The Media Access Report

Issue 26, Autumn 2013

MEDIA
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INCLUSION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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Media Access Australia – *Inclusion through technology*

'We believe that all Australians have the right to access all forms of media and information, through technology, so they can participate fully in society.'

Media Access Australia is Australia's only independent not-for-profit organisation devoted to increasing access to media for people with disabilities.

At the core of our work is the understanding that exclusion from mainstream audiovisual media has profound effects on educational outcomes, workforce participation and social inclusion.

Access to media through technology empowers people to be independent, gain knowledge, make their own choices, and be active members of our society.

Our expertise

We promote inclusion by providing expert knowledge and advice on existing and emerging mainstream technologies to government, industry, educators, consumer organisations and individuals.

We demonstrate how media accessibility can be improved in practical ways, by piloting innovative ideas and major projects.

We work as a catalyst for change in areas of access that include television, DVD, cinema, the arts, education, computing and the Internet, with a primary focus on people who are blind or vision impaired, or Deaf or hearing impaired.

We seek to improve national and international Internet accessibility standards as a member of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an international online community where the general public and organisations work together to develop web standards.

We are a national organisation, based in Sydney, with a satellite office in Perth.

Our heritage

Media Access Australia was formed out of the Australian Caption Centre, a not-for-profit organisation co-founded by Adam Salzer and Alexandra Hynes in 1982.

The Centre aimed to promote and produce captioning for Deaf or hearing impaired Australians. At the Centre's inception, captions were non-existent, however, over its life the organisation grew to provide captioning services on TV, video and DVD.

In 2005, the Centre sold its commercial operations including captioning services to Red Bee Media, and became Media Access Australia. We no longer provide services to business, allowing us to focus on promoting inclusion without the conflicts of commercial operations.

As Media Access Australia, our focus broadened to include people who are blind or vision impaired and others who are disadvantaged in access to media. We recognised that, while some needs are

different between disabilities, there are important similarities in terms of solutions, technologies, industries and regulation. By focusing on these similarities we can achieve better results for all.

Disclaimer

Statistical information published in *The Media Access Report* is derived from public sources such as television listings and websites. It has been made available for general use only and is provided without warranty as to its accuracy or currency.

Submissions

We are interested in receiving submissions for publication in the Media Access Report, including accounts of media or events and news items dealing with captioning, audio description and other access services. If you have any material you would like to submit, contact Chris Mikul on (02) 9212 6242, or email chris.mikul@mediaaccess.org.au

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If you would like to be put on the mailing list to receive future issues of The Media Access Report, email info@mediaaccess.org.au

Media access news

Canadian access champion honoured with Jubilee Medal

The CEO of our sister organisation, Media Access Canada, Beverley Milligan, has been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. The medal recognises the enormous contribution Milligan has made to the lives of Canadians with sensory impairment. Over 20 years, Milligan has been a pivotal force in making closed captions a guarantee on Canadian TV.

In the 1990s, as the founder of Canada Captions Inc, Milligan applied a corporate sponsorship model to captioning so that advertisers could sponsor the provision of captions and receive a "closed captions provided by…" credit for their efforts. This system is still in place in Canada and the USA and has helped Canada achieve 100% captioning across TV networks.

Alex Varley, CEO of Media Access Australia, said, "Bev has done outstanding work on practical access standards and boosting levels of accessible media in Canada, including being the primary driving force in the establishment of the Broadcasting Accessibility Fund last year.

"Her approach is the same as ours – grounded in real-world, practical solutions and collaboration with like-minded organisations around the world."

Milligan has been the CEO of Media Access Canada since 2009. The organisation works to increase access to broadcast media for Canadians with disability, particularly through closed captions and audio description.

The regulatory framework in Canada is stronger than that of Australia when it comes to broadcast access. The *Broadcasting Act 1991* states that "programming accessible by disabled persons should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system as resources become available for the

purpose". Importantly, Canadian broadcasters now need to introduce audio description for blind and vision impaired audiences as a condition of receiving a license.

Campaign for captions in Malta

A campaign is under way in Malta to have captions introduced on television and in cinemas. Run by the Deaf People Association and film promotion organisation Kinemastic, the Subtitles Now campaign has received international attention.

Currently, the only access provided for Deaf and hearing impaired people on Maltese television is a five minute news update with sign language broadcast each day. In cinemas, open captioned sessions are few and far between, with most occurring at inconvenient times.

Speaking to the *Times of Malta,* The Deaf People Association's Alison Vere said that if the campaign is successful it will "provide a quantum leap in the quality of life of deaf Maltese and would also help increase deaf literacy".

Using a combination of signing, music, subtitles and text, the Subtitles Now video aims to build empathy for Malta's Deaf and hearing impaired community and build momentum for its cause throughout the country. It can be watched on YouTube:

New initiative promotes technology designed for everybody

A major initiative recently launched in London is raising awareness of the need for technology design that includes people with a disability.

An initiative of the Royal London Society for the Blind, Everybody Technology works collaboratively with technology companies, developers, designers and people with disabilities to create products that combine technology and design for the benefit of all users.

Achievements to date include its collaboration with IBM to create a Conversational Internet, where people who are blind or vision impaired can browse the internet by using voice. It's also aiming to make touchscreen devices available affordably to those who need them.

An Everybody Technology event hosted in London in November brought developers from companies such as IBM and Panasonic together with accessibility experts and users with a range of disabilities to discuss how technology can be improved for all. Media Access Australia CEO Alex Varley was among over 200 people in attendance at the event, which saw people with disabilities give insight into their product experiences, and experts such as Dr Jonathan Hassell provide advice on inclusive design solutions.

It also showcased a mainstream example of technology developed through RLSB's collaboration with Panasonic in its range of talking TVs.

Television

ACMA grants captioning and target reduction exemptions

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has granted caption exemption and target reduction orders to 10 television services providers, covering a total of 90 channels. Most of

these are subscription TV services which are re-transmitting channels from other sources such as FOXTEL.

These exemption and target reduction orders relate to the new quotas for captioning on free-to-air and subscription television which were included in the *Broadcasting Services Act* in 2012. The ACMA has the power to grant the orders to television services if providing captions would cause them 'unjustifiable hardship'. The closing date for applications covering 2013 onward was 27 December 2012, and the ACMA posted its reasons for granting them earlier this year. Once these were posted, individuals and organisations had 30 days to make submissions in response to them.

The following TV services have been granted exemption or target reduction orders.

Eastern Australia Satellite Broadcasters
- Target reduction orders for 2 channels (VAN, VAS) for the years 2012-2015.

Fetch TV
- Exemptions for 4 channels (ESPN2, MUTV, Manchester City TV, Chelsea TV) for the years 2012-2013.
- Exemptions for 16 channels (Baby TV, Fashion TV, Fox Sports News, Australian Christian Channel, Ovation, Travel Channel, Al Jazeera, Bloomberg, CCTV News, DW TV, Euronews, France 24, NDTV, Setanta Sports, CNBC, BBC World News, Real Madrid TV) for the years 2012-2014
- A target reduction order for 1 channel (Nat Geo Adventure) for 2012-2014.

Imparja Television
- A target reduction order for 1 channel (IMP) for 2012-2015.

Optus Mobile TV
- Exemptions for 5 channels (Cartoon Network, CNN, Sky News Live, Sky News Sport, Sky Racing) for the years 2012-2013.

Setanta Sport
- An exemption for 1 channel (Setanta Sport) for the years 2012-2017.

Sky Racing
- Exemptions for 3 channels (TVN, Sky Racing 1, Sky Racing 2) for the years 2012-2013.

Telstra Pay TV
- Exemptions for 37 channels (ABC 1, SBS 1 and 35 FOXTEL channels) for the years 2012-2013.

TransACT

- Exemptions for 15 channels (Euronews, Bloomberg, Al Jazeera, CCTV News, Deutsche Welle, Australian Parliament Committees, Australian Parliament Senate, Australian, Parliament House of Reps, Australian Christian Channel, CNN International, Channel News Asia, Fashion TV, EWTN, Eurosports, Eurosports News) for the years 2012-2014.
- A target reduction order for 1 channel (Nat Geo Adventure) for the years 2012-2014.

Sky Channel
- Exemptions for 3 channels (TVN, Sky Racing 1, Sky Racing 2) for the years 2012-2017.

ThoroughVisioN
- An exemption for 1 channel (TVN) for the years 2012-2014.

In our submissions regarding the preliminary exemption and target reduction orders, Media Access Australia made two main points. The first of these is that the ACMA has not defined the concept of 'unjustifiable hardship', which is the main reason given for most of the preliminary exemption and target reduction orders being granted. This contrasts with the approaches taken in the UK (where channels are exempt from access requirements if the costs would exceed 1% of their 'relevant turnover') and the US (where video programmers are not required to provide captions if this would cost them more that 2% of gross revenues). These rules are clear, objective and publicly available.

Our second point was that exemptions should not be granted for a period longer than a year. We believe the amendments to the *Broadcasting Services Act* were framed to bring about increases in captioning, and granting an exemption or target reduction order should be an exceptional circumstance. Captioning technology is constantly evolving, costs are coming down and the nature of television services also change. The legislated system allows for services to apply for exemptions each year, and we believe this is how it should operate. Many of the preliminary exemption and target reduction orders are for periods longer than a year, with some extending until 2017. The ACMA rejected this argument, stating that, "Under the BSA, while it is open for the ACMA to refuse to make an order, it is not open to the ACMA to make an Order for a period other than the specified eligible period in the Application."

Other submissions made different points. Michael Lockrey argued that "a broadcasting licence is a privileged, commercial right and it comes with a strong obligation to provide access to their content at all times". He notes that "it is uncertain from the information provided whether the broadcasters have even checked whether it's possible for the content licence holders and / or producers to provide a captioning solution at the source".

In her submission, Joanne Beckwith wrote, "It is time to make a stand and point out that it is the responsibility of any business to know and adhere to the charter of not only human rights but the disability and discrimination act. To claim financial hardship is just showing these applicants to be bad at budgeting, accounting and business modelling. Access is not an optional extra it is and should always be part of any proper budget both in time and money. It is insulting to have to justify access."

All the orders and the submissions in response to them can be downloaded from the 'Exemption orders and Target reduction orders' section of the ACMA website.

Canada makes captioning of TV commercials compulsory

Canada's media regulator, the Canadian Radio–television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), has announced that all TV commercials, sponsorship messages and promos will have to be captioned from 1 September 2014.

While captioning on all English and French language TV programs has been compulsory in Canada since 2007, the new rules mean that it will become the first country in the world where 100% of broadcast content has to be captioned. The onus will be on the advertisers to caption their

commercials, with the Television Bureau of Canada announcing that, once the rules take effect, all advertising content will be screened to ensure it has closed captions before being cleared for broadcast.

The CRTC's rules on advertising material follow the introduction of stringent new quality standards for captioning on Canadian television, which took effect in September 2012.

Audio description channel launched in Czech Republic

The radio and television broadcaster Czech Radiokomunikace has launched an audio description channel, the second in the world after Canada's AMI-tv. Telecompaper reported that the launch follows a pilot operation conducted with the Association of TV Operations in March 2012. In the Czech Republic, 2% of all broadcasts must be audio described for the blind or vision impaired.

Canada's AMI-tv, originally called The Accessible Channel, was launched in 2009. All programming on the channel, which is sourced from different networks, has audio description and closed captions.

Conference looks at voice recognition and live captioning

The increasing use of voice recognition technology to create captions for live programs was a major topic at the CSI User Experience Conference, an independent event held on 5 December in London where the latest developments in TV access were discussed.

During a panel discussion, Claude Le Guyader from Deluxe Media noted that access suppliers across the world seized on voice recognition as a captioning solution because of the shortage of stenographers. He emphasised though that the technology, which is becoming increasingly common for other applications such as the iPhone's Siri, is far from perfect.

Voice recognition was first used for captioning on Australian television in 2005. In this method, a captioner 'respeaks' the dialogue of a news bulletin or other live program into a microphone, and voice recognition software converts it to text. Media Access Australia's Chris Mikul said, "Captions created using voice recognition can be of equivalent quality to those done by stenocaptioners, but a lot depends on how much time captioners have spent practicing with the software so it gets accustomed to their voices, and how much preparation time they have before each program."

Voice recognition software is still a long way from being able to accurately transcribe speech without having an intermediary 'respeaking' into it – especially when the sound quality is less than perfect. The most notorious example of this is the automatic captioning now available for YouTube videos. Commenting on the CSI conference, the author of the 'i heart subtitles' blog wrote, "At the moment this does illustrate the technology's limitations as most readers here I am sure are aware – the captions created this way are completely inaccurate most of the time and therefore useless." Nevertheless, if you own the YouTube video, it is now possible to correct the automatic captions.

A [full transcript of the conference](#) is available on the CSI Magazine website.

Ofcom extends access requirements to programs made for Europe

The British communications regulator, Ofcom, has decided to extend the access requirements it places on UK broadcasters to channels providing services to other countries in Europe.

The access requirements will be the same as those applied to domestic broadcasters. They consist of quotas which, after ten years, rise to 80% for captioning, 10% for audio description and 5% for signing. Ofcom may decide to reduce these quotas for channels where the access services would cost more than 1% of their relevant turnover.

In addition to providing the access services, the TV service providers must also promote awareness of them by supplying information to electronic program guide operators about which programs are captioned, audio described or signed, and through on-air announcements and publications.

DVD

Why aren't all Australian DVDs captioned?
Media Access Australia's Project Manager for DVD, Ally Woodford, looks at the accessibility of the home entertainment industry.

Over the years captions have become part of the standard process of producing a video for many distributors. This has only come from years of hard slog by advocates worldwide, buoyed by the support of funding for 'seed' projects, such as the temporary captioning of entertainment VHS videos through the Australian Government's 'Subtitled Video Project' from the 1990s. But the industry's current move away from shopfront selling to online presents a new set of obstacles for distributors and consumers to sort through.

Format changes
The previous change in formats from VHS to DVD and Blu-ray and, moving further into the future, online video, has alleviated but not solved the limited space issue on discs where priority was naturally given to the video program itself. Added features such as blooper reels, directors' commentaries, foreign language subtitles and of course access features of captions and audio description had to fight it out for the remaining space on the discs. To a very large degree this increased accessibility although it did not solve things completely.

In moving to online where there is no capacity limit, the natural thought is that there is room for every possible extra produced. But so far this extended capacity has meant nothing as the feature itself is generally just provided – a move back to the days of VHS.

Regional issues
In Australia we have a handful of distributors who caption their videos, regardless of origin. This has meant that movies produced in the USA, the UK and other countries have ended up with captions on their Region 4 release for Australian, New Zealand and other audiences, yet not in the origin territory. Conversely, MAA has found that on average 10% of DVDs on a new release rental shelf at any given time have captions or English subtitles available in a region outside Australia. With multi-region DVD players and the ease in which purchases can be made from anywhere in the world these days, it is not unheard of for people requiring access features to order an accessible version from overseas.

Distributors
DVD is a widely captioned format outside of television. Where it fails is in making that final jump to 100% accessibility due to the nature of the industry (and the absence of legislation). There are

distributors, and there are distributors. Major distributors, particularly those that are vertically integrated from cinema to DVD, e.g. Sony, Universal, Fox and Warner Brothers, always have higher access ratings on their releases compared to smaller companies: they work with bigger budgets, they often work from access files that have come directly from the cinema release, and they have procedures in place to ensure the higher volume of titles they release get to market on time. These well-oiled machines also have a certain expectation around them.

But for every 'big name' distributor there are a couple of small, independent distributors. These distributors source their videos for release from a range of film distributors and work with much smaller budgets. They may only release 5 to 10 titles a year. The budgets for these releases will extend to putting the program on a master disc, getting a cover made, dubbing and selling. The end result is a plain old vanilla title, with no added extras. It is this end of the market that prevents DVD accessibility through captions jumping from the mid-60% range (here in Australia) to 100%.

Specialist genres

In most countries it is far more common to see entertainment titles captioned and audio described than documentaries, educational titles, sporting events and music videos. Amongst these genres it is particularly disappointing that educational titles are not made accessible. With the use of multimedia increasing in the classroom through the digital revolution, having accessible educational programs, at the least, may be considered a priority.

One way of working towards this could be through the classification exemption system. In Australia, these types of titles may be exempt from classification (i.e. a rating, such as G, PG, M, etc) under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*. Should a title of an educational nature be granted such an exemption by the Classification Board, it could be argued that it is exempt on the proviso that closed captioning and audio description is included. This type of policy would be similar to Screen Australia's captioning and audio description policy, where all feature films funded by the body are done so in the knowledge that both access features are included for cinematic and DVD release.

Labelling

The labelling situation in Australia is one area where we have had great success. A number of years ago DVD distributors represented by the Australian Home Entertainment Distributors Association (AHEDA) agreed to instigate a uniform labelling system for both closed captions and audio description. The labels include the logos for closed captioning and audio description as well as terminology that clearly reflect whether a title is accessible to people with hearing or vision loss. Although not all distributors in Australia are members of AHEDA, I have noticed that a number of non-AHEDA distributors are also using the system.

Online purchasing

While the labelling of DVD and Blu-ray packaging has worked well locally, the universal trend to move to video purchase online or by download is a step backwards in accessibility. It is rare in online DVD shopping portals to find evidence of a title's accessibility. Personally, I've found Amazon UK to be the most thorough in providing information on captioning and audio description, plus it allows the user to filter search results by these formats. Perplexingly, these options are not available through Amazon's US site.

For download, the USA's *Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010* works towards all broadcast programs subsequently distributed online having captions. It is hoped that there will be flow-on effects of this ruling for Australia and other territories. In the meantime, we are faced with very few options for discovering accessible titles to download. Catch-up TV fares a little better with ABC's iView and SBS's catch-up player leading the way at present.

We've come a long way from the days of a handful of special-edition VHS tapes being available with captions through select video stores or library services, and the hard and continued work done by lobbyists over the years has worked well in the transition from VHS to DVD and Blu-ray, but in many ways the process was still the same for the purchaser – via a retail or rental outlet. Moving to online delivery removes this tangible element and introduces an entirely new platform for distributors to inform and provide for their customers, and for customers to seek out the information they need. Media Access Australia is one of many organisations worldwide advocating for accessibility to be a priority in this revolution rather than a retrospective add-on.

Human Rights Commission releases Australia's first fully-accessible DVD

Twenty Years: Twenty Stories is a video project initiated by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) which celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA). The DVD release, as well as having captioning and audio description, also features spoken menus – an Australian first.

The project was launched by the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, at Admiralty House on 1 March 2013. "The series *20 Years: 20 Stories* is a collection that reaches into our hearts, tugging at every emotion we have," said Ms Bryce. "It is also of great practical import, filled with constructive advice and valuable information for the way forward."

Each of the twenty videos, which were produced in association with the Sydney Community Foundation, tells the story of a disabled person who managed to bring about systemic change by making a DDA complaint. The videos, created by both professional filmmakers and community groups, were made possible by donations from government and commercial enterprises. Captioning of the videos was funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' Captioning Grant, which is administered by Media Access Australia.

The audio description was provided at no cost by The Substation, which worked with DVD authoring house Motionlink (also donating its services), to create the spoken menus. "The talking buttons enable people who are blind or vision impaired to successfully navigate the menus, including turning on the audio description for the films," said Vanessa Lewis from The SubStation. "As such, it is the first truly accessible Australian DVD."

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes (whose recent, successful battle with RailCorp over train announcements is the subject of one of the videos), spoke of the vital importance of audio description. "For someone such as myself who is totally blind it's critical to know what's happening on the screen, not just to hear the sound. What is she doing, is the scream from the victim or a passer-by, what smashed the glass?"

Twenty Years: Twenty Stories is available to watch on the AHRC's website as well as on DVD.

Figure 1 The Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, launches 'Twenty Years: Twenty Stories'

Access on new release DVDs

Of the 71 new release movies on DVD researched by Media Access Australia in January 2012, 23, or 32%, were found to be audio described and captioned.

Distributors Eagle, Paramount, Madman, Reel, Shock and Sony Universal all had titles released internationally with either captions or subtitles that were not released in Region 4, a market which includes Australia, New Zealand, South America and Oceania. The Madman title of *Your Sister's Sister* was released in Australia without audio description but had audio description for its Region 2 (UK) release.

The titles with both audio description and captions are:

- *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*
- *Bait*
- *The Bourne Legacy*
- *Brave*
- *Chernobyl Diaries*
- *Dark Knight Rises*
- *The Expendables 2*
- *Fire With Fire*
- *Hope Springs*
- *Hotel Transylvania*
- *Ice Age 4*
- *LOL*
- *Lockout*
- *Madagascar 3*
- *Moonrise Kingdom*

- *Resident Evil: Retribution*
- *The Sapphires*
- *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World*
- *Ted*
- *Think Like a Man*
- *Total Recall (2012)*
- *Universal Soldier 4*
- *The Watch*

Education

Educational app review: captions for learning

Educational apps are increasingly being used by teachers as a fun and interactive way of engaging students, but captions are often lacking on the video content found within them.

Studies have shown that using captions can enhance the learning experience for all students, with particular benefit to students who speak English as a second language or with learning difficulties, not to mention the Deaf or hearing impaired students for whom captions are absolutely essential.

Media Access Australia found and tested three educational apps that include captions for all students.

BrainPOP
Cost: Free, $1.99 per month or $6.99 per month (unlimited access)

BrainPOP is aimed at schoolchildren from the age of 5 to 9 and covers subjects such as science, social studies, English, maths, arts & music, health and technology. The app has three levels of availability:

The free version provides one captioned movie per day, only available for the day. A 10-question quiz on the movie can be completed by students at the time. A small number of movies are permanently available in each subject field, nevertheless. Prior to each day's movie availability there is no list of upcoming movies so it's a bit of a lucky dip in what you receive.

For more access, a monthly in-app Explorer subscription amount of $1.99 can be paid. On top of the daily movie, four additional movies are made available on the daily topic. Again, these movies and quiz are only available on the day.

For permanent access to more than 750 captioned BrainPOP videos and related quizzes, subscribers can pay $6.99 per month.

Khan Academy
Cost: Free

Khan Academy has a library of more than 3,500 videos for students aged 5 to 18, and the majority of content is captioned. Topics mainly cover maths and science but there are also some videos about finance and history.

The caption option allows students to follow, skip ahead or go back by navigating through the captions provided as a time-coded transcript that appears underneath the video. On-screen captions are also provided.

Videos can also be downloaded to a student's tablet or smartphone to be watched offline. However, it should be noted that captions for the Khan Academy videos can only be viewed on the minimised screen.

TEDiSUB
Cost: $0.99

TEDiSUB is an app for the iPad that provides access to TED Talks, a series of videos that can be viewed on demand on the website of the same name. TED is a non-profit organisation that organises conferences and talks with the goal of sharing people's ideas on a wide range of topics, including design, technology, entertainment and science.

While not exclusively an education website, the videos allow students to explore a wide range of interesting topics.

The videos in the TEDiSUB app include captions, allow you to select subtitles from a variety of languages, and you can also view an interactive transcript of each video. As the transcripts are time-coded, you can easily jump within the video by selecting a line of text on the transcript.

Videos can also be downloaded and viewed later without connection to the internet.

Cinema and the arts

New year, new accessible cinemas
2013 is set to be a landmark year for accessible cinema in Australia with two major cinema chains on track to complete the installation of audio described and closed captioned screens at all of their complexes. On top of this, 15 new cinemas will commence accessible movies by the end of March.

The new locations for the Hoyts circuit are Northland in Victoria, Stafford in Queensland and Wetherill Park in New South Wales. Hoyts has a larger circuit nationally but is expected to complete its installations by the middle of the year.

Event cinemas has Pacific Fair, Toowoomba Grand Central, Indooroopilly, Capalaba, Morayfield and Carindale in Queensland; Bondi Junction, Tuggerah, Liverpool, Hurstville and Coffs Harbour in New South Wales; and Morley in Western Australia.

Village Cinemas has almost completed installing accessible screens across its national circuit, except for its Albury location on the Victorian and New South Wales border. Village has notified MAA and members of the Accessible Cinema Advisory Group that Albury will have two screens installed and operational in the first quarter of 2013.

Reading Cinemas has stated that all its locations will be accessible within the next six months.

These chains are part of the Australian Government's Cinema Access Implementation Plan, which is for the four major chains of Village, Hoyts, Event and Reading cinemas. The four-year plan runs

to the end of 2014, so the cinemas have until then to complete their accessible screen installations. The earlier the completion of the rollout is, the better it is for the customers.

There are now 168 accessible screens in 89 locations in Australia.

Accessible cinema questionnaire results

From June to December 2012, Media Access Australia ran a questionnaire for the general public on technology issues surrounding the use of closed captions and audio description in cinemas. The answers have now been collated and shared with members of the Accessible Cinema Advisory Group, as well as post-production houses creating captioned and audio described movies.

The questionnaire was designed to pinpoint technical issues that affect the quality of the access feature delivered that could possibly be fixed during the post-production phase of a movie. It was hoped that answers could also point towards issues around specific cinemas which could be addressed.

There were 51 complete responses to the questionnaire. 41 were around captions and the remaining 10 for audio description. Issues mentioned in responses include volume drop-outs of audio description during movies, and the inability to watch captions from the beginning of a movie, requiring assistance from box office staff.

New captioned cinema technology launched in Italy

Italian company [MovieReading](#) has teamed with electronics giant Epson to launch a new competitor in the market for cinema captioning technology.

The MovieReading app for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets allows you to watch closed captions discreetly on your own personal device. The app is compatible with Epson's Moverio BT100 glasses. Similar to Sony's Entertainment Glasses, these replicate the effect of open captions. At a cost of 299 euros ($370), MovieReading is working towards Italian cinemas purchasing glasses to hire out to customers. Some cinemas are also hiring out tablets with pre-loaded captions for one euro.

The app is free but caption files are then downloaded for approximately $2 per file. At the cinema, patrons can show their download receipt to get a discount for the ticket, essentially making the captions a free service. Once inside the auditorium, the downloaded caption file is selected and as the movie's opening credits begin, the app will synchronise the captions with the movie soundtrack.

MovieReading aims to offer captions for two new release movies each week in Italian, with the number of English caption files set to increase as the market demands. At present, captions are mainly provided in Italian. Initially launched in Italy, MovieReading has now expanded the availability of its app to a select international market, including Australia.

What sets MovieReading apart from current closed caption technologies is that it is does not need to rely on captions being available directly from the movie, or equipment being supplied by the cinema. Movie patrons have the opportunity to be completely independent in watching captions.

Persistence pays off for Californian accessible cinema fan

A Californian teenager who lobbied his local cinema and council to get captioned movies shown at his favourite cinema complex has been rewarded and will now be able to enjoy his first movie on the big screen since he was four years old.

The Santa Monica boy, John Butchko, who is now 13, is looking forward to seeing *The Life of Pi* on the big screen after repeated approaches to the area's largest cinema, AMC 7 Theatre, and city officials paid off. AMC 7 announced that it will provide closed captions on four of its seven screens using the Doremi CaptiView technology.

Butchko's efforts stemmed from a school assignment around community service coupled with his love of movies, even though he had to wait for captioned DVDs to come out or travel 50 kilometres to a cinema that provides the service. "Movies are a large part of the conversation in school, and if I haven't seen them, I can't participate in that," Butchko said.

In January 2012, AMC announced an official commitment to deploy closed captioned technology across all its American complexes, commencing within 90 days of a cinema's digital conversion. During his lobbying, Butchko discovered that AMC had already commenced digital cinema and installed the closed caption technology, but was told that technical difficulties prevented the display of movies with captions.

 Through Butchko's advocacy and support from Santa Monica City Council, the cinema has worked out an option to ensure captions are displayed immediately whilst sorting out formal technical arrangements for the long term.

UK cinemas consult on closed caption technology

The UK's Cinema Exhibitors' Association (CEA), representing around 90% of cinema operators, is undertaking research into technologies that assist people who are Deaf or hearing impaired enjoy movies.

Through a survey and invitation to attend an event demonstrating access technologies, the CEA hopes to garner consumer feedback on available technologies which display closed captions in the cinemas. The attendees will watch the Disney animation *Wreck-It Ralph* screened with a range of closed caption devices. They will then share their insights on the devices in a focus group.

The CEA expects to spend most of 2013 testing and trialling equipment that best serves the industry's and customers' needs. The resulting program will replace the current movie arrangements that are restricted to a number of open captioned sessions per week, similar to Australia's accessible cinema program prior to digital conversion.

A working group to assist in the transition has been put together which includes representatives from the CEA, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, Action on Hearing Loss and the National Deaf Children's Society. The UK's accessible movie listing service, Your Local Cinema, is also a member of this group.

Digital technology

Apple TV software update improves accessibility

Apple TVs are now easier to use for everybody after a software update to the device improved access features. Included in this update are support for Bluetooth keyboards and improved access to the Accessibility Menu.

Apple TV is a digital media receiver that can stream content from the internet to a TV. Users can access music, podcasts, apps, TV shows and movies on iTunes, and surf the web on a TV which has the device connected.

Apple TV already included support for VoiceOver, the screen reader that provides access to menus for blind users, and closed captions for those who are Deaf or hearing impaired. These have now been made easier to turn off and on due to the new toggle feature. Once this has been activated, users can quickly turn the Accessibility Menu on and off by pressing and holding the Menu button on the Apple TV remote control.

The Bluetooth keyboard support introduced in this update improves navigation by allowing you to use a keyboard instead of the onscreen keyboard in previous versions, which blind or vision impaired users may prefer.

The Airplay feature allows you to stream videos, such as those from ABC iView, from an Apple computer, iPad or iPhone over wifi. However, the closed captions may not be visible on the TV screen. This feature may also be helpful for people who are vision impaired, as Airplay allows you to mirror your device's screen on to a TV, serving as a magnifier.

Costing $109, it could be an affordable option for people considering upgrading to a smart TV.

A [full list of updates for Apple TV](#) can be found on the Apple website.

American Federation of the Blind launches note-taking app

A specialised iPhone and iPad app called AccessNote has been launched by the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB), enabling blind and vision impaired users around the world to write notes on their phones. With a host of accessibility features including compatibility with braille displays and keyboard navigation, AccessNote is an affordable alternative to traditional note-taking devices.

AccessNote is the first notetaking app specifically designed for blind and vision impaired users, and thus includes VoiceOver support, and adjustable colour contrast and text size.

The AFB is quick to state in the app's description that it has been developed with the classroom in mind. AccessNote provides a simple, low-cost alternative to the expensive and cumbersome braille devices currently used in most schools. Also, with assistive technology integrated into mainstream devices such as the Apple iPhone, blind and vision impaired students can feel far less conspicuous.

AccessNote features:

- Dropbox integration.
- Automatic save feature: This feature takes the hassle out of having to navigate to a separate page to save work.
- Search: This feature allows you to search for a saved note or to search for keywords within the note.
- Customisable keyboard: Custom keyboard shortcuts to navigate and perform tasks.
- The Review feature: This is useful for reviewing your notes as audio. When AccessNote is in Review mode, it reads out your notes so that you don't accidentally alter the file or note you are reviewing. The Review feature also works with a tilt gesture that allows you to skip to the next note. To skip to the next note, tilt the device to the right.
- Cursor tracking: This feature remembers where you have left the cursor in the current note opened so that if you are working with different notes, the app will take you to where you left your cursor when the note was last opened.
- Bluetooth keyboard: The Bluetooth keyboard allows you to use a braille display or wireless Apple keyboard. The braille display can convert your notes to braille, while using the wireless keyboard will allow you to use keyboard shortcuts to navigate the app.

AccessNotes is available world-wide to download from the App Store for $20.99.

FCC awards innovation in technology

The FCC Chairman Awards for Advancement in Accessibility were presented on 19 December by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski. The awards, sponsored by America's communications regulator, the Federal Communications Commission, recognise projects that show innovation in technology for the benefit of people who have a disability.

Six projects won awards and two were given honourable mentions. The awards are part of the FCC's Accessibility and Innovation Initiative which aims to encourage industry, app developers and assistive technology developers, government representatives and consumers to discuss and share solutions for accessible communications technologies.

The six categories for winners were Consumer Empowerment Information, Mobile Applications, Civic Participation Solutions, Education: College or University, Video Programming and Geo-Location Solutions.

The winners for 2012 were:

- Consumer Empowerment Information – Project StAR: Accessible Radio 2012/The Narrator
- Mobile Applications – WGBH National Center for Accessible Media: 'Media Access Mobile'
- Civic Participation Solutions – Prime III: A Universally Designed Voting Machine
- Education: College or University – Project: Possibility SS12 – Code for a Cause Video Programming – Accessible Media Inc. (AMI)
- Geo-Location Services – Tiramisu Transit

The honourable mentions for 2012 were:

- Civic Participation – Google+ Hangouts
- Mobile Applications – Virtual Braille Keyboard

For more information about the Accessibility and Innovation Initiative, see the Broadband.gov website.

Introducing Glassbrick, Australia's home-grown screen magnifier

Have you ever used a piece of technology and thought "I could make a better one of these"? Sierra Asher, a 27-year-old game designer from Brisbane, did just that. The end product is Glassbrick, a screen magnifier for Windows that can meet the demands of hardcore gamers.

Asher works for game design house Halfbrick Studios and is the sole artist behind the hugely popular Jetpack Joyride. He has impaired vision and is reliant on screen magnification software to use computers. A Mac user at home, Asher couldn't find a screen magnifier for PCs that was up to the task.

When Asher first started using PCs he used a hand-held vision aid called a binocular. This helped his vision but only left one hand free for using a mouse and typing. He got an Apple Mac and found the inbuilt Zoom tool made using a computer extremely easy. The trouble was he couldn't find an equivalent tool for the PCs he used at work.

The latest versions of Microsoft Windows come with a Magnifier tool but it lacks the customisations that most users need. Commercial magnifiers are available but many are expensive and come with their own list of problems.

While he was thinking how the screen magnifier could be perfected, Asher was taking a leadership course. This gave him the courage to pitch the idea for his own magnifier to the team at Halfbrick.

"My main goal in designing Glassbrick was to make learning at schools more accessible because I know how hard it was for me," said Asher, who used a hand-held binocular magnifier when he was growing up.

Although Halfbrick's CEO was supportive, getting enough support from the team was a challenge. The current version of Glassbrick was built in just six days.

In many ways, Glassbrick is the equivalent of NVDA, the free screen reader developed by fellow Australians Mick Curran and Jamie Teh. Glassbrick is free, commercial-grade and not-for-profit. Like NVDA, it can be stored on a USB thumb drive so users can carry their assistive technology around in their pocket.

The main advantages of Glassbrick lie in its lightness. It runs comfortably without slowing your system down, making it perfect for use with heavy-duty software such as games and design suites.

The main features include:

- Full screen zooming
- Customisable keyboard shortcuts
- Adjustable mouse tracking speed
- Four different colour modes, including inverse and grey scale
- Mobility: Glassbrick can be stored on a USB thumb drive and moved between computers

With pressure coming from Apple to provide commercial-grade access features out of the box, Microsoft improved its Magnifier tool with the release of Windows 8 in October last year. Like Glassbrick, Magnifier for Windows 8 supports high contrast colour schemes. Unlike Glassbrick,

Magnifier will launch as the computer starts up, making Windows 8 computers continually accessible.

With Halfbrick Studios dedicated to making games, Asher needs time to ensure that the product remains a viable competitor to the technology that comes as a default within devices. With no marketing budget, what Glassbrick needs is users. Asher wants as many people as possible to download the tool and join in the community of users so that he can keep his bosses convinced of the need for making assistive technology as widely available as possible.

If we had Glass: the access potential for Google Glass

In February, Google released a promotional website for its Project Glass, a device worn as glasses which integrates smartphone technology. Among much social media fanfare, Google was quick to sell the device on its potential, inviting Twitter and Google+ users to submit their ideas for how they'd use Glass.

Google has developed Glass as a mainstream technology without its potential as an assistive technology in mind. The magic of the device lies in how third party app developers will take it and apply it to the disability market.

Below are our ideas for how Glass could enhance the lives of people with disability in the future.

Mobility

Glass is designed to work hands-free, enabling people with restricted mobility, such as arthritis or quadriplegia, to perform tasks across the web. Similar to Apple's Siri technology, Glass relies on voice commands, making it ideal for those who have difficulty using standard keypads.

Hearing

While YouTube's auto-captions are proof of how far Google's voice recognition software has to go, Google is working on improving it. Once the software becomes more accurate, we could see Glass being used to convert speech to text, essentially making real life conversation captioned. A similar looking device, Sony's Entertainment Access Glasses, is currently being used in cinemas overseas.

Glass also displays information, superimposing text over what you see through the glasses. This could provide access to information normally communicated aurally, such as train delay announcements.

Vision

Glass is specifically geared towards sighted users but could nevertheless hold access potential for people who are blind or vision impaired. For instance, Glass could integrate facial recognition software so that blind users are made aware of who is in front of them. Similarly, Glass could use optical recognition to read out information such as street signs or identify landmarks.

As reported by technology site The Verge, Google are working towards making a "fully polished" version of Glass available by the end of the year for less than $US1500.

Pressure increases on Amazon as AppleVis campaigns

eBook giant Amazon has been under increasing pressure from disability groups due to its failure to provide accessibility features in its Kindle devices and apps. The latest comes from a campaign run by AppleVis to have Amazon's Kindle app for iOS devices made accessible for blind users.

AppleVis, a popular resource for blind and vision impaired Apple users, has launched a campaign to encourage Amazon to make its Kindle app for iOS compatible with the VoiceOver screen reader. If made, the change would drastically increase the accessibility of eBooks on mobile devices and provide blind customers greater choice.

AppleVis states, "Not only would this be a good commercial decision, but it would simply be the 'right' thing for Amazon to do. As consumers, this would also provide us with some much-needed competition and choice when shopping for eBooks."

Through its Campaign of the Month initiative, AppleVis enables readers to target the developers of inaccessible apps, including CNN, Facebook and Skype, via an accessible petition form. Over 260 people have taken part in the Amazon Kindle app campaign so far.

Top presentations from CSUN 2013

The world's largest accessible technology conference took place in San Diego, California last week. The Annual International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference, commonly known as CSUN, showcases emerging technologies set to make an impact over the coming years. Here, Media Access Australia's Dr Scott Hollier details his favourites.

The open web: where consumer products meet web standards

A big focus of presentations this year was the convergence of consumer products with web standards. This means that more products will be designed in an accessible way that works better with the accessibility features on popular devices.

A great example of this was the demonstration of Mozilla's operating system Firefox OS, which is likely to appear on smartphones and tablets later in the year. Firefox OS is based almost entirely on web standards, removing the restrictions from private companies to create apps for it. Firefox OS also comes with a built-in screen reader which was demonstrated at the conference.

Google updates its Google Apps accessibility guides

Google used CSUN as an opportunity to bring its accessibility resources for Google Apps together and improve their readability. These include a number of tips around using the accessibility features in Google's products and helpful keyboard shortcut information. The resources guide people on how to get started with Google Apps for blind and low-vision users, Chrome and ChromeVox, Google Drive files and folders, Google Drive Documents, Google Drive Sheets, Google Drive Slides, Gmail and Calendar.

Android accessibility: 4.2 and beyond

Several presentations focused on the rapid evolution of Google Android accessibility including the significant improvements to the compatibility of apps with TalkBack, Android's screen reader. There was also discussion around screen magnification and other potential new benefits as Android continues to catch up to Apple on accessibility.

Windows 8 – the good, the bad and the inaccessible

A new addition to CSUN this year was presentations looking at the accessibility of Windows 8. Microsoft's latest operating system is radically different and generally considered to be a significant improvement over earlier versions with a touch-enabled Magnifier and significantly updated Narrator screen reader. However, issues around the accessibility of apps in the new Windows Store and the challenges of toggling between traditional and new applications have proved to be points for discussion this year.

Online media

MAA report spearheads progress on social media accessibility

In March 2012, Media Access Australia released *sociABILITY: social media for people with a disability*. The project was the first of its kind and is now being used as a keystone in a global push towards recognising people with disability as a large and influential audience on social media.

While social media networks still present access barriers, there are steps organisations and individuals can take to reduce them. For instance, Facebook does not let you provide alternative text for images and so Media Access Australia provides this in the first comment below the image. Similarly, when posting a link to a video we will always mention whether it is captioned or audio described.

The United States Government has recently published a how-to guide for creating accessible social media content which uses *sociABILITY* as a source of information. *Improving the Accessibility of Social Media in Government* guides people within government agencies on making Facebook, Twitter and YouTube content as accessible as possible.

This is indicative of a global trend. Once organisations and governments move towards making their websites accessible through such schemes as Australia's National Transition Strategy, the scope gradually widens to include content put elsewhere on the web.

sociABILITY: social media for people with a disability, written by MAA's Dr Scott Hollier, talks through the barriers found on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Skype and blogging, and guides users on overcoming them. The awareness this raises about the needs of people with disability online is vital for those who manage communities.

It can be downloaded via Media Access Australia.

Blindy.TV: a new online audio description service

Blindy.TV, which describes itself as "your accessible couch potato experience", is a new free online service created by blind people that provides five channels of audio described programming which can be listened to on its built-in media player, or on an external player.

According to its website, "The entire service is a labor of love. Blindy.TV has no assets. The server space, bandwidth, content production, and everything else that collectively forms Blindy.TV are provided through the uncompensated contributions of like-minded people. We have no revenue, and we don't accept any cash donations."

The programs available on Blindy.TV come from a variety of sources, and include programs recorded off air in locations where audio description is available. There are currently five channels on Blindy.TV: Comedy, Drama, Scifi, Brain and ETC. All programs, which are generally older episodes of TV series, are 30 or 60 minutes long and interspersed with news segments, comedy skits and music.

The creators of Blindy.TV see it as a stopgap measure, until the mainstream media embrace audio description. "We hope that you will enjoy what we have made," they write, "but we don't want people to forget that equal access to mainstream media, not some Blindy TV, is the real goal."

Deaf consumer groups file complaint against Amazon for lack of captions

Seven American deaf consumer groups have [filed a complaint](#) with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), accusing Amazon of violating new rules requiring the captioning of TV programs made available online.

The new rules are included in the *Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act*, and came into effect on 30 September 2012. They state that most full-length, non-live programming must be captioned if previously broadcast on television with captions. Monitoring of programming available on Amazon's 'Instant Video' service in October and November showed that between one and eighteen programs a day were not captioned which should have been. They included popular programs such as *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* and *Fringe*.

The groups which filed the complaint include the National Association of the Deaf, Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network. They contend that Amazon has no excuse for failing to caption these programs, considering that it was a participant in the FCC's Video Programming Accessibility Committee, which determined how the new rules regarding caption of online videos were to be implemented.

Older people with sight loss excluded online

Research conducted by the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) and BT Group in the UK has highlighted the impact of older people being excluded online.

The study, *[Tackling Digital Exclusion](#),* found that 87% of older people who are blind or partially sighted have never used the internet. Researchers attribute this to a perception amongst this group that blindness or low vision makes using computers and websites impossible. The report also identified that many respondents felt they didn't have the necessary knowledge and skills to get online, and that a third of the people surveyed lack the accessibility software they need.

The research combined a survey of 150 blind and 150 partially sighted people over 65 who were not internet users, seven discussion groups and 70 face-to-face interviews. Author Angela Edwards also sought insight from those involved in training older people on computer and internet use.

Online participation for older people with disabilities is a huge problem globally, with exclusion from the internet preventing social interaction, access to health and social services, and information on news and current affairs. As the risk of becoming disabled increases heavily as people age, it is vital that seniors are equipped with the information they need to stay online despite any sensory, mobility or cognitive impairments that may develop over time.

Job search site launches accessible websites in the US and Australia

A US-based job search and recruitment website has made job hunting easier for people with a disability by making the site more accessible. Working with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), Monster is the first job search website in the US to incorporate the needs of blind and vision impaired job seekers in the design and development of its website. The changes have also been incorporated into Monster's Australian website, CareerOne.

Monster.com is a job network where employment agencies can post jobs and job seekers can search and apply for jobs. Currently, Monster has websites in 40 countries, including China, Hong Kong, the UK and Australia.

Identifying the barriers faced by people who are blind when looking for jobs online, the NFB and Monster have been working together over the past year to come up with a plan to increase employment participation amongst the estimated 21.2 million American adults with vision loss.

In a statement, Monster's Martha Coakley said, "Unemployment and underemployment in the blind community are significant problems and given the extent to which computers and the Internet have become integral to our daily lives, it is essential that websites are accessible to everyone."

The agreement between Monster and the NFB will see several improvements made to the website including:

- All forms and search functions within the site have been made accessible to screen reader users.
- In addition to the website, Monster will make its mobile apps accessible within the next two years.
- Monster will ensure employment agencies use an accessible template when posting jobs to the site so that it is easier to navigate with a keyboard, screen reader and braille devices.
- Improve how the website works with text-to-speech technologies, screen readers and braille devices. This is useful for blind or vision impaired job seekers in particular. Text-to-speech technology converts text content to audible speech.
- Improve how the website works with braille devices so blind job seekers can access the content when a braille device is connected.
- Monster also plans to train its staff and representatives on how to provide assistance to blind customers.

In addition, Monster will contribute $50,000 to a job internship program that will be run by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. To oversee the process of improving Monster's website and services for people with a disability, a committee will be set up. This committee will also work to keep improving the accessibility of Monster's products and services.

Shortly after announcing the changes to its US website, Monster confirmed that they would be extended to CareerOne in Australia. CareerOne has stated that it is "continuously improving our website and working to make it more accessible".

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2009 only 54% of working age people with a disability participated in the workforce compared to 83% of working age people who did not have a disability. The working age was defined in this report as 15–64 years old.

As one of the most visited job search websites in Australia, CareerOne's accessibility overhaul is a positive step towards helping the disability community overcome barriers when looking and applying for jobs.

Glossary

Audio description: The descriptive narration of all the visual elements of a TV program, movie, DVD, performance or other media, giving access for the blind or vision impaired. AD may be pre-recorded and delivered as an option for television programs or DVDs, or it may be performed live (e.g. for a theatrical performance).

Captions: A transcription of the audio elements of a TV program, movie, DVD, performance or other media, giving access for the Deaf and hearing impaired. Unlike subtitles, captions include song lyrics, descriptions of sound effects and music, and are often positioned and coloured so as to make it easier for the viewer to identify who is speaking. Captions may be divided into:

- Open captions: Captions which are 'burnt onto' a video or digital image and will be seen by anyone who looks at it, and

- Closed captions: Captions which a viewer chooses to see (e.g. by accessing teletext captions on TV, or activating the captions on a DVD).

Signing: Access to a TV program, movie, DVD, performance or other media via a signer using one of the various Deaf sign languages, e.g. Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Some TV programs in the US and UK have a signer occupying a space on the screen.

Stenocaptioner: A highly trained captioner who captions live programs using a stenographic keyboard.

Subtitles: This generally refers to English translations of foreign language TV programs or movies, presented as text at the bottom of the screen. It can also be a straight transcription of the dialogue of an English language program (this is a common feature on DVDs). Note however that captions are often called subtitles in the UK and other parts of Europe.

Teletext: The broadcast data delivery system used in Australia to transmit captions on analog television.

Acronyms

ACE	Australian Communications Exchange
ACCAN	Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
AD	Audio description
AFB	American Foundation of the Blind
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AHEDA	Australian Home Entertainment Distributors Association
CEN	Cinema Exhibitors' Association (UK)
CRTC	Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (US)

MAA	Media Access Australia
NFB	National Federation of the Blind (US)