

Hearing things in your head is a good thing

Oticon took the concept of hearing back to the drawing board and shifted its focus, after research showed that only one in four people who experience a hearing loss actually take the time to address their hearing loss. "That is the reason why many hearing aid devices land up in the drawer, not being used," says Tally Sherban, a Client Relations Executive at Oticon South Africa, a leading hearing aid manufacturer.



Tally Sherban

"Sound is one thing, but making sense of sound is everything to someone with a hearing loss. That core realisation led us to understand that we can't merely compensate for damage in the ear, but that we need to help the brain understand the sound it receives from the ears or a hearing device. We call it, BrainHearing, the brainchild of 100 years of experience and innovation. It is a whole new mind set in audiology and hearing care."

Four key audiological features enable the brain to make sense of sound:

- It uses both ears to orient itself in order to know what is happening in the environment.
- It separates relevant sounds from competing noise.
- It has to know where to focus in noisy sound environments.
- The brain also depends on its ability to recognise a sound in order to make sense of it.

To provide the brain with the input it needs to make sense of sound, the technology must fulfil a number of demands. "In order for the brain to make sense of sound, we have to allow both ears to work together, to keep the natural sound level differences occurring at each ear. It is about preserving the important details of sounds while maintaining as much of the surrounding environment as possible. From there, we prioritise speech information over other sounds and allow the hearing device to deliver varying degrees of directionality.

"Once you have these two pillars in place, the brain has the freedom to focus by understanding speech over other noises, engaging in conversation and switching focus when necessary (free focus). Finally, the company's YouMatic helps to make sounds more recognisable, allowing the user to enjoy an enhanced, enriched listening experience according to his or her own sound preferences and tastes."

Oticon hearing instruments with this technology are designed for the brain, supporting the hard work it does. By combining the spatial sound, speech guard, free focus and YouMatic technologies, BrainHearing was born. "The results speak for themselves. In our international satisfaction study that was completed in 2013, our overall satisfaction for both new and experienced hearing instrument users was rated at 96%, which revolutionises everything we know about the hearing industry," concludes Sherban.

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