

# Contact centres and the National Relay Service

As a customer service representative in a contact centre, you may from time to time, receive calls via the National Relay Service (NRS).

The NRS is a government-sponsored program that allows people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment to make phone calls in the same way as anyone else. Using the NRS, such people can contact organisations like yours to do business over the phone.

The NRS uses specially trained contact centre staff called relay officers who act as a 'relay' or bridge between people with hearing and speech impairments, and the person or organisation they are ringing – in this case your contact centre.

The relay officer is the central link in any NRS phone call, relaying what is said by each party.

The NRS is available 24 hours a day, every day and relays more than half a million calls each year throughout Australia.

## How does the NRS work?

The NRS caller will most likely be using a special phone called a TTY, or they could be making their NRS call through the internet.

In the most common type of call, **Type and Read**, the caller types their part of the conversation, and the relay officer reads their words out to you. The relay officer then types what you say back to the caller.

## Are there other types of NRS calls?

Yes, since NRS users vary in the extent to which they can speak and/or hear and how they manage the phone.

**Speak and Read** – the caller can speak but not hear.

**Type and Listen** – where the caller can hear but not speak.

**Speak and Listen** – where the caller is hard to understand on the phone.

In each case the relay officer will explain the situation to you before the call starts.

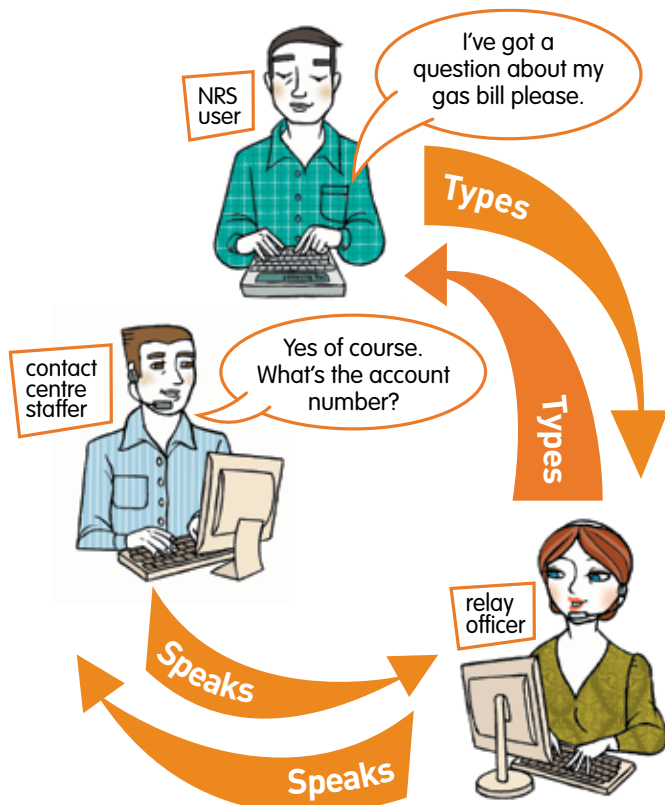
The relay officer stays on the line throughout each call, but does not interfere with what is being said.

## But doesn't it breach privacy laws?

No, the use of NRS relay officers in phone conversations is recognised by the Australian Information Commissioner as being compliant with privacy legislation.

Relay officers receive extensive training about their role and legal and ethical responsibilities. They sign a confidentiality agreement when they start work.

## A typical relay call



### How do I know that the relay officer is genuine?

Relay officers will always identify themselves by a unique name. You might want to note down the name for later reference if needed.

### Why do I need to know about the NRS and relay calls?

All your customers have equal rights of access to information and services. People with hearing or speech impairments have difficulty using the phone but still need to be able to get information, discuss options, make appointments, carry out transactions and do all the things that regular phone users do through your business. These rights are specifically guaranteed in disability legislation around Australia.

It is also good business for your organisation to provide access and information to as wide a group of people as possible.

### How do I authenticate the call?

If you are required to authenticate each caller, the process for an NRS call is straightforward – you simply ask the same questions that you would of any caller. The relay officer then relays your question and then relays back the response of the caller.

If your contact centre deals with private financial or other personal information, you will have your own specific questions and procedures for authenticating callers. Again, you do not need to change these. In handling a relay call it is useful to think of the relay officer as not strictly a party to the call but more of an 'invisible' facilitator.

### What do I do when I receive an NRS call?

When you get a call via the NRS, the relay officer will introduce him/herself and explain that it is a National Relay Service call.

The first time you receive a call through the NRS, it might appear a bit strange to have your conversation 'relayed' by a third person. But as the call progresses you will quickly get used to it.

One thing to note is that the call will take longer than a similar direct call. If you are concerned about this, just tell your supervisor that the call was an NRS call. If your organisation has a special procedure for logging exception calls, you can do that.

### For more information

Contact our Helpdesk (9am to 5pm, Sydney time):

Phone: **1800 555 660**

Email: **helpdesk@relayservice.com.au**

See our website **www.relayservice.com.au** for a wide range of information about relay calls and the National Relay Service.

The National Relay Service is an Australian Government initiative funded by a levy on eligible telecommunications carriers.

### Tips for managing the call

- speak directly to the caller not the relay officer
- once the relay officer has told you that there is someone ringing through the NRS and the call has started, only speak directly to the relay officer if you have a question or problem about the call process
- pause at the end of each phrase or sentence – this allows the typing of the relay officer to keep up
- repeat and spell difficult words, names, addresses and phone numbers
- cover one topic at a time
- speak no more than one minute each turn
- say 'go ahead' after each response
- end your call with 'goodbye, signing off' or something similar.



A phone solution for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment  
[www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au)



An Australian Government Initiative