

How Captions Make Conferences Accessible to All

Corporate conferences, trade shows and other business-to-business events in the United States generated more than \$16 billion in revenue in 2018, and the industry shows little sign of slowing down as companies continue to find value in a conference's ability to enhance their brands and industry leadership position.

Designed to provide a plethora of information and content on a variety of relevant subjects, corporate conferences keep attendees up-to-date with the latest industry knowledge and trends. They offer the opportunity to meet and learn from peers, hear about new products and technology, discover fresh and innovative ways of thinking, and, perhaps most importantly, allow participants to network with others in their field. Conferences are a way to promote and expand a business's brand, and make sure its messages are getting out to an enthusiastic audience in the best possible fashion.

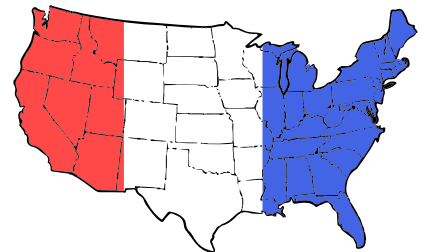
However, it is important that businesses speak to their entire audience.

For many people with disabilities, one of the barriers to participating in corporate events and outings is a lack of accessibility, whether it be accessible venues, information, and/or a proper means of communication and participation.

There are approximately 50 million Americans in the deaf and hard-of-hearing community — and more than 350 million people worldwide with a disabling hearing loss — representing a sizeable consumer group and workforce that no business or industry can afford to overlook.

People with disabilities face barriers every day, and these barriers don't just impact those individuals with disabilities — businesses also stand to gain customers and profit by being more inclusive (and, conversely, lose the same by limiting access). No business can succeed without customers and a dedicated workforce, and no customer or workforce wants to patronize or be part of a group that provides them with limited access to products and services. Ignoring accessibility issues creates not only a less than optimal business relationship; it also can lead to legal actions and lawsuits that can hurt even the largest of corporations.

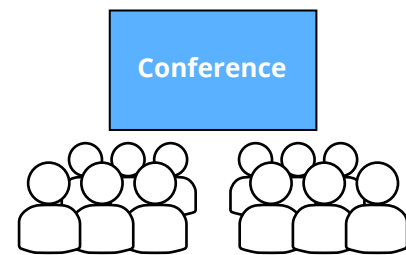
Therefore, it is in the best interest of all parties involved to make accessibility a priority. Though government rules and regulations exist, true accessibility for all won't be achieved until the public and corporate mindsets begin to change from "needing" to obey accessibility standards to "wanting" to provide accessible solutions because it's simply the proper avenue to pursue. The government may amend current policies to encourage greater accessibility, but companies and businesses, themselves, can be more active and take greater steps in embracing people's differences.



50 Million Americans
in the Deaf and
Hard-of-Hearing
Community

Challenge

Creating accessible solutions for all in the workplace, regardless of whether it is in a corporate boardroom or an in-person conference or event, is of vital importance. But when an event tips the scales at more than 25,000 attendees – as do some of the most popular corporate events – the thought of making accessible all of the day’s activities, learning sessions, and keynote addresses can become quite daunting.



Many members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHOH) community often become frustrated by the lack of accessibility in education, employment, entertainment, and live events. However, event organizers can easily remove communication access barriers by providing accessibility services such as live captioning, sign language interpreters, or other alternative types of communication.

Important, though, is employing the right captions and captioning company. Having poor quality captions is akin to providing no captions at all as poor captions only cause greater communication breakdowns and frustrations for deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees.

Solutions

Since its introduction to television audiences in the early 1970s, closed captions have expanded well beyond the media and entertainment borders and into corporate boardrooms; primary, secondary, and college classrooms; and arenas, stadiums, and event centers, and reach new audiences every day via computer screens, tablets, and smartphones.



Providing captions for corporate events, live meetings, and video presentations and demos creates a more inclusive world and benefits all people — deaf and hearing — by enabling information access to all. In addition to the nearly 50 million DHOH Americans, there also are those who prefer to watch captioned content — namely nearly 58 million millennials — who, when added to those Americans in the DHOH community, means that about one in three adults in the United States benefit from captioned content.

Though there is no one-size fits all solution for making a corporate event accessible for DHOH attendees, there is little question on one key item — professional human captioners provide the highest quality communication access.

Human captioners provide a high level of service that voice recognition programs simply cannot duplicate. Though automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology is making great strides, the best approach to captioning remains rooted in the human experience of the spoken word. Professionals trained to provide captions bring human sensitivities and contextual awareness to the captioning table that no ASR system can. ASR systems routinely fail to present names and technical terms properly, they stumble on accented or mumbled speech or background noises, and can have difficulty in determining the differences between what a speaker “said” and what they actually “meant.”

Professionally trained, highly skilled human captioners, like those employed at VITAC Corporation, can make recorded videos and podcasts accessible via captions and transcripts; make streaming videos and webcasts accessible via live Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captions; and bring captions to live events (such as those in conference, workshop, breakout, information group, and work meeting settings).

CART can be handled both in-person and remotely. In-person CART features an on-site captioner in the same room as the speaker or group discussion who listens to the presentation and instantaneously translates all the speech to text. Remote CART involves a captioner listening to a presentation via IP audio and quickly sending captions to a dedicated URL. Display options include computers, projection screens, monitors, or mobile devices, and captioned text can be displayed as a full screen at the front of the room or may be incorporated onto the same screen as a PowerPoint presentation.

Solution Details

Providing captions for large-scale corporate events is no small chore, and requires captioners and caption companies who are well-trained, well-prepared, and experts in their craft.

Every detail of a corporate event – no matter how big or small – has been months in the planning and, therefore, the best is expected by the attendees. Likewise, only the highest quality captions should be expected from the event’s captioning provider. Quality captioners and captioning companies use the newest updated equipment and the best technology to solve the challenges of captioning communication.

VITAC’s clients include, among others, a U.S.-based multinational technology company that for years has set a high bar in the area of corporate conferencing. VITAC began working with and providing captions for this client in 2012, working with the company on its internal training sessions and town hall meetings. Thanks to years of successful, results-driven performance and positive relationships, VITAC’s role expanded in 2017 to include providing captions for the company’s large-scale corporate and training events.



Initially, VITAC provided on-site captions for the client’s keynote speakers and discussions hosted by the company CEO and C-level executives, which attract much of the attendees’ attention. However, the real nuts-and-bolts of conference events, the breakout sessions and smaller- scale group meetings, were left uncaptioned.

As part of its push to expand its accessible solutions, the client called upon VITAC to caption all the breakouts as well, bringing increased access and also fulfilling ADA requirements and federal accessibility regulations.

VITAC is one of the only captioning companies that can handle events of this scope, and has significant advantages over other captioning providers. VITAC is the largest provider of realtime and offline captioning products services in the United States, employing hundreds of the most skilled and tenured captioning professionals in the industry and captioning more 575,000 hours of programming each year. Our customers include every major broadcasting company and most cable networks as well as program producers, corporations, educational institutions, and government agencies.

While VITAC's size is notable, its true differentiator is its people, capacity, and technical expertise. Unlike other captioning companies that rely primarily on contractors, VITAC's professional captioners are dedicated company employees that are recruited, trained, tested, and reviewed to ensure exemplary client service. Captioners across the company use the same software, secure systems, and up-to-date technology, with back-ups in place, so that one has the ability to pick up right where another has left off.



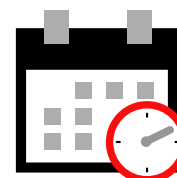
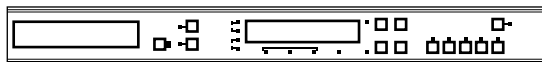
**575,000 Hours
captioned each year!**

In the lead-up to captioned conferences and events, our captioning coordinators and producers plan for the hundreds or even thousands of hours of captioning over the course of the days-long events, designing workflow schedules and additional coverage scenarios.

Soon after they and all the necessary technical equipment arrive at the venue, captioners begin working in advance of the event on "pre-game" legwork — learning the topics slated for discussion and building out their glossary of terms, names, spellings, and industry jargon. They also will attend rehearsals to better understand the clients' needs, and get set up properly in order to caption the presentation as accurately as possible.



HDTV CAPTION ENCODER



Captioners also will make sure secure audio and video connections exist for the overall conference and individual breakouts. Of course, there always are adjustments to be made, and that is where human captioners are essential to make changes on the fly and adjust schedules around the client needs.

When the conference begins, captioners will connect directly to the caption encoder and listen through an audio feed or the venue sound system, transcribing the presentation and sending captions via encoder onto the presentation screens for all attendees.

VITAC remote teams handle the smaller conference sessions, tapping into the event center's audio channels. But there really are no small assignments when captioning for events and conferences that have more than 100 breakouts going on simultaneously. A typical captioning day for these events might mean 100 breakouts in the breakfast hour, followed by 80 the next hour, and another 100 sessions before lunch. After the sessions are finished, captioners can go back and synchronize the offline captions to bring the words on the screen as they are spoken.

The captions, organizers say, enhance speaking points and provide different avenues for attendees to absorb information, as some are more visual learners and learn things in different ways than others.

When the dust settles at these larger conferences, VITAC captioners will have completed in a week of conference captioning the same amount that some local television stations do in a year.

Business Benefits

Satisfies Regulations:

Adding captions to events, whether they be television programs, videos, college classrooms, stadium scoreboards, or large-scale corporate conferences, satisfies the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 requirements. The ADA is the first comprehensive civil rights legislation addressing and granting basic accessibility needs of people with disabilities. Title I of the ADA says that employers cannot discriminate based upon a person's disability status, and that companies must provide "reasonable accommodations" for employees. While this does not necessarily always mean captions, many companies have begun captioning and describing such things as online training videos, conference calls, and webinars to ensure compliance.

Client Service:

VITAC always puts first the needs of the client. Captioners work around conference schedules, and are committed to providing accurate descriptions whenever and wherever needed – whether it be for multiple breakout sessions, small group discussions, or CEO speeches.

Worry-free Experience:

Though a lot pre-planning goes into each large-scale captioning engagement, there is very little that needs to be done by client as professional captioning companies typically will provide all the equipment required for on-site captioning, professional staff, and 24/7 customer service and technical support. VITAC also provides secure systems and heightened encryption gateways between captioners and encoders, and works within the clients' existing infrastructures so that no additional hardware investment is required for hardened connectivity.

Ancillary Benefits

Attendee Comprehension/Focus:

Captions are able to keep an audience's attention longer, effectively keeping them focused on the message. Adding captions to company videos enables employees to better focus and understand the presentations.

Attendee Retention:

If ensuring attendees can understand your conference presentations is a top priority, then making sure they remember the information presented is a close second. A U.S. Department of Labor study found people learn best with a combination of both visual aids and oral explanation.

Language Barriers:

There are millions of Americans who speak English as a second language. For non-native English speakers, research shows that captions help clarify video dialogue and speaker accents, ensuring clear comprehension.

Conclusion

As with many disabilities, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing face discrimination in various areas of life, including employment opportunities. Additionally, a person's inability to hear could have adverse effects on how they interact socially, thus, they may be uncomfortable or lack confidence in certain social settings. How others embrace or fail to embrace also is a concern.

VITAC is committed to delivering ubiquitous captioning — anywhere, anytime, and on any platform — via highly skilled human captioners who deliver captions 24/7, 365 days-per-year. The company strives to advance captioning technology for always-on connectivity, speed, and security, and is, importantly, a strong advocate for captioning regulations and organizational compliance.

It is impossible to deny the importance of building an engaged, diverse, and inclusive workforce. By making diversity, inclusion, and accessibility a priority, companies can create better brands and products and, ultimately, increase business performance. In fact, 69 percent of CEOs ranked diversity and inclusion as a top business priority, according to a Deloitte Insights report. To find out how your business can become more accessible, call our sales team at (800) 278-4822 or visit www.vitac.com.

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HOURS A DAY

7

DAYS A WEEK

365

DAYS-PER-YEAR



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