



 **Blind Low Vision NZ**

Partnership helps enrich the lives of the Blind , Deafblind and Low Vision community

“Noel Leeming’s dedication and hard work has helped improve the live of our members and given them access to information not available on other platforms” *Nigel Waring, Head of Technology, Blind Low Vision NZ*

About Blind Low Vision NZ

- Established in 1890
- Head office in Parnell, Auckland
- 180,000 New Zealanders today are either blind, deafblind or have low vision.
- The organisation supports people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision. It is a place they can connect with for practical or emotional support.
- 250 Staff (plus 6,000 Volunteers)
- 14,250 members (including over 6,000 with internet access)

blindlowvision.org.nz

Improving lives and processes at the same time

Blind Low Vision NZ's audio library, until recently, was delivered through a CD service. To access the library members would call, visit or go online to order a book, magazine or newspaper. All publications were in the format of a CD, which would be sent out to members via the post. The process was not only costly in time but also resource intensive.

With the advancement of technology, Blind Low Vision NZ were looking to move to voice activated technology with their audio library in mind. Nigel Waring, Head of Technology at Blind Low Vision NZ saw this opportunity as "levelling the playing field" for their community to experience content on demand as a sighted person would.

Through partnering with Sonnar Interactive Ltd, the Blind Low Vision NZ team co-created a third-party library skill for the Amazon Alexa, allowing members to access audio content from their library through the voice activated technology.

Nigel Waring adds "The Library skill our team developed has been ground-breaking - it's the only skill like it currently on Amazon's Alexa."

To help get the devices into homes of their community government funding was released for 3,500 Alexa's and Blind Low Vision NZ needed a tech partner to help with the distribution of the devices.

Noel Leeming helps accelerate delivery

Having a team of only 50 volunteers to deliver 3,500 Alexa units into the homes of their members nationwide, the organisation needed the help of a New Zealand tech partner. "We wanted a Kiwi based company with retail presence in as many cities and towns in New Zealand as possible, in addition we wanted a supplier that could help with a troubleshooting service and installation. In doing this for example, any warranty or supply issues could be easily managed." explains Nigel.

After engaging suppliers in the market as part of a tender process, Noel Leeming was selected as the preferred partner. Being a New Zealand company with the ability to leverage buying power, deliver a service in home and supply the equipment within time and budget requirements appealed to Blind Low Vision.

As part of undertaking the work, the Noel Leeming Technical team required training from Blind Low Vision NZ to learn how to engage with the community. This was

a crucial factor in the success of the delivery. “Training of the Noel Leeming staff in how to engage with blind, deafblind or low vision people has also improved our client’s experience”, adds Nigel Waring.

Through Noel Leeming’s nationwide network of stores 3,300 Alexa units have been delivered locally to Blind Low Vision NZ’s members across the country, with the remaining units delivered mid 2021. With over 100 tech guys on the roads across the regions, Noel Leeming Tech Solutions has rolled out 1140 visits over 12 months to help set up, install and educate the members on the new ‘Alexa’ - all in the comfort of their home.

“We’ve not only addressed the initial order request but we’ve helped the business teams meet their KPIs, and reduce workloads so they can focus on other projects, and we’ve met their members needs.” *Noel Leeming Technical Services Manager, Janie Brown.*

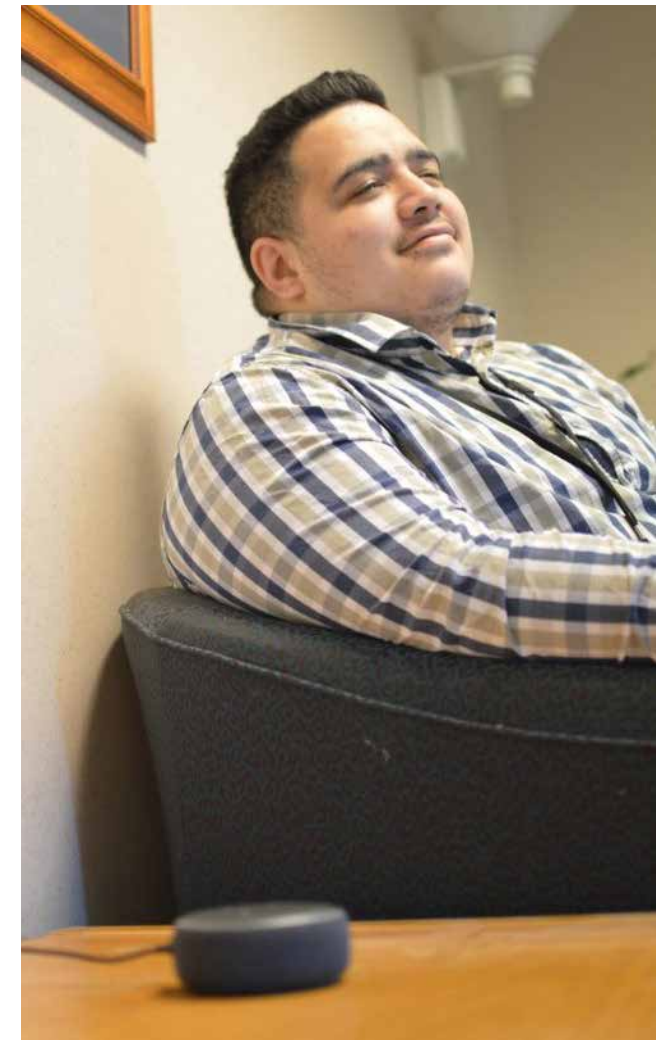
“We hope to continue to grow and improve the partnership with Noel Leeming to provide more Alexa devices, installations and services after the initial project is complete. If Blind Low Vision NZ is fortunate enough to receive additional funding we will closely work with Noel Leeming to

achieve the best outcomes for all blind, deafblind and low vision people in New Zealand.” - *Nigel Head of Technology, Blind Low Vision NZ.*

Great teams are about personality, not just skills

Before taking on the home visits, Blind Low Vision NZ provided training to the Noel Leeming technician team on how to best engage their community and show them tricks and tips on communicating with their community. This was crucial to the success of these home visits, as Janie Brown explains “the home visits were tailored to suit. We needed to treat every member as unique, they have different needs, abilities and knowledge around the technology. So having the information of how to engage with them, was really key.” Nigel Waring, Head of Technology at Blind Low Vision NZ adds to this statement - “Training of the Noel Leeming staff in how to engage with blind, deafblind or low vision people has also improved our client’s experience. We’ve had great feedback.”

As part of the process Noel Leeming provided a complete end-to-end service. When an order request is received from Blind Low Vision NZ, Noel Leeming orders the Alexa unit. Members are then contacted to schedule a convenient day and time for the tech team to install. When the technician arrives at their home, they unbox, set up and connect the Alexa device, creating



a members link and login to the audio 'library skill'. If the member doesn't have Amazon, the technician will set this up for them. They also set up other 'skills' they would like to use, taking them through the full functionality of the device, running demonstrations and educating them on how to use the technology. But there's more to the job than just providing the expertise, knowledge and resource to deliver the technology, as Janie Brown, who coordinated the home-visits for the Technicians, adds "It's more than just getting the job done, we've heard that some of our guys have even stayed on for a cup of tea and chat."

As a result of having 'Alexa' in their homes, members are feeling more connected to the world, they have faster access to information and to the audio library through the instant voice activation. Alexa allows them to have more control in choosing what information they want and when they want it, bringing a greater sense of independence and social inclusion.

Teams become agile and more flexible

At the beginning when initially scoping the project, no one even considered what would be ahead of them. In March 2020 when the country went into lockdown Blind Low Vision NZ were ready to deliver the Alexa units, meaning a number of home visits needed to be rescheduled. This created its own challenges with coordinating the teams across the regions. As Janie Brown explains "We needed to be agile and more flexible to work around the Covid lockdown restrictions."

Looking back, Nigel Waring adds "We found it important to have regular meetings with Noel Leeming to track progress of installations and service requests, especially during Auckland lockdowns, to ensure that client expectations were being managed."

Today, with the initial project almost complete, both partners are looking to continue working together.



"As Head of Technology on behalf of the Blind Low Vision NZ clients, I would like to thank the staff from Noel Leeming for their dedication and hard work on making this project a success, especially during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns that caused significant rescheduling of service appointments. The work you have undertaken has improved the lives of blind, deafblind and low vision people by giving them access to printed information and services that is not available on other platforms. Thank you!" - Nigel Waring, Head of Technology, Blind Low Vision NZ.

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