

3Play Webinars | WBN 08-15-2019 Intro to AD

JACLYN LEDUC: Thank you all for joining us today for this webinar entitled Intro to Audio Description. My name's Jaclyn, and I'm from 3Play Media. I'll be presenting to you today. So let's get started.

So today, what will we cover? I'm going to be covering several things, including what is audio description, how do you create audio description, where do you publish audio description, why should you describe, and then I'll also talk about who 3Play Media is. And like I said, at the end I'll leave some time for Q&A.

So I want to start by defining audio description. Audio description is an accommodation for blind and low-vision viewers. It's an audio track that narrates relevant visual information that's contained within a video. And typically, audio description is represented by a little AD icon. It's similar to the CC icon for captioning. And that allows you to toggle the audio description on and off.

So I'm going to show you an example of audio description. I'll start by showing you a clip without it. And while I play that, if you would just close your eyes and see how much of that you can understand without audio description. And feel free to write that down in the chat window and let me know what you see.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[LAUGHING]

- Ah. Ooh. Hello. [CHUCKLING]

[INHALING] [EXHALING]

[SNEEZING]

[GASPING]

[FUMBLING NOISES]

[SCREECH]

[SCREAMING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[PANTING]

[GROANING]

[SNEEZING]

[END PLAYBACK]

JACLYN LEDUC:

OK, great. Sorry about that. So I see that some of you said that it was definitely hard to follow along. So without audio description, this clip can be confusing-- without having access to the visual aspect of it, because there's no dialogue.

So now I'm actually going to play the same clip with audio description. Just give me a moment.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- From the creators of "Tangled," and "Wreck-It Ralph," Disney. A character [INAUDIBLE] like a Snowman shuffles out to a purple flower peeping out of deep snow. Hello. He takes a deep sniff.

[SNEEZING]

His nose lands on a frozen pond. A reindeer looks up and pants like a dog.

- Oh.

- [INAUDIBLE] towards him.

[INAUDIBLE] the spot. The reindeer [INAUDIBLE]. The snowman uses his arm as a crutch. The reindeer paddles his front legs. Head over heels, the snowman crawls over the ice. The reindeer does the breast stroke. The snowman rolls his body, but flips onto his back. Reindeer's tongue sticks to the ice.

- [SCREAMING]

- The snowman throws his head.

Twig arm and reindeer lips tug at the carrot.

The carrot flies off and lands in soft snow.

- [SCREAMING]

- The reindeer goes after it with the snowman and his body parts hanging from his tail. The snowman puts himself back together again and glumly contemplates his noseless state. The reindeer jams the carrot back in place and pants like a proud puppy.

The snowman pats him [INAUDIBLE], then he goes to sneeze. He grabs his nose with both hands. "Frozen," coming this winter, in 3D.

[END PLAYBACK]

JACLYN LEDUC:

All right, so I see a lot of you are saying that with the audio description, you had a much easier time understanding that clip. So that is what is really great about audio description. So people tend to be more familiar with the captions than they are with audio description. But audio description is similar to captions in that it makes videos more accessible, particularly to people who are blind or have low vision.

Captions assume that the viewer can't hear. So captions transcribe relevant auditory information and then visually displays that text as the video plays. So audio description, on the other hand, assumes that the viewer can't see. And it translates relevant visual information into speech. For anyone who has never heard audio description, it's often described as being similar to the sports announcer in a baseball game narrating over the radio.

In the image on the screen, it shows a man who's crying while shaking a computer. The audio description for this clip would say that he shakes the computer, whereas the captions would transcribe the audio and said that the man is, quote unquote, "sobbing mathematically."

There are two types of audio description, standard and extended. The example that I showed you in the beginning of this presentation use standard audio description. And what this means is that the snippets of audio description are inserted into the clip to fit within the natural pauses of the original content. But with a video that doesn't have any natural pauses, this is where extended audio description would be necessary.

Extended description allows you to actually add pauses to the source video to make room for audio description as needed instead of being constrained to the natural pauses. Extended is really useful for videos that have a lot of complicated content, like an advanced physics lecture which might have very few natural pauses. So you can see several examples of extended and standard audio description right on our website, 3PlayMedia.com.

So having watched a video with audio description now, you might be wondering how you create audio description. And there are several ways. Audio description is typically traditionally expensive, ranging anywhere from

\$15 up to \$75 per minute. And that higher cost is because there are a lot of things that go into creating audio description. For example, we have production time, recording, writing, and writing descriptions into time codes. These things are time consuming and pretty difficult to do on your own. Although there are a few ways to do so, and I will talk about that on the next slide.

So here are some of the ways that you can do audio description on your own. Just take note that these kind of DIY methods are typically more time consuming and expensive. So for lecture-- educational content, for example-- you can have professors or narrators narrate the visual information on their slides or in the background as they're happening. This one is the easiest way to cut costs.

You can also create a text only description. Note that this will lose a lot of the cinematic detail for the viewer. You can create a text only description that is time-coded and fits into the spaces of the video. If you're using Able Player, you can set timings and add the description as a web VTT track. You can also take it a step further once you've created a text description. If you have good recording equipment and video editing software, you can record voice active descriptions and merge it with your source audio then output a second video with description. And then the final option is to outsource. And of course, keep in mind that traditional vendors do charge between \$15 to \$75 per minute.

So if you decided to go ahead and create descriptions from scratch, you will definitely want to consider quality standards. There are best practices for description quality, and the DCMP made by the Described and Captioned Media Program has a lot of really helpful guidelines and standards to follow.

And when you're describing, it's important to consider what to describe, when to describe, and how to describe. So for example, things like on-screen text or credits-- you want to make sure that you're being consistent throughout. DCMP description key is great. And it's important to consider whether you're doing your own descriptions or using a third party vendor, just because you want to be sure that that vendor is following those same quality standards.

So as practice, I'm going to show you this GIF. And I'd like everyone to describe it, making sure to describe the visual elements that are most critical to the viewers. So make sure you describe characters, people, visual action and movement, use complete sentences, and most importantly, just try to tell the visual story of this scene.

And in case that you're not able to view this GIF, I will give a description of it in just a minute, but I want to allow you to come up with some of your own descriptions. So I'll give you just a few moments to do so.

Some good responses coming in. I have one here. It says "Chandler jumps on the coffee table and dances while Rachel, Monica, and Phoebe sit around the table and stare at him." That's perfect. That's a great description of this GIF.

We'll move on now. I'll just read you mine quickly. Honestly, it's very similar to the one that I just read. And you guys did great. I said, "Rachel, Monica, and Phoebe from the show "Friends" sit in Monica's New York City apartment and watch Chandler do a goofy dance on the living room table."

So yeah, like I said, you guys did really well. Concise and descriptive is key when writing descriptions for video. And you all seem to have that down. So the big question is, where do you publish audio descriptions? So unlike captions, description is not supported by most video players.

It can be challenging to determine a work-around to publish audio description, but I will talk about some of those steps you can take in the next few slides. I just want to provide you with a brief background on audio description. So it has been around since the late 1970s, but its use has increased since then.

Today, description is being applied to dozens of devices and is being increasingly used more so online. It's also used for things like live theater, movie theaters, and you probably even noticed it on in-flight entertainment and for broadcast TV. But making audio description even more widely available for online videos is really dependent on video player and browser

support.

So unfortunately, the list of accessible players and platforms is pretty short that support audio description. There is Able Player, OzPlayer, Brightcove, JW Player, Ooyala, and Kaltura. And those are really the only video players at this time that support audio description.

But there are other ways to publish description. So most players don't support description, and if you're not using any of the platforms that I just mentioned, then another way to publish is to link to a second version of the video with description-- kind of like with the "Frozen" trailer that I showed earlier.

And then a few players support a secondary audio track where users can select the AD audio for the same video source. Some support this by swapping in a new source video with description. HTML5 natively supports a web VTT description track, just like it does with captions.

However, browser support and player support are lacking. Additionally, audio description must be readable by a screen reader. And right now, Able Player is the only one that reliably supports this.

Text-only merged transcript and description are good for deaf blind viewers but are not time synchronized. So this would be like providing a transcript only for a video. 3Play Media, we have developed a keyboard and screen reader accessible audio description plugin which allows your description to play with a video player without having to republish the video.

So there you have a few ways you can publish audio description successfully. And then next I'm going to talk about several of the benefits of audio description and why you should describe your video content.

A lot of people wonder why you should describe and what the benefits are. There are a number of benefits of audio description. The number one benefit is accessibility. It's an accommodation for blind and low vision viewers. In 2015, the National Health Interview Survey found that 23.7 million Americans-- that's actually about 10% of the US population-- have trouble

seeing to some extent. So audio description can be a critical accommodation for these viewers.

And then further benefits are the flexibility to view videos in eyes-free environment, the ability to help with language development, auditory learners. Audio description can also assist those with autism to better understand emotional and social cues. And finally, a benefit of audio description is that it fulfills the legal requirement to make content accessible.

So I'm going to briefly cover some of the accessibility laws, which is often another reason why you should consider describing. Section 504 is a broad anti-discrimination law. It applies to federal programs or agencies and programs receiving federal funding, like public libraries and universities, while also extending to local educational agencies such as K12 schools.

Per legal requirement, any covered entity must make itself accessible, including providing captioned videos for deaf or hard of hearing individuals. Section 508 was introduced in 1998 to require federal communications and information technology to be accessible.

This law applies to federal programs or agencies, but it's often also applied to federally funded programs through state and organizational laws. Audio description is a requirement that is written into Section 508, which was recently refreshed to include language from the WCAG 2.0 level AA guidelines.

So WCAG 2.0 level AA guidelines are from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. And this is the international standard for web accessibility. There are three levels of WCAG. There is A, AA, and AAA-- AAA being the highest accessibility standard. Because Section 508 references WCAG 2.0, audio description is required for pre-recorded, synchronized video media.

WCAG also provides success criteria for how to meet these requirements, and it allows for no audio description if the visual information is articulated in the audio of the source video. And please note-- WCAG 2.1 is the most recent update, and that is an extension of WCAG 2.0. 2.1 is backward compliant with 2.0, but 2.0 are still the guidelines that are referenced in the

law.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, also known as the ADA has five sections. Title II applies to public entities and Title III applies to places of public accommodation, which has been extended and tested against online businesses through several lawsuits mainly having to do with captioning. There has been more and more action in audio description for online video as well.

Audio description has gradually been phased into television programs per the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. It also goes by the CVAA. The requirement to describe TV programs extends to the top 60 TV markets, and the goal is to have 100% of TV described by the year 2020. So that's coming up.

There have been several lawsuits tied to audio description. So there's American Council of the Blind vs. Netflix, American Council the Blind vs. Hulu, the DOJ vs. UC-Berkeley, and then both *Hamilton*, the musical, and AMC theaters have been involved in lawsuits involving audio description.

So I mean, all were sued for not providing audio description and for not being fully accessible and complying with those accessibility laws that we just went over. So I'm going to shift a little bit and talk about 3Play Media and our audio description services.

So who are we? We were initially spun out of MIT in 2007 and we're still based in Boston. We're a video accessibility company. We began as a captioning, transcription, and subtitling service, but we've since expanded to offer audio description as well. So we're really broadening our approach to accessible video as a whole.

We have over 2,500 customers across different industries, including higher education, government, enterprise, and media and entertainment. So some of those customers include Discovery Digital Networks, NBC Universal, the IRS, and at edX.

Our goal is to make accessible video easy. We have a number of different

search plugins and integrations for captioning and description that help simplify the process of creating accessible video. We also have an easy to use online account system where you can manage everything from one place.

But really what we're working toward is a one-stop shop for all your accessibility needs from captioning to description, transcription, and subtitling. And we're really trying to innovate with audio description. The cost and process of traditional audio description can be insurmountable for many institutions, but technology is helping to innovate that process.

One place that we're really beginning to change the process is with a 3Play plugin which helps alleviate the difficulty of publishing descriptions. And I will get to show you that demo shortly. Our process combines technology with human labor in a really careful and strategic way so that we can have the best of both worlds.

In our description process, we use time-coded transcripts that we've created along with the innovative approach to the theatrical process of where and when to describe. We do this with a US-based pool of human describers others who have been trained to described using those quality standards that we just went over a few moments ago. Currently, we're using a synthesized speech engine to create the actual audio files and the audio output, and we do have auctions for different speeds and different voices.

So let's talk a little bit more about synthesized speech, because it really is a new concept when it comes to audio description. Synthesized speech is a machine-based voice, and there are a lot of pros to using synthesized speech for audio description.

So using synthesized versus voice actors speeds up the production time significantly, it cuts costs, it allows for more flexibility, and it's actually very familiar to blind users who are used to screen reader voice-- which are actually faster and mechanized.

So of course, using synthetic speech has some cons. It does sound more like a machine than a human voice, because it is. There are some limitations to

alter the tone-- for instance, synthetic voices can't really convey words in a concerned or happy way or with other emotional tones. There are sometimes issues with pronunciation. However, this can be personally addressed using phonetic speech.

Overall, though, there is not too many negatives compared to the positives of using synthetic speech. I mentioned earlier that publishing audio description can be challenging, but 3Play has a number of ways to approach that. So we offer a number of different ways to publish-- some are text-based and some are media-based.

We have a merged file that includes the original video with description, a time-coded WebVTT, audio description track that can be read by screen readers, and the audio description feature of our plugin that allows you to have your file play with video players that don't support multiple audio tracks or WebVTT description tracks.

I'd like to also mention that even after the audio description files have been processed by us, you have the option to go through and make edits. In traditional description, vendors don't allow the end user to edit their description, but our workflow does allow you to edit the description frames even after your files have been processed.

And finally, I just want to quickly show you how simple our audio description plugin is. So I'm going to pull that up on the screen. And here it is. So as you can see, you can play the video here. And then you have the option to turn on the audio description.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- T-shirts and fasten on backpacks with multiple straps.

JACLYN LEDUC:

And you can adjust just the volume of the audio description here. And then you can turn it back off.

[END PLAYBACK]

So today, we've covered audio description. But for those of you ready to dive in and learn more about video accessibility, I just want to quickly let you know about our event called Access. Access is a full day accessibility event hosted by us. Access is for anyone and everyone interested in learning more about accessibility.

We'll have a number of speakers, including Lainey Feingold and speakers from HubSpot, Adobe, Wistia. We'll also have workshops on all things accessibility from legal landscape to how to get started with accessibility at your organization.

There'll be networking. You'll have a chance to talk with 3Play team members and there'll be giveaways and great food. The conference is on October 3rd right here in Boston, where we're based out of. And we're actually offering a special discount for everyone attending the webinar today. We're going to drop the link in the chat right now, and we'll also send it out in tomorrow's email.

Just so you know, early bird tickets are on sale now until August 21st, which means they're half off right now. And if you use the code, webinars, you'll get an additional 10% off. So with that, we will move on to Q&A. And if anyone has any more questions about Access, you can ask those as well. So we're just going to get ready for the Q&A.

OK, so I have a question. "Is there any legal requirement or recommendation for voice type?" So no. The general answer to that is, no. According to the DCMP, description should be distinguishable from the original audio of that video. So for example, if the audio is primarily a woman speaking, you might consider having a male audio description voice so that it's distinguishable from the main audio track. But generally, there's no legal requirement as to what the voice needs to be.

This is a great question. "If someone wants to create their own description, is there a tool that we recommend?" So the easiest way would be to get a

caption file and then add the description within the natural pauses after getting that caption file. It kind of makes that process easier, especially if you're creating your audio descriptions on your own-- mostly because the captions are already time-coded. So that will help you out a lot.

And then you can then record yourself reading the description or you can describe as you record-- say, if you're recording a classroom your lecture or something like that.

So someone is asking if the plugin-- the 3Play plugin-- is compatible with Canvas LMS. And yes, with the 3Play plugin and the audio description feature of the plugin, you can embed this in a web page or in any LMS system, including Canvas. So absolutely-- you can add audio description to your LMS

Someone asked, "If, quote unquote, "traditional" vendors charge \$15 to \$75, what is typical of 3Play Media charges-- presuming that we are not a traditional vendor?" So great question. Our audio description service starts at \$9 per minute. We are different from other vendors because, as I mentioned, we use a mix of technology and human describers to create kind of a much more cost effective solution.

Someone asked how we hire our audio describers. So if you're familiar with our captioning service, all of our describers are trained to go through a rigorous process. We do use the DCM key description key standards and make sure that all of our describers understand best practices and quality and rules for prioritizing what to describe, how to describe, and when to describe all of those things. So we do have a very strict policy in training to make sure that we have the best describers possible.

OK, someone asked, "How do audio descriptions fit in with Mediasite player?" With Mediasite's slide editor, you can add descriptions of slides, but you can also use the 3Play plugin for Mediasite videos.

Someone asked, "What were the players that supported an audio description?" There was a Ooyala, OzPlayer, Brightcove, JW Player, Able,

and Kaltura. So those are the players that support audio description at this time.

And looks like we've gone a few minutes over, so we're going to wrap up Q&A. So I just want to thank you all for attending today. And remember that you'll be receiving the slide deck and recording in an email tomorrow. And I hope everybody has a great rest of the day.