

Accessibility Everywhere: Captions in Nontraditional Places

BY JOHN H. CAPOBIANCO



The beauty of closed captions is that they provide benefit to people of all hearing abilities. HLAA Corporate Member VITAC enlightens us here on just how much more common closed captions are becoming across multiple venues—and looks to the future.

For some, closed captions simply are those words that run across the TV screen that describe the dialogue and action. But for more than 48 million Americans with hearing loss, captions are an important connection to a world that many in the hearing community take for granted.

Since their introduction to TV audiences in the early 1970s, closed captions have expanded well beyond the media and entertainment borders and are now found

Above: VITAC's Internet Captioning Service allows individuals to view captions on their computer or mobile device.

within corporations, classrooms, arena-filled concerts and standing room-only sporting events. Captions allow everyone greater accessibility to content, whether it be via TV, movies or social media. And they continue to pop up daily in new and exciting places—and everywhere inclusion and accessibility are required and desired.

Below is a look at some of the nontraditional areas where captions can be found.

Stadiums, Arenas and Event Centers

An increasing number of stadiums, arenas and event centers display captions on scoreboards, ribbon boards and in-stadium CCTV systems. Colleges and universities routinely use captions during commencement ceremonies to not only make the events inclusive to all attendees and participants, but also to help meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

For sporting events, the captioned material can provide what is announced over the PA system, including scores, play description and player information; in-game promotions, commercials and contests; and end-of-game announcements and details on the next event. Captions also may be streamed to a dedicated URL, allowing fans to view them on their mobile phones or tablets. This is especially helpful for viewers who can't read faraway screens.

Theaters

Theaters are beginning to offer more options for patrons with hearing loss, including smart caption glasses and open captioned performances, as well as apps for smartphones and tablets here in the U.S.

In England, smart caption glasses enable wearers to see a transcript of the dialogue and descriptions of the sound from a performance displayed on the lenses of the glasses. London's Royal National Theatre tested the technology for shows last year and is making it available for performances this season.

The lenses look like a normal pair of glasses that fit inside a special casing. When looking through the glasses, captions scroll across the bottom of the augmented reality lenses. A hand-held keypad is attached to the glasses to allow customized text color, size and positioning.

Captions allow everyone greater accessibility to content, whether it be via TV, movies or social media. And they continue to pop up daily in new and exciting places—and everywhere inclusion and accessibility are required and desired.

Movie Theaters

Captions and captioning devices in movie theaters across the country also have helped close the gap for many between silent films and the newest Hollywood blockbusters.

The U.S. Department of Justice, in its 2016 Final Rule revising the ADA Title III, requires movie theaters to have and maintain equipment to provide closed captioning (and audio description) at a moviegoer's seat, promote the equipment's

availability, and ensure that theater staff are available to assist patrons.

There are several captioning service providers for first-run cinema releases, including the Digital Theater Systems Cinema Subtitling System, MoPix, the USL Closed Captioning System and CaptiView, a small-screen device with an adjustable arm that clips to a viewer's seat and displays the movie's dialogue, as well as Sony Entertainment Access Glasses. Not all movies are available with closed captions, however. Recent efforts by various

advocacy groups are trying to ensure open captioned movie showing, which requires no special equipment.

The Justice Department's Final Rule only addresses closed captions and doesn't require movie theaters to offer open captioned screenings or screenings where the captions are projected on the silver screen for all to see. Hawaii, however, passed a state law that requires at least some movie screenings to display open captions, making them accessible to people with hearing loss without assistive technology. Advocates in other localities are considering working with their legislators to enact similar laws.

Museums and Galleries

Though it varies from place to place, some museums and galleries provide captions on videos and visual displays. Additionally, live CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) captioners and American Sign Language interpreters can be made available for live lectures or performances with advance notice.

Video Games

Studios and game developers have begun to make games more accessible from launch, but not every developer is quite there yet.

Though subtitles are common in games, captions describing the nonspoken elements of the game—such as gunshots, dinosaur roars or creaky floorboards—aren't. This lack of captioning and gameplay audio cues can make playing and fully appreciating the game's content difficult for people with hearing loss.

Some games, however, like last year's *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, are a bit ahead of the curve in access and feature options, with subtitles appearing in different colors depending on the characters speaking, along with closed captions to indicate sound effects. Others include a variety of subtitling options and larger text fonts.

A waiver offering video games temporary exemption from the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) expired at the beginning of this year, meaning that new games or games undergoing substantial live updates will now be required to meet accessibility requirements under the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The CVAA doesn't require video games in general to become fully accessible. Rather, it requires any in-game communication aspects, like in-game chat and any user interfaces needed to play the game, to be accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities, such as people with hearing or vision loss. The CVAA also calls for people with disabilities to be involved in a game's design or testing.

Mobile Apps

Smartphones have become everything from wallets to cameras to jukeboxes. And they can help with captions too.

There are a number of captioning apps offered through Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS), administered by the FCC. These apps work with a phone's voice and data plan, enabling users to see captioned transcription and hear the call at the same time. Only people with hearing loss may register and use these apps, according to FCC rules.

Live Caption, Live Transcribe and Ava are examples of automated speech recognition (ASR) apps that can transcribe face-to-face conversations in real time, allowing users to speak directly into their phones and see their words turned into captions.

Apps such as Subtitle Viewer and Subtitles Viewer! enable users to watch subtitles synced with the TV in the family room or movies at the cinema on their mobile devices. The subtitles—available in two dozen languages—are downloaded from huge user-contributed databases at opensubtitles.org and opensubtitles.com.

Airlines

You can fly the friendly skies with captions at your side—sometimes. Closed captions aren't yet required on airline in-flight entertainment. Nonetheless, some airlines are voluntarily making captions more widely available and more accessible to passengers with hearing loss.

Amusement Parks

Some of the larger amusement parks, like Disney World, offer guests with hearing disabilities hand-held captioning options—portable text captioning systems—that provide synchronized captions in theaters, on moving rides and at other locations where traditional fixed captions aren't feasible.

Where Next?

The possibilities for captioned content are endless. Imagine getting into a taxi and having captions pop up on a small screen in the cab, or wearing eyeglasses that scroll captions as you wear them around, or viewing captions while you're filling up your next tank of gas.

A federal lawsuit recently was brought against a Miami gas station because it lacked closed captioning on the TV screens built into its pumps. The suit argued that people with hearing loss missed out on the news and commercials streamed while consumers fill their tanks—a violation, the suit claims, of Title III of the ADA.

Expect to see captions pop up in even more places as the call from consumers and advocates for accessible services and solutions becomes more vocal, and as more companies, organizations and industries realize that captions can help them reach an ever-greater audience—an audience, in many cases, that has considerable buying power. **HL**



John H. Capobianco is chief marketing officer of VITAC Corporation, the nation's largest provider of closed captioning services. John has been instrumental in the success of companies that include Computer Associates, SAP North America, MEDdecision, Bluestone Software, Sybase and others. Known for his infectious energy, innovative marketing techniques and passion for closed captions in media and technology, John is a widely regarded expert in accessibility, sales and marketing, as well as within the technology sector. He's a frequently requested speaker at key industry events. For more information, please visit vitac.com.