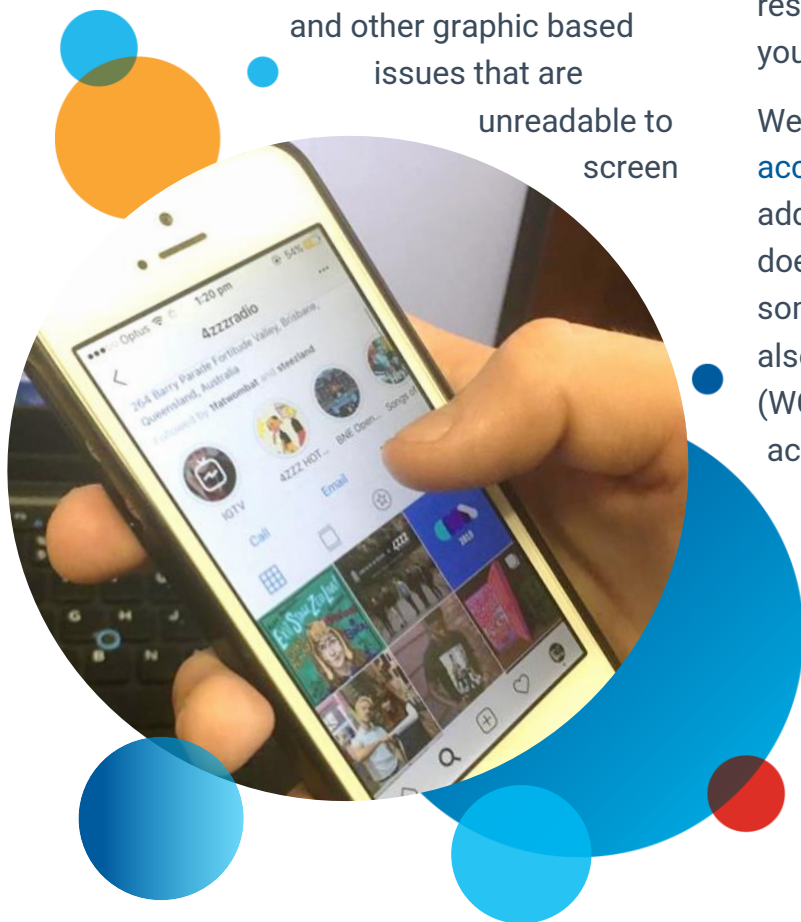Alternatives exist to CAPTCHA, hover menus and other graphic based issues that are unreadable to screen reader users. If you can't part with your graphics heavy version, you can make a basic html low-tech site alongside your fancy site with a front page link for screen reader users;

Get your users to test it! If you have a blind or vision-impaired volunteer, why not seek their advice on what works for them?

To learn more on how a screen reader works with a website see Webaim.org[12] - an accessibility tester your most valuable resource when thinking about how to make your internet presence accessible.

Webaim have developed the WAVE accessibility tool[13]. Just type in the web address of your site and it will tell you what does and doesn't work (requires knowing some technical terms). The A11y Project[14] also offers a checklist for web developers. [15] (WCAG) were created to improve global web accessibility and set the standard for best practice web development.

In recent years, the Australian government has made WCAG accessibility compulsory on their websites as more public services go online.[16]

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[11] https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/digital-access/document-accessibility-toolbar
https://webaim.org/techniques/screenreader/ [12]
[13] http://wave.webaim.org/
[14] https://a11yproject.com/checklist

Steve Richardson.

Steve has been volunteering at 4RPH for more than 20 years, starting in the 1990s.

Steve began his radio career in the DJ booth at Skateway, later undertaking an audio engineering course before being invited by friend Paul Price to volunteer at Brisbane's Radio Reading Network service, 4RPH.

Since then he has worked to perfect his audio editing and on-air production, and now produces a monthly interview program, "Access All Areas ", around issues of interest to the community of listeners who are blind or vision impaired.

Steve is on the management committee of 4RPH and helps audition new radio readers at the station. He has also served on the board of RPH Australia.

Steve is passionate about disability rights and advocacy.

He has spoken about disability, radio, work and health issues at events around Australia including the 2017 Community Broadcasting Association of Australia conference, and for Blind Citizens Australia in 2019.

About this resource

You can find more Radio Reading Resources for stations and for volunteers on our website.

We developed these community media training resources to support the Regional Development project, which aims to broaden the national reach of Radio Reading services to reach people with a print disability living in regional and remote areas.

RPH Australia is supporting stations, outside the current Radio Reading Network, to produce new, diverse, quality local programming made by and for people with a print disability in their community. Contact us to find out more.

About us

RPH Australia is the peak body for the Radio Reading Network; community radio services dedicated to providing access to information for the estimated 5 million Australians with a print disability. We champion the rights of all people to access printed material, empowering equal participation in cultural, political and social life.

Radio Reading programming aims to meet the information needs of people with a print disability (those who are unable to effectively access printed material due to visual, physical or cognitive impairment, age or low literacy).

It provides a voice for people in our community with a print disability and caters directly to their information needs and interests.

RPH AUSTRALIA
the radio reading network

1RPH   2RPH DIGITAL your radio reading service 1224AM | 100.5FM   radio 4rph 1296AM   PrintRadio TASMANIA Turning print into sound   Vision Australia Radio

Tune in or support your local Radio Reading station via the **RPH Australia website**.