

Auriplex could prove a sound investment

THE NAME Auriplex is set to become music to the ears of deaf people.

Hearing aids often fail to do the job if the wearer is in a crowded or noisy environment – it becomes very difficult to pick out the sounds you want to hear.

Auriplex, a new company based at Cambridge Science Park, has developed an aid to hearing aids, which can also be used as a stand-alone product.

Called iEar, pictured right, it separates sounds, overcoming a major problem for Britain's nine million hard-of-hearing. Of these, only about two million wear a hearing aid, but Auriplex reckons many more will feel comfortable using iEar, which is high-tech in appearance as well as action.

"People will not be ashamed of getting this out and putting it on the table at meetings," says Abol Chizari of Auriplex.

iEar will improve hearing across a wide spectrum of deafness, from those who are simply losing definition to the profoundly deaf.

The product can be hooked into one or both ears and works via a wireless connection to a tiny microphone which can be placed anywhere the user chooses, for instance on a podium in front of a speaker.

"It will work with any hearing aid that is 'T' enabled, which means will work with a loop system. iEar is in effect a portable loop system, but wireless and a hundred per cent in the user's control," Abol said.

The technology for iEar



has been developed in Cambridge and the initial production entirely made by various sub-contractors, is all based in the city. Local focus groups have carried out successful tests.

In addition, two local specialists are distributing it: Clearerhearing at Fensanton, and Christopher Carr in Chesterton. It is selling at £399.

Steve Mantle at Clearerhearing, who has been involved with the project as a consultant from the outset, said: "In an age where more and more people are wearing Bluetooth headsets for their mobile phones, iEar fits in very well."

Auriplex has manufacturing set up and everything in place for the business, but will be looking for funding to fuel rapid growth.

The technology is unique and as well as targeting a huge market in the UK, is looking at a \$1.7 billion sector in the US.

How it works

WHEN people lose their hearing, the brain becomes lazy and can no longer pick out a particular voice or sound.

Hearing aids amplify everything, which is why people with poor hearing, even when they have an aid, tend to withdraw in a crowded room, because they can't hear anything properly above the noise.

iEar uses wireless FM technology, and because it is in two parts, the user can put the microphone in exactly the right spot to hear the voice or sound they want to pick up.

This could mean putting the microphone in front of someone who is speaking, putting it in the back of a car, if the user is the driver, so they can hear what their passengers are saying, or simply plugging it directly into the TV.