

3Play Webinars | WBNR 05-21-2020 Intro to AD

SAMANTHA SAULD: Thank you all for joining us today for this webinar entitled "Intro to Audio Description." So my name is Samantha Sauld, and I will be presenting today. I'm a content marketing specialist here at 3Play Media, and I write on all things accessibility. If you have any questions after the presentation, feel free to send me an email.

So during this presentation, we'll cover what is audio description, how to create descriptions, the benefits of audio description, the legal landscape around accessibility, integrations, and then finally, we'll end with how to publish audio description, and then the Q&A.

So let's start off with defining audio description. Audio description is an accommodation for blind and low-vision viewers. It's an audio track that narrates the relevant visual information that's contained within a video. Typically, audio description is represented by a little AD icon, similar to the CC icon for closed captioning.

So now, I'm going to show you an example of audio description. I'll start by showing you a clip without descriptions. While I play that, I'd like you to close your eyes and think about how much you can understand without audio description. Think about what's happening in the clip and feel free to share your experience in the chat window.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

[LAUGHTER]

- Hello.

[SNEEZE]

[END PLAYBACK]

SAMANTHA SAULD: Great, thanks. So in the chat window, can you guys let me know what that experience was like? So some of you are saying that it was kind of hard to follow along while you were closing your eyes. And yes, I agree. So without the audio description, this clip can be confusing when you can't see what's going on, especially since there's no dialogue.

So in the next slide, we'll show the same clip, but instead, this version will have audio description. So similarly to the last example, close your eyes and think about your experience. Again, feel free to type anything you felt or noticed.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- --*Wreck-It Ralph*,
Disney. --nosed
[INAUDIBLE] snowman
shuffles up to a purple
flower peeping out of the
deep snow.

- Hello.

- He takes a deep sniff.
His nose lands on a
frozen pond. A reindeer
looks up and pants like a
dog. Seeing the reindeer
slip on the ice, the
snowman smiles and
moves towards him,
though actually, he's
running on the spot. He
uses his arm as a crutch.

The reindeer paddles his front legs. [INAUDIBLE] the snowman crawls onto the ice. The reindeer does the breast stroke. The snowman rolls his body, but flips onto his back. The reindeer's tongue sticks to the ice. The snowman throws his head. Twig arm and reindeer lips tug at the carrot. Flies off and lands in soft snow.

[SCREAM]

The reindeer goes after it with snowman and his body parts hanging on his

tail.

[END PLAYBACK]

SAMANTHA SAULD: Perfect, thanks. So if you guys could let me know what your thoughts are now with audio description. Yeah, so a lot of you guys are saying there was limited understanding before, and now it's much better. It's much more vivid. It's much more clear. And yes, exactly. So with audio description, it allows you to get a full picture of the visual information.

So, on to the next slide-- audio description. So as you just saw, audio description narrates the relevant visual information. It describes the characters, what the scene looks like, and the actions that are going on. It paints an image of the visuals for those who can't see the screen, such as blind and low-vision users.

So audio description has been compared to a sports broadcast. With captions for a touchdown, it would read "audience cheering." The audio description would say, "He's passed the 10, five, touchdown." You could be in the kitchen with the game on, playing in the living room, and you can still have a great sense of what's going on in the game.

So there are two types of audio description, standard and extended. The example that I showed you in the beginning of this presentation used 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. You can see several examples of extended and standard audio description on our website.

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 and traditionally expensive, ranging anywhere from \$15 to \$75 per minute. The higher cost is because there are a lot of things that go into creating audio description-- for example, production time, recording, writing descriptions and time codes, et cetera.

These things are time-consuming and pretty difficult to do on your own, although there are a few ways to do so. Just take into account that DIY methods are typically time-consuming and expensive. So for a lecture or educational content, you can have professors or narrators narrate the visual information on their slides or in the background as they're happening. This is one of the easiest ways to cut costs.

You can create a text-only description, but note that this will lose much 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. And if you're using Able Player, you can set timings and add the description as a WebVTT track.

You can also take it a step further. So once you've created a text description, and if you have good recording equipment and video editing software, you can record voice-acted descriptions and merge it with your source video. Then, output the second video with descriptions.

And then the final option is to outsource. And of course, keep in mind that traditional vendors charge between \$15 to \$75 per minute.

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

So let's dive a little bit more into the DCMP. So the DCMP stands for the Described and Captioned Media Program. It's funded by the US Department

of Education and administered by the National Association of the Deaf. It provides helpful guidelines and standards to follow for audio description. So from the DCMP, we'll learn what to describe, when to describe, and how to describe. It's a great resource that I recommend everyone reference, whether you're making your own descriptions or if you're outsourcing.

So let's practice. I'm going to show you this video. And I'd like everyone to describe it, making sure to describe the visual elements that are most critical to the viewer's ability to understand, follow, and appreciate the context of the scene. And in case you're not able to view this video, I'll give a description of it in just a minute. So when you're typing in your descriptions in the chat window, make sure that you describe people, animal, things, describe the visual action and movement, use complete sentences, and most importantly, tell the visual story of the scene. So I'll give everyone a few minutes to describe the video.

So MJ said, "A corgi freewheeling on a skateboard." Clarice says, "On a paved surface, a corgi dog rides on a skateboard towards the camera." Michelle says, "A brown and white dog with front legs on skateboard while hind legs pushes." "The smiling corgi was riding his skateboard across the paved surface."

So yeah, all of these are really, really great descriptions. They're really concise. And I think that you all really got that down. So the description that I gave for this video was, "A brown and white corgi uses its hind legs to push itself on a skateboard." So all of your answers were perfect.

So the DCMP has five main measures for quality. A high-quality description must be accurate, prioritized, equal, appropriate, and consistent. The DCMP Description Key is great, and it's important to consider, whether you're doing your own descriptions or using a third-party vendor. You want to be sure that vendors follow these same quality standards as well.

So from the beginning, one of the challenges with implementing audio description is player support. Most browsers and video players don't support the playing of description in the same way that they support captions.

However, there is a growing list of video players that do support audio description. Hopefully, this list will continue to grow, but there are some other options you can turn to for publishing audio description.

So there are other ways to publish descriptions. For one, most players don't support descriptions, like I said. And if you're not using any of the platforms that I just showed, then another way to publish is to link to a second version of your video with descriptions, like the *Frozen* trailer that I showed you earlier.

Number two, a few players support a secondary audio track, where users can select an AD audio from the same video source. And some support this by swapping in a new source video with the descriptions.

Number three, HTML natively supports a WebVTT description track, just like 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.

And the number four, text-only merged transcript and descriptions are good for deaf and blind viewers, but are not time-synchronized. And this would be like providing a transcript only for a video.

And then number five, 3Play Media has developed a keyboard and screen-reader accessible audio description plugin, which allows your descriptions to play with a video player without having to republish the video. So there you have a few ways that you can publish audio description.

So we've covered some of the basics of audio description. But the next question is, why should you describe our video content? And to answer that question, we're going to cover some of the benefits of audio description. So 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, of course, is accessibility. It's an accommodation for blind and low-vision users. And in 2015, the National Health Interview Survey found that 23.7 million Americans, which is actually about 10% of the US population,

have trouble seeing to some extent. So audio description is a critical accommodation for those viewers.

Another reason is that it gives flexibility to view videos in eyes-free environments, like the example of focusing on cooking while you're watching something. An audio description is also helpful for auditory learners. About 20% to 30% of students retain information best through sounds.

Another benefit is that it helps with inattention blindness, which is whenever the viewer fails to recognize visual cues in plain sight. Audio description also helps with language development and, of course, legal compliance. Another benefit that's not mentioned on the slide is that it assists those with autism better understand emotional and social cues.

So now, I'm going to briefly cover some accessibility laws. So Section 504 is a broad anti-discrimination law. It applies to federal programs or agencies and programs receiving federal funding, such as public libraries and universities, while also extending to local educational agencies such as K to 12 schools. And per the 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 be accessible. So this law applies to federal programs or agencies, but it's often also applied to federally funded programs such as state universities. 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 the 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. That's A, AA, and AAA, which is the highest accessibility standard.

Because Section 508 references WCAG 2.0 AA guidelines, audio description is required for pre-recorded synchronized video media. WCAG also provides

success criteria for how to meet these requirements. And it does allow for no audio description if the visual information is articulated in the audio of the source video.

Please note that WCAG 2.1 is the most recent update, and it's an extension of WCAG 2.0. WCAG 2.1 is backward-compliant with 2.0, but WCAG 2.0 is still referenced by the law.

So now, on to the CVAA. So in October 2010, Barack Obama signed the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, otherwise known as the CVAA, requiring that modern communication technologies be accessible to all people, regardless of disability or ability. In implementing the CVAA, the Federal Communications Commission, otherwise known as the FCC, put forth a notice of proposed rulemaking. And this notice set regulations for implementing audio description on video content intended for children and for prime-time viewing. So audio description has gradually been phased into television. And the requirement to describe TV programs extends to the top TV markets. And the goal is to have 100% of TV described by this year.

Finally, the last law that we'll cover is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, or the ADA. So the ADA has five sections. It's a broad anti-discrimination law and prohibits disability discrimination. It requires effective communication, which means providing assistive technology and services for content.

Title 2 covers government entities and the services, activities, and programs they provide. These things must be accessible, as to not discriminate against people with disabilities. Title 3 applies to places of public accommodation such as restaurants, hotels, and schools. But it 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.

Cool. So there have been several lawsuits tied to audio description. Some notable ones are the American Council of the Blind versus Netflix and *Hamilton, the Musical*. Both were sued for not providing audio description

and not complying with accessibility laws.

Netflix now offers audio description for nearly all of its original titles and select other movies and TV shows which they license. So they really stepped it up. And *Hamilton, the Musical*-- the *Hamilton* musical suit is still ongoing, although there have been talks of a settlement where *Hamilton* would potentially agree to describe their live shows.

So in this section, I'll cover some of the audio description integrations in our audio description process here at 3Play. So 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. And 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. So we're really innovating with audio description. The cost and process of traditional audio description can be insurmountable for many institutions, but technology is helping to innovate the process. So one place that we're really beginning to change the process is with the 3Play plugin, which helps alleviate the difficulty of publishing audio description. And I will get into that shortly.

So our AD, or Audio Description, process here at 3Play consists of three steps. We start with a timecoded transcript, which could be used for captions. And from there, human describers go in and create time-coded descriptions based on that content. And then lastly, it's then made into time-coded descriptions using synthesized speech.

So from there, how would you publish it? So the audio description embed portion of the 3Play plugin allows you to add audio description to videos without having to republish your audio or video files. So it works with YouTube, Vimeo, Brightcove, and several other video platforms. From us, you'll either get an iframe or JavaScript embed code, which you can then host right on your website.

That's all the time we have for now. If you guys have any other questions, feel free to send me an email. Or feel free to send an email to info@3playmedia.com. So thank you guys all for joining, and I hope you have an awesome rest of the day.