

Hear me, feel me

Interpretation that is universal and multi-sensory benefits everyone. This is a simple statement, but in practice universal and multi-sensory design are rarely used.

For many years the Dog Rose Trust has researched facilities that enable the blind and visually impaired to access and appreciate all environments. In Scotland we developed the Dorcas Project, an interactive system using 3-D models, tactile plans and objects. We were given a model of Glasgow Cathedral Precinct, which we refurbished and fitted with a sound system that activated a commentary for each area of the precinct. The audio, relayed through infra-red headsets, tells the listener about the history, architecture and function of the building. As it was recorded in situ, it also tells them what each place sounds like. Here, sound, touch and vision combine to make the experience more meaningful for everyone.

Sounds are far more than words - they convey atmosphere, express the character of an exhibit and reinforce a message. The Trust uses sound in many situations: at a motor museum where each decade of motoring has its own signature tune and the sound of the cars is incorporated in the audio guide; to interpret a modern painting by recording the words written on the painting mixed with music and characteristic sounds; on a windswept Shropshire hilltop by a stone circle where the sound of the skylarks mingles with the ghostly sound of distant medieval bagpipes.

Audio information, tactile tracks, accessible signage, and sound icons are among the many ways in which the experience of those with poor sight, and everyone else too, can be enhanced.

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