The Media Access Report

Issue 25, Summer 2013

MEDIA
ACCESS
AUSTRALIA
INCLUSION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Contents

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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Media access news

Captioning Award winners announced

On 25 October the Deafness Forum of Australia celebrated the achievements of the media and entertainment industry in providing access to the one in six Australians who are Deaf or hearing impaired. Hosted by Rodney Adams, an Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf, the evening was a celebration of the impact of captions on literacy, human rights and social inclusion.

The winners in each category were:

- TV Captioning: Nine Network for providing captions on 300 hours of Olympics coverage, particularly outside primetime.
- Entertainment, Cinema & the Arts: the Sydney Opera House for its continued provision of captions across its performance program.
- Online Captioning & Digital Innovation: SBS for becoming the second television network to provide captions for its catch-up TV service.
- Captions for Kids: Parliamentary Education Office for captioning every video available on its website.
- Organisational Commitment to Captioning: Showtime for captioning 80-90 per cent of its programming.
- Roma Wood Community Award: Senator Ursula Stephens for her work as a patron for Media Access Australia's captions in schools campaign, **cap that!**, and political support of captioning.

The awards were judged independently by Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes, Hear For You's Managing Director Olivia Anderson and Media Access Australia CEO Alex Varley.

Varley said of the judging process:

What the judges were really looking for was something beyond the ordinary. Australia now has locked-in quotas for captioning and meeting those alone is not worthy of an award. Nine Network's efforts with the Olympics were about captioning between midnight and 6am which took extensive resources and organisation, but was very important for access to the biggest sporting spectacle in the world.

Innovation is a key feature of Australian media, and access needs to keep pace with that. With SBS's catch-up TV captioning, not only has it provided a great service that most television networks do not offer, but the technology behind it means that it is sustainable and cost effective. This means that captioning has become a core part of the product, just like sound and video.

The Captioning Awards are not just about the big networks and major media players. Sustained effort and commitment also occurs at a more local level. The work of Jenny Spinak at the Sydney Opera House has been built up over a decade and is now part of the psyche of the venue.

Deafness Forum of Australia's ambassador, Senator Rachel Siewart, spoke about her mother's experience of hearing loss and the difference quality captions can make to people's feeling of being included in society.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes A.M., Auslan interpreter Rebecca Ladd, Greens Senator Rachel Siewert and host Rodney Adams discuss captioning and disability rights at the Deafness Forum Captioning Awards.

Accessibility achievements honoured at National Disability Awards

Individuals and organisations committed to improving access to media for the disabled were honoured at the National Disability Awards, which were held at the National Gallery of Australia on 28 November.

Michael Small, formerly of the Australian Human Rights Commission, was a joint winner of the Minister's Award for Excellence in Disability Reform. During his time at the commission, Small was instrumental in achieving significant improvements in access to television, cinema and DVDs through increased levels of captioning.

The joint winners of the Excellence in Improving Social Participation Award were the Australian Communications Exchange (ACE) and the Captioning Studio. ACE was commended for its video relay service, captioned phone service and phone apps including OpenMi, which was launched in 2011 and provides visitors to museums and other venues with guided tours in Auslan (Australian sign language) on their smartphones.

The Captioning Studio was recognised for its work promoting and providing access for the Deaf and hearing impaired through its captioning for theatre and live events, and innovative use of technology.

Senator the Hon Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Carers, presented the winners with their awards. The full list of finalists and winners is available on the International Day of People with Disability website: http://www.idpwd.com.au/awards/

Highlights of the Languages and the Media conference

The Languages and the Media conference, the premier access conference in the world, was held in Berlin on 21-23 November 2012. Media Access Australia's CEO, Alex Varley, gave a presentation at the conference in which he asked the question 'Does measuring subtitle quality actually make a difference?' Varley here provides his personal top 5 trends and highlights from the conference which are set to make a difference to the world of access.

1. Audio description is now a major topic

Audio description has reached the same level of importance as captioning and there were a number of presentations around AD issues. A major issue in Europe is whether a country uses subtitles for foreign programs on TV (such as American shows) or dubs them using a local voiceover. For subtitling countries, there has been a growth in so-called audio subtitling. This is a service where the subtitles are read out as part of the soundtrack for people who are blind or vision impaired and don't speak the language. Linked in with this is standard audio description which describes the visual elements, and there were major discussions around how to separate these elements. Do you use different voices? Do the audio subtitles include emotion and other characteristics of the speech?

2. Caption quality still remains a key problem

My presentation looked at the use of measurements in caption quality and whether an overemphasis on this creates its own problems and how the new draft Australian standard deals with this. Co-presenters looked at the situation in France, where there are many variations of

identifying who is speaking and each one uses specific colours and punctuation marks. This adds significant cost to creating captions. In Italy, there is a problem of no standards and no basis for agreement of standards, so little progress is being made.

3. Automated processes are getting better

'Machine translation', where software creates captions and audio description, is improving in quality and increasing in usage. Captioners and describers/actors are not entirely happy with these developments, but the production companies can see massive cost-saving opportunities. People seem less worried about the synthetic voices used for automatic audio description, particularly those who are used to screen readers. (See story below.)

4. Globalisation means standardisation is essential

Many program providers (including Discovery and Viacom) operate on a global scale, delivering the same programs across many countries. In most cases, the graphics, menus and on-screen text are provided in the local language. This means that they need a standard version of the program that they can localise. The impact on access is that unique country-specific rules (such as the French captioning example mentioned above) make this process more difficult.

5. You always need to talk to the viewers

Whether you are trying to evaluate whether blind people appreciate more complex audio description, or looking at an accessibility app for museums, such as the one presented by Australian Communication Exchange, now more than ever, it is important that you talk to the audience as you develop new techniques. This is both a communications issue and also a practical one in that more complexity is not always the best thing.

Overall, the strongest message is that discussions are no longer about whether access is a good idea or not, but how the product can be improved and made more cost-effective.

A summary of Varley's presentation on measuring caption quality is available Media Access Australia website.

Alex Varley presenting at the Languages and the Media Conference 2012

Can machines make audio description easier?

The question of whether automated tools help or hinder the production of access services, such as audio description, was a much discussed topic at the Languages and the Media conference held in Berlin in November.

The main issue is the effect of replacing a human voice with a synthetic one on the experience for the viewer. This and a number of other potential issues are discussed in more detail below.

Are machine voices less effective than human voices?

Beatrice Caruso of SWISS TXT Ltd argues that we should take our cues from the intended audience for audio description. Blind people are used to artificial voices that are already used for screen readers, navigation devices and smart phones (often with a choice of the voice). These voices have become more 'natural' over time as well.

Aline Remael from the University of Antwerp has undertaken work looking at translation of audio description from one language to another and how audio description works with audio subtitles (on a subtitled film where the subtitles are read out so that a blind person can access them). She suggests that machine voices can be used to distinguish the audio subtitling and audio description from the human dialogue in the soundtrack, making it easier to distinguish the different elements. Remael speculates whether this could be further used in the future by having multiple artificial voices.

Are there cost efficiencies from using machine voices?

Caruso argues that replacing the voice talent with a machine means you don't have to pay the voice talent. However, this is not the only saving. By not having a human working in a studio at a particular time, you can edit, fix, change and modify the description anytime and the machine will 'revoice' it as required. Furthermore, this means that the editors and quality control functions can work in their own time and off-site.

Anecdotally, the Canadians report that the voiceover talent is paid six times more per hour than the person creating the audio description. It should be noted that the recording of the voice is a small portion of the audio description task. In many cases, the person writing the description also records it.

Is the quality from a machine less than using a human?

Again, Caruso argues that poor quality is inevitably down to poor scripting, not the method used for voice over. Furthermore, the speech synthesis system used by SWISS TXT Ltd identifies any words that are unknown and thus have to be transcribed phonetically to ensure that they are pronounced properly. These improvements to the system's lexicon are saved to constantly improve the synthesis engine.

Where to next?

Matamala, Fernandez and Cortiz from the Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona are doing further research into the acceptability/comprehension of audio description using machine voices for blind people. They are working primarily in Catalan and Spanish, which have fewer choices of different synthesised voices to English, however their preliminary work suggests that synthesised voices are acceptable to blind audiences.

Television

ACMA releases draft television captioning standard

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has released a draft of the new standard covering caption quality on free-to-air and subscription television.

In June 2012, the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (BSA) was amended to include increased quotas for captioning on free-to-air television, and to introduce quotas for captioning on subscription television. The amendments also state that captions must be of adequate quality, based on factors including readability, comprehensibility and accuracy. The ACMA was given the task of developing a standard which it could use to determine whether broadcasters are fulfilling their new caption quality obligations.

The ACMA held a series of meetings with the television industry, caption suppliers and community representatives to seek input in formulating the *Broadcasting Services (Television Captioning) Standard 2013*. In a consultation paper, the ACMA explains that it has taken "a holistic approach to considering the quality of a captioning service". In the consultative meetings, the community representatives argued that pre-prepared captions were always preferable to live captions for consumers, and should be provided whenever possible, but the ACMA has decided "not to specify a preference for how programs should be captioned". Instead it will "focus on the outcome for viewers, regardless of the captioning method used".

The ACMA has decided against using 'metrics' to gauge caption quality (such as a minimum accuracy rate or, for live captioning, a minimum time lag between the audio and captions appearing on the screen). "The use of metrics," the ACMA states, "could create a narrow focus that would detract from considering whether a captioning error, or a particular time lag, affected whether the captioning service was meaningful to deaf and hearing-impaired viewers."

The ACMA has invited interested parties to submit comments on the draft standards. The closing date for submissions is 22 January 2013.

The consultation paper and draft standard can be downloaded from the ACMA website:

ACCAN launches caption quality campaign

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is seeking Caption Campaigners who can monitor TV programs and report on poor quality captioning.

The campaign, which has been organised in conjunction with the Deafness Forum and Deaf Australia, comes after amendments to the *Broadcasting Services Act*, which took effect in June 2012, make captions of adequate quality a television license condition. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has been given increased powers to ensure caption quality on both free-to-air and subscription television, and released a draft of its quality guidelines for public comment on 5 December. (See above story.)

Most of the problems with captioning on Australian TV relate to live captioning, which is becoming increasingly common. Caption Campaigners will be looking for programs on which the captions are

incomprehensible, missing words or are poorly synchronised with the audio. ACCAN will provide them with all the information they need to lodge effective complaints with the ACMA.

Audio description trial hailed a great success

The trial of audio description on Australian television ended on 4 November on ABC1, with the Australian drama *Dangerous Remedy* being the last program to be described for blind and vision impaired viewers.

Since the trial commenced on 5 August, an average of two hours of audio described content was broadcast each night. Other Australian programs described during the trial included *Rake, Lowdown* and *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*.

"The ABC is to be commended for doing such a good job with the trial," said Chris Mikul from Media Access Australia. "The quality of the audio description, particularly on the locally produced shows, has been terrific."

During the last weeks of the trial, a campaign, *It's As Easy As ABC*, saw over 30,000 postcards addressed to Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy and ABC Managing Director Mark Scott, asking them to keep the service going.

Senator Conroy stated in a media release, "The audio description trial is an important first step on the pathway to establishing a permanent audio description service on Australian television, and we were pleased to be able to provide funding for it in very tight economic circumstances."

Lauren Henley, a spokesperson for the *It's As Easy As ABC* campaign, said, "There are some technical aspects of the trial that need to be ironed out, but we're hopeful that the government can work through those as quickly as possible to get audio description back on our ABC and across all television networks."

The ABC has prepared a report on technical aspects of the trial which the Federal Government is now considering. Senator Conroy has stated that the government will work cooperatively with interested parties, including blind and vision impaired viewers, to ensure audio described TV can be delivered in the future.

Aussie TV finds its voice

MAA's Eliza Cussen met with some of the talented captioners turned describers who provided audio description for the recent trial on ABC TV.

A man walks into a bar.

Or is it a restaurant? Maybe it's a train station. Or it could be a hospital and the man is actually a woman.

This is the process each of Australia's 600,000 blind and vision impaired people go through when they watch TV. Dialogue, music and sound effects go a long way to telling a story. But without knowing what's on screen, watching TV becomes a guessing game.

That's where audio description (AD) comes in. AD is a track of narration which describes important visual elements of a TV show, movie or performance. It's delivered between lines of dialogue and means that those who are blind or vision impaired can switch it on to keep up with the action without relying on other people to fill them in.

AD is widely available on TV in the UK, USA, Canada, Europe and New Zealand. Audio described movies are available at 60 cinemas across Australia and on almost half of all new release DVDs sold. Yet Australian TV falls far behind.

In August, the ABC began a trial to test if AD could be delivered on its airwaves. For a few hours each night on ABC1 over the next thirteen weeks, blind and vision impaired Australians could enjoy TV, too.

Lauren Henley from Blind Citizens Australia said, "I have rarely sat down to enjoy a television program since becoming blind. It's too hard to follow what's happening and it just leaves me feeling frustrated.

"When I accessed the audio description service for the first time I was surrounded by friends who are also blind or vision impaired… It was fantastic to be able to collectively enjoy a program that was also being viewed by thousands of sighted people around the country, without missing out on vital information and without needing someone sighted to describe things. It gave me a true sense of empowerment and independence."

Legal drama *Rake* received the honour of being the first Australian show to be broadcast with AD. Henley found that this was the best example of the "phenomenal" description that's been delivered so far.

As the program's soundtrack offers banging, crashing and paper shuffling, the audio description gave an explanation:

> *Cleaver turns his apartment upside down as he frantically searches for something. He pulls pictures off the wall, and rummages through piles of books. He searches through his clothes and looks under the bed.*

Captioning and Subtitling International (CSI) and Red Bee Media were the two companies which provided AD for the ABC's trial. It's an extensive process involving writers, editors and voicers. Everyone involved had a background in captioning, and becoming audio describers let head writer Sharmishta Sarkar and head voicer Carmel Sealey of CSI release their creative side. It's a delicate art.

There are a number of challenges: making sure you're not repetitive, making sure you can fit it in between dialogue, making sure the emotion of the scene is portrayed in the delivery as well as the script.

"We have to be very careful that we don't interpret those actions," said Sarkar. "It's basically allowing the blind person to interpret for himself or herself. What you see is what you say."

During the transformation from captioners to audio describers, Sarkar and Sealey were set the challenge to come up with as many ways as possible to phrase "a man walks into the room". Using words such as 'stumbles', 'leaps' and 'breaks into', Sealey came up with 127. Sarkar reached 60.

Carmel Sealey in the recording booth

"Carmel's a natural, it's quite bizarre," said her boss, Michelle Kwan. "Carmel has a neutral Aussie voice. It's very clear. She can throw tone in to it as well. Some voicers just read, Carmel doesn't just read. You want to feel like the voicer is sitting next to you at home in the lounge room, not someone who's reading a book next to you."

"When there's romance you don't want to say it too dispassionately because it kills the mood," said Sealey. Describers have to say what they see, and that includes all the sex and violence that Australian drama is famous for. "If someone's getting shagged you have to say 'someone's getting shagged'," said Sarkar. "There's no way 'having sex' can explain what's happening."

For Sarkar, nothing has posed such a challenge as writing for *The Slap.* One scene in particular many readers will surely remember. In Episode Four, *Connie,* Hector drives the babysitter home. "When I first saw the scene I thought 'Oh god, how are they going to be able to get around this?'" said Kwan.

But Sarkar found a way. "I can't sound salacious. I can't say he's doing whatever he's doing. So I had to work around it and say he's got his hands through her unzipped jeans. Then his fingers wriggle in and out… of the jeans."

But that's Australian drama. The ABC sets itself the task of making and broadcasting programs that push the boundaries. The Australian content in the AD trial included the criminal drama *Jack Irish, Lowdown,* the comedy set in a tabloid paper, and the comedy that makes describers squirm, *Summer Heights High.* The ABC tells Australian stories with an Australian voice. And CSI was in the privileged position of setting the standard for what Australian audio description sounds like.

Henley, who has been listening to audio description imported from the UK and USA for years, had her doubts. "I didn't think locally produced content would be able to meet the same standard. But I've been really impressed with the level of detail provided and I think the Australian describers have done a fantastic job."

This opinion was shared by Geoff Cousins, who oversaw audio described content for the ABC during the trial. "All programs require sympathetic treatment, such as the gender or accent of the voice over, to ensure the commentary subtly complements the program rather than overwhelm the viewer," said Cousins.

Greens Senators support audio description

Senator Scott Ludlam, Greens spokesperson for communications, and Senator Rachel Siewert, Greens spokesperson for disability, have urged the Government to follow through on its commitment to working towards a permanent audio description service on Australian television.

Following the 13-week trial of AD on ABC1, which ended on 4 November, Senator Ludlam moved a motion that requested the Senate to officially note:

- The strong popularity of audio described TV during the trial.
- The technical issues identified by the ABC will be reported to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy by the end of 2012.
- The Minister has indicated that he will work with all parties to resolve the technical issues involved in providing a permanent service.

In addition, Senator Ludlam called on the Government to make the ABC's technical report available to the public and, subject to the report's findings, to consider including funding for audio description in the ABC's triennial funding process taking place this year.

Once the ABC's report is released, Media Access Australia, along with blind and vision impaired member organisations, will work with the ABC and the Minister to help resolve any technical issues it raises.

Audio description comes to New Zealand subscription TV

The audio description service which has been provided on the free-to-air channels TV One and TV2 since 2011 will now be available to people who watch them through SKY TV, after a NZ$50,000 upgrade.

"This is fantastic news for all blind and vision impaired New Zealanders," said Clive Lansink, National President of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand. "We are grateful SKY has made this service available and, for some, it really will be life-changing."

The audio description service, funded by NZ On Air, began after a trial in early 2011, and has now risen to 20 hours of audio described programs per week.

A Charlie Chaplin classic gets the audio description treatment

Canadian access company Descriptive Video Works has audio described the vintage silent film *The Gold Rush* to bring to life one of Charlie Chaplin's most famous works for the blind and vision impaired.

Audio description is normally provided for content that has a range of other aural elements, such as dialogue, sound effects and music, all of which play important roles in storytelling. The challenge presented by a silent film for audio describers is that apart from music, all elements of the movie must be described, as there is no dialogue or sound effects.

Descriptive Video Works, a Vancouver-based provider of captioned and audio described content for TV, cinema, theatre and video, was tasked with the job of describing *The Gold Rush* for TV Channel Zero. This is one of the first classic silent films to have been given an audio description soundtrack, opening up a new genre for vision impaired film lovers to enjoy.

The Academy Award winning box office hit *The Artist* was audio described when it was released in 2012. A tribute to the golden age of silent film, the movie demonstrated that even the most visually-dominant content can provide a rich and enjoyable experience for blind and vision impaired audiences.

Captioning bill introduced in the Philippines

Two members of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Irwin Tieng and Mariano Michael Maloney, have introduced a bill requiring closed captioning of television programs.

Tieng described captions as "a critical link to news, entertainment and information for individuals with hearing disabilities". The bill exempts from captioning requirements public service announcements of less than 10 minutes, programs broadcast between 1am and 6am, and text-based programs.

Individuals who are found to have breached the rules will be liable for a fine of between P50,000 and P100,000 (AU$1,167 to AU$2,334), or imprisonment for between six months or a year, or both.

If the bill is passed, the National Telecommunications Commission and the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board will be mandated to create, in consultation with others, the rules and regulations for captioning.

DVD

Access on new release DVDs

21 movies were released on DVD in October and November 2012 with closed captions and audio description. Of the 69 titles Media Access Australia researched, 53 were captioned (or 77 per cent) and 21 described (or 30 per cent).

Distributors 20th Century Fox, Eagle, Paramount, Pinnacle, Rialto 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 titles with both audio description and captions are:
- *The Amazing Spiderman*
- *Arthur Christmas*
- *The Awakening*
- *The Cabin in the Woods*
- *The Cold Light of Day* (no CC logo on packaging)
- *The Dictator*
- *Friends with Kids*
- *Howzat*
- *Katy Perry, the Movie: Part of Me*
- *Life Happens*
- *Men in Black 3*
- *Pirates: Band of Misfits*

- *Piranha 3DD*
- *Prometheus*
- *Rock of Ages* (no CC logo on packaging)
- *Santa's Apprentice*
- *Seeking Justice*
- *Snow White and the Huntsman*
- *That's My Boy*
- *The Three Stooges*
- *What to Expect When You're Expecting*

Education

ABC launches new education site with captioned videos

The ABC has partnered with Education Services Australia in launching Splash, a new educational website offering a range of multimedia resources including captioned content.

Splash provides free articles, videos, audio clips and games linked to the new Australian Curriculum. The extensive online library covers maths, English, history and science for primary and secondary students up to Year 10, with other subjects to be added in future.

The site also gives teachers topic collections and ideas for incorporating Splash content into the classroom, as well as useful tips for parents.

Importantly, each video on Splash is closed captioned, so that Deaf and hearing impaired students can access the content and teachers can make use of captions as a literacy-boosting tool. To turn on the captions, hover over the 'CC' button at the bottom right corner of a video and click on 'Eng' which should appear above. Transcripts are also available for videos and audio clips on the site.

Captions have long been demonstrated to assist all students, and particularly those who are Deaf or hearing impaired, have a language background other than English, have learning disabilities or are struggling readers. Media Access Australia's education campaign, **cap that!**, runs in the lead-up to National Literacy and Numeracy Week and encourages teachers to turn on captions whenever they use video resources in the classroom.

The Splash website is currently in its beta stage and the ABC is seeking advice from teachers, parents and students on how it can be improved.

Cinema and the arts

Australian cinemas win human rights award

Australia's four major cinema chains of Hoyts, Village, Event/Greater Union/Birch Carroll & Coyle and Reading won the 2012 Human Rights Award in the business category, announced in Sydney on 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

The awards honour the contributions each nominee has made to the protection and promotion of human rights. The Business Award recognises a business that, through its activities, has made a commitment to the promotion and advancement of human rights and/or human rights principles in the Australian community.

The cinemas' nomination for their commitment to providing closed captioning and audio description in every complex by the end of 2014 highlighted how the four traditional competitors have worked together to improve access to a favourite form of entertainment.

The win caps off the first two years of the four-year Cinema Access Implementation Plan, which will see all complexes across the chains converting to digital based technology including more flexible means to deliver accessible screenings for people who are Deaf, hearing impaired, blind or vision impaired.

At the halfway mark of the plan, the only one of its kind in the world, Village Cinemas has completed the conversion across all but one of its complexes, and both Hoyts and Event cinemas are well over the halfway mark. The cinemas expect to complete the entire rollout well ahead of the given deadline of December 2014.

Media Access Australia extends its congratulations to the cinemas and looks forward to the continued introduction of accessible sessions in major and independent movie complexes across the country.

Major American cinema chain embraces audio description

Cinemark, one of the world's largest movie distributors, has committed to providing audio description in all of its cinemas screening first-run movies by mid-2013.

In rolling out the audio description, which is being done in conjunction with the conversion of its cinemas to digital technology, Cinemark has worked closely with the California Council of the Blind (CBC). All of Cinemark's Californian cinemas are already providing audio description.

In a report on the announcement on DailyFinance, Donna Pomerantz, President of CBC, said, "We are pleased with Cinemark's support for audio description. This national initiative makes first-run movies available to millions of patrons who are blind and visually impaired."

Cinemark has adopted the Fidelio audio description system developed by the Californian company Doremi. This is the same system currently being installed in Australian cinemas as part of the Cinema Access Implementation Plan brokered between the Federal Government and the four major cinema chains, Hoyts, Village, Event and Reading. By the end of 2014, there will be 242 screens enabled for audio description across 132 locations.

Access to cinema promoted in UK and US

Organisations in the UK and US have recently produced advertising campaigns to promote movies with audio description and captions to the general public.

In the United Kingdom, the Cinema Exhibitors' Association (CEA) has jointly produced a captioned and audio described advertisement to raise awareness of accessible movies to the general public.

The advertisement has been produced using the 2011 movie *Top Cat* and follows on from two previously successful accessible cinema trailers. You can view it on the CEA website.

In producing the advertisement the CEA, which represents over 90 per cent of UK cinema operators, collaborated with its Disability Working Group and received assistance from Paramount DreamWorks Pictures, Vertigo, ITFC, Deluxe Digital London and the British Board of Film Classification, demonstrating whole-of-industry support for accessible cinema.

Over in the US, Regal Entertainment Group has launched a video clip on YouTube promoting its adoption of Sony's Entertainment Access System, which allows patrons to watch closed captions or listen to audio description.

Regal Entertainment Group owns and operates the largest circuit of cinemas in the US, with 200 of their cinemas already offering the system for both 2D and 3D movies. It expects to complete the rollout of the Sony technology in its 522 cinemas by April 2013.

Major cinema chains in Australia are part way through a four-year rollout of accessible cinema technology.

Digital technology

Windows 8 introduces accessibility features for touch-enabled devices

On 25 October, Microsoft launched Windows 8 and its tablet version, Windows RT, the latest operating system for computers and tablets. Rather than simply building on its predecessor, Windows 7, Windows 8 provides an overhaul of the operating system's design.

As well as new features intended to help Microsoft compete with Apple and Google Android, such as an app store, Windows 8 is the first version since Windows 2000 to include radically enhanced access features.

Accessibility features

The built-in accessibility features have been updated to work with touchscreen devices, including the first major update to the Narrator screen reader since the release of Windows 2000 twelve years ago. In addition, some new features have been added to make it easier for a user to have accessibility features start as soon as the computer is switched on.

The following assistive features have been updated or introduced:

- Narrator: improved performance, extra language support, new voices, better application support and touch-enabled.
- Magnifier: support for high contrast colour schemes and a new interface for touchscreen devices.
- Sign-in settings: allows the user to select which built-in accessibility features launch as the computer starts up.
- Accessible apps: the new Windows Store 8 allows the user to search only for apps which the developer has certified as accessible. There are also features that can help developers create accessible applications.

Differences between Windows and Windows RT

While the built-in accessibility features have been significantly improved, consumers should be aware that there are two variants of the new Windows operating system: Windows 8 and Windows RT.

Windows 8 is designed as an upgrade to Windows 7, featuring access to both new touch-based and traditional applications, while Windows RT is only available on tablet computers.

While the built-in accessibility features in Windows 8 and Windows RT are essentially the same, Windows RT can only use applications from the Windows Store, which works in a similar way to other app stores such as Apple's app store and Google Play. As a result, existing assistive technologies designed for Windows XP, Vista or 7 cannot be installed on Windows RT.

Accessibility review: Microsoft Surface tablet

Microsoft's Surface tablet has promised to deliver the best of both worlds: an easy-to-use tablet for games and entertainment but also a serious productivity device that has a detachable keyboard, trackpad and Office software. Our interest though lies in its accessibility – is it a worthy purchase for people with disabilities? Dr Scott Hollier road tested the Surface tablet to find out how it fares for accessibility.

Hardware
There are a number of features which make the tablet easy to use and versatile:

- Magnetised power connection: just wave the power connector on the right hand side of the tablet and it almost plugs itself in.
- Windows button: at the bottom centre of the screen is a non-raised 'Windows' button which is difficult to find but vibrates when your finger passes over it.
- Kickstand: allows you to stand the tablet up like a laptop screen.
- In-built ports: includes an SD card reader and USB port.
- Screen: 10.6 inch widescreen.
- Volume and power keys: you can adjust the volume and turn on the power through physical keys raised for easy access.
- Touch and type cover.
- Aside from the kickstand, the big talking point of the Surface is its Touch cover which is a keyboard, trackpad and screen protector all rolled into one. The Touch cover feels like a rubber mat which can be attached to the tablet through magnetic connecters. Like the power plug, it's great as a vision impaired user to be able to put the Touch cover on the desk, wave the tablet near it and have the two connect with a satisfying 'click' noise.
- Using the Touch cover takes a bit of getting used to. Unlike a regular keyboard, the Touch cover has no tactile feedback so it feels a bit like typing on a rubber mat. However, it's surprisingly effective with a bit of practice. The main difficulty I've had is finding the command keys like ALT and CTRL, as the keys at the bottom half of the Touch cover keyboard aren't as distinctive without tactile feedback to identify them.

Microsoft also offers the Type cover for the Surface, which should offer a more natural typing experience. The Type cover is a slim, traditional keyboard that doubles as a cover for the tablet. Alternatively you can plug in a full-sized keyboard using the USB port.

Using the Touch cover is similar to typing on a netbook with the added feature of a touchscreen.

Windows 8 vs Windows RT
Surface comes installed with Windows RT, a 'light' version of Windows 8. Another version of the Surface will be released in early 2013 which will run on Windows 8 Pro.

For accessibility testing purposes, Windows RT and Windows 8 Pro are identical in their built-in accessibility features. However, the RT version of Surface cannot run traditional software, only apps available in the new Windows Store. So if you want a Surface but still want to install older assistive technology software, it's best to wait and buy the Surface with Windows 8.

Getting around the new Windows interface

Windows RT on the Surface tablet incorporates two worlds in one by providing an option to use the new touchscreen-based interface and the traditional desktop interface.

In the touchscreen, Windows RT environment, the iconic Windows Start screen has been updated. When you turn on the tablet, you get a series of tiles containing apps similar to an iPad or Android tablet.

With Surface there are a few ways to interact with the interface. You can either use your fingers to swipe across the screen, use the trackpad to move the mouse or use keyboard shortcuts. With Magnifier turned on, I often use a combination of all three. I have often stuck to using the traditional keyboard and trackpad, but it was nice to just push (or swipe) something around the screen to speed up the process. These command gestures differ from the ones used on other tablets but with a bit of practice they become fairly intuitive.

Surface command gestures

- Swiping left and right scrolls the Start pane and lets you see all your apps.
- Tapping on a tile opens an app and swiping from top to bottom closes it.
- The left-hand corner lets you switch between apps or see a list of open apps, while the right-hand side shows you various settings.
- In the traditional desktop environment, you can view apps and programs as you would in previous versions of Windows. It should be noted that Windows RT only runs pre-installed apps and apps purchased from Windows Store. However the Microsoft Office suite for Windows RT comes pre-installed on the Surface and can be run in the traditional desktop environment. The pre-installed versions of Office are the new 2013 version which at the time of writing is in preview. Office will be automatically updated once a full version is released.

Many have noted their disappointment that older Windows software can't be installed on this version of Surface. However the Windows Store is growing at a speedy rate every day with more apps becoming available as more developers create them for Windows.

Accessibility features

Across Windows 8 and RT devices, Narrator and Magnifier have been upgraded to be touch-compatible. One major improvement to Windows is that the operating system remembers your preferences whenever you log onto another device through your Outlook account and launches accessibility features at start-up.

Magnifier

Magnifier now includes touch support and can be turned on in the Ease of Access Center. You can access this through either the desktop or the New PC Settings. You can also use the Windows and '+' shortcut to activate Magnifier.

If you use Magnifier without a keyboard attached, scroll bars will appear on the side of the screen along with '+' and '-' icons. This allows you to move around the screen by moving your finger up and down the side bars or along the sides of the side bars to get around the screen, and the '+' and '-' buttons make the zoom area larger or smaller respectively.

As soon as you connect a keyboard like the Touch cover and start moving the mouse instead of the screen, the bars disappear and Magnifier works in a similar way to its older version. While the bars don't feel as intuitive as the zoom on an iPad where you can just grab the screen and move it

around, it is an effective compromise in giving people both traditional control and touchscreen control of the magnified area.

Narrator

When I mention that Narrator has been upgraded, the general response I get from people is "About time". It's fair to say that Narrator has not been a high priority for Microsoft given it has been 12 years since its last major upgrade. In fairness, the new touch-friendly Narrator is good for basic screen reader functionality. Turning it on allows you to explore the screen by touch, tapping once to select an area to be read, and tapping twice to select or activate something. The double-click can also be done by moving a finger around the screen until you find something and then tapping the screen with a different finger.

I used some of the basic Narrator commands and was able to fairly effectively navigate the Surface without vision, select options and get basic access to web pages. Traditional screen reader users will still want something more than what Narrator offers, and with NVDA's new touch-friendly version around the corner there are some good things to look forward to in the not-too-distant future.

One important point to note is that while it is possible to run Magnifier and Narrator at the same time, it becomes unwieldy to use. A warning message appears saying that the touch interface options for Magnifier won't work when Narrator is running so the only way it can effectively operate in this mode is to use Narrator by touch or keyboard and Magnifier by keyboard only.

Another accessibility feature worth noting is that when the keyboard is removed and the Surface is just used as a tablet, the on-screen keyboard automatically recognises that there's no physical keyboard and it kicks in. It also performs the same trick in reverse, removing itself when a traditional keyboard is plugged in.

The USB Port

Many people have also praised the fact that most hardware devices can be plugged straight into the USB port of the Surface and just work which is very helpful for people using a variety of assistive technologies. Software-wise it's also possible to search the Windows Store for apps which have been created with accessibility in mind, so this is very helpful for people wanting to stick with things which will definitely work with the built-in tools.

Summary

- The combination of touchscreen capabilities, ability to attach a keyboard with a trackpad and a USB port accommodates a variety of input methods.
- Magnifier and Narrator have been given touch-friendly updates.
- The ability to carry over accessibility preferences to different devices through the Outlook sign-in is a major accessibility plus.
- Windows Store provides a variety of apps for fun along with the built-in Office apps for productivity.

Accessibility added to Kindle Fire as blindness organisation plans protest

Amazon has announced it will add accessibility features to its Kindle Fire and Kindle Fire HD tablets, increasing access to content on the tablets for blind and vision impaired users. This comes after the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the US announced it would stage a protest against Amazon's plan to push the use of its Kindle devices and eBooks at schools.

Running on a version of Google's Android operating system, the Kindle Fire and Kindle Fire HD (both 7 and 8.9) tablets will include text-to-speech technology, a voice guide, and the ability to change text size and colour. These accessibility features will be available on the tablets in early 2013.

The tablets allow users to access content on Amazon such as music, games, apps, magazines and eBooks, as well as browse the web through a WiFi connection. Kindle Fire uses standard definition while Kindle Fire HD uses high definition.

The accessibility features that will be added to Kindle Fire and Kindle Fire HD 7 and 8.9 include:

- Text-to-speech: This feature allows text content to be read by a synthesised voice, allowing blind or vision impaired users to access this information.
- Voice Guide: The Voice Guide is a screen reader for Kindle devices which announces actions on the screen. For example, if an eBook is selected to be opened, this information is announced as "Hunger Games. Book opened."
- Adjust text size: Users can adjust the font and text size to suit the user's needs.
- Adjust text colour: Users can change the colour of the text so that it is easier to read, in case they have vision impairment or are colour blind.

These accessibility features are only available on Kindle Fire. Other Kindle models feature adjustable text colour and size, however no text-to-speech feature is included.

In Australia, the availability of Kindle Fire, Kindle Fire HD 7 and Kindle Fire HD 8.9 is limited to a few retailers and some Amazon content remains restricted. Publishers can also opt to 'block' some of their eBooks from being accessed by text-to-speech technology. This means that blind users aren't able to access Kindle eBooks on another eReader or device such as the iPad, as the dedicated screen reader or text-to-voice technology is not supported by the eBook. Kindle eBooks are also unable to be displayed on Braille devices.

Amazon is currently promoting its Kindle eReader and eBooks for use in schools. However, the NFB claims on its website that the Kindle devices and Amazon eBooks remain inaccessible. "The problem with all of these plans is that neither the Kindle devices nor the book files used in conjunction with them are accessible to students who are blind or who have other print disabilities."

The NFB staged a protest against Amazon's school initiative on December 12, outside the Amazon Headquarters in Seattle, Washington.

Apple Maps misses accuracy but shows accessibility

When Apple released iOS 6, the software for its mobile devices, many critics pointed out the shortcomings of the newly created Apple Maps app. The app replaced Google Maps, which was the default navigation app used in all iOS devices until the release of iOS 6. Media Access Australia tested how the Apple Maps app works with the default screen reader, VoiceOver, on an iPhone 4S and found that while there are some obvious holes, there are some new features that show Apple is considering accessibility in its app development.

General

To echo what many other critics have expressed, Maps shows some inaccuracy in the mapping content that it provides. The level of detail that the app provides is minimal at this stage and as many have reported, some landmarks are misrepresented.

While inaccurate mapping content makes it difficult for anyone, for a person who is blind or vision impaired, the inaccurate information would be hard to verify. As an Apple app however, the inbuilt screen reader VoiceOver works with most of the features in Maps, and instructions on how to activate a button or feature are announced.

Directions

The turn-by-turn voice directions feature delivers audible navigational instructions, in addition to text instructions on the screen. While it has not yet been made available in Australia, VoiceOver works well with the text instructions on the screen. You can hear directions through VoiceOver in one step, then swipe up or down with one finger to access the next set of directions or go back to the previous set.

The tracking function

Apple has introduced a tracking function in Maps which can be used in two ways. The first is to use this button to mark your current location on the map. The second is to use it as 'onward heading', a compass-like function that follows you as you walk or follow the route suggested by Maps.

When you set tracking as a compass, VoiceOver announces the street or landmark you are approaching. The compass also moves the map around to match which way you're facing.

VoiceOver reads out the street names

When you view a route suggested by Maps, you can also move your finger across the screen to hear VoiceOver announce street names, including orientation. For example, if your finger points to York St on the screen and it spans from North to South, VoiceOver will announce, "York St, North-South road." The feature allows blind or vision impaired users to identify what streets are near their current location.

Integration with mail, messages, Twitter and Facebook

Apple Maps has integrated Mail, Messages, Twitter and Facebook. This means you can share your current location (or any location you drop a pin on) via email, messages and social media. Sharing your location on Twitter or Facebook will post a link that will show details of your location on Google Maps. This share facility introduced by Apple Maps could be useful for blind or vision impaired users to share where they are with friends, even if they are unsure of what their immediate surroundings are.

Accessibility comments

While Apple continues to build up the accuracy of its mapping services, the new features introduced in iOS 6 such as the tracking function, integration with email, messages and social media, and in particular, integration with VoiceOver, show there is considerable potential for the app to become an accessible alternative to Google Maps.

YouTube's iPhone app includes closed captions

Google has beaten Apple in the accessibility stakes by releasing its own YouTube app for the iPhone which includes a host of new features, including support for closed captions.

The YouTube app which currently comes inbuilt in iPhones and iPads is made by Apple, and only features a tiny sample of the service's vast video collection. The new app increases the number of videos available to mobile users and allows them to search for closed caption videos, a feature previously unavailable in the Apple version of the app. In addition to enabling closed caption search, the app also includes a 'voice search' feature, which means users can use their voice instead of typing to search.

Developed in just under a month, the app also makes it easier to find videos and share them across social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Google+.

How to search for closed caption videos:
- Tap the magnifier symbol on the top right-hand corner to search.
- In the search field, type the name of the video you're looking for. A series of search results will be listed. From here you can filter your search to closed caption videos only.
- Tap the gear symbol to the right of the Channels button
- In Search Options, scroll down to Features and select 'closed captions'. This means that only videos with closed captions will appear in search results.

How to turn on captions:
- Turn the iPhone on its side so that the video plays in landscape view
- Tap the 'CC' button at the bottom left of the screen

The app is further indication of Google's growing support for closed captioning across its products. YouTube recently added functionality to let video owners fix automatic captions, opening the door for more videos with readable, meaningful captions to be made available online.

The new Google-made YouTube iPhone app is available free from the iTunes store. While it will work on iPads, there is currently a dedicated tablet version of the app in development.

A full description of Google's YouTube app is available on Mashable.

Online media

SBS introduces captioning for online programs

Captions are now available for all non-live programs on SBS's On Demand service. This makes it only the second Australian 'catch-up TV' service to have captions after the ABC's iView, which introduced captioning in 2010.

SBS has developed a system which automatically reformats television captions for use on online players and platforms. Now that the system is in place, no further human input is needed in the process, and there are no ongoing operational costs. SBS hopes to extend the process to live programs soon, and to provide captions to third party platforms where they are supported.

Programs are generally available on SBS On Demand for 7 to 30 days after broadcast. Captions can be activated by clicking the 'CC' button on the video player's control panel. (Note, the 'CC' button will only appear after the advertisement at the start of the program has finished playing.)

AbleGamers opens Accessibility Arcade

The AbleGamers Foundation has opened an Accessibility Arcade at the Washington DC Public Library, providing a permanent space for people to experience accessible gaming.

The AbleGamers Foundation works to educate and promote video games that are accessible to people with a disability. The Accessibility Arcade will feature games that have accessible options or use accessible technology and provide an opportunity for people to have a hands-on experience of accessible gaming.

An accessible game is one that has adjustable settings to suit the needs of a person who has a disability. For example, if someone has colour blindness, an accessible game is one that presents different options for colour. For gamers who have a mobility impairment, games can offer remappable keys to suit the needs of individual players.

In a press release, the Chief of DC Public Library's Adaptive Services Division, Venetia Demson, said, "We're looking forward to welcoming new and experienced gamers with disabilities of all ages to the library for a unique experience. When properly used, video games can be an important learning tool for literacy, spatial reasoning and curriculum support as well as a wonderful social experience."

The Accessibility Arcade has previously been on exhibition at a number of events attended by the AbleGamers Foundation. Washington D.C's Martin Luther King Memorial Library was the first place to permanently feature the Accessibility Arcade.

NVDA screen reader now recognises long description

The free screen reader for Windows, NVDA, has been updated to recognise 'longdesc', an attribute used by web developers to describe the data that is visually presented in images such as graphs and diagrams.

To access the long description, press 'NVDA' + 'd' once the screen reader announces it is there. For example, if users have their screen reader focused on an image of a graph, NVDA will announce there is long description available. To activate the long description, users can press the NVDA

button (usually Insert) and the 'd' to hear the long description. This update is compatible with the Firefox and Internet Explorer browsers.

NVDA has recently been adapted for Windows 8, Microsoft's latest operating system that was released in October. For more information about the NVDA longdesc update, visit the NVDA Project website.

Netflix agrees to caption 100% of its content

Netflix, the popular US-based video on demand service, has reached an agreement with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) to provide 100% of its content with captions by 2014.

In 2010, the NAD, the Western Massachusetts Association of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired and a deaf man, Lee Nettles, brought a suit against Netflix for its lack of captioning. Since then, Netflix has increased its captioning levels, so that 90% of content currently being viewed has captions. Increasing this to 100% is a significant victory for the Deaf and hearing impaired, and an important step in the ongoing struggle to make online video content accessible.

The CEO of the NAD, Howard A. Rosenblum, said, "The National Association of the Deaf congratulates Netflix for committing to 100% captioning, and is thrilled to announce that 48 million deaf and hard of hearing people will be able to fully access Netflix's Watch Instantly services."

In the lead-up to 100% captioning being achieved, Netflix has also agreed to improve its user interface to make it easier for people to identify which movies and TV shows have captions.

Netflix is not yet available in Australia.

For more information about the Netflix agreement, see the NAD's press release.

Trailer captioning: Netflix shows initiative with its first original drama series

American video on demand provider, Netflix, has announced its first original series and has captioned the trailer for an inclusive build-up in anticipation of its February release.

The 2012 adaptation of the political drama *House of Cards,* starring Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright, is a 13-part download-only series on Netflix. As it builds up to captioning 100% of its content (see story above), Netflix's user interface has been improved so that captioned videos are easier to find. Providing captions for the *House of Cards* trailer is a further indication of its commitment to deaf access.

The captioning of trailers for TV and in cinema is something that is greatly lacking and creates frustration for viewers wishing to be part of the hype around a new series. There are websites where you can watch captioned trailers, such as Captionfish and Your Local Cinema (where audio described trailers are also available) but major service providers are yet to deliver these themselves.

"There are opportunities to watch accessible trailers but they never come directly from the source," said Ally Woodford, Project Manager for cinema and DVD at Media Access Australia. "Ideally, a movie producer would provide an accessible trailer to be played in-cinema and also on DVD but I'm yet to see this happen. The complementary services of Captionfish and Your Local Cinema do a

great job in filling this gap but services should be streamlined so viewers don't need to seek out the accessible version elsewhere."

Netflix, currently available in North America, Latin America, the UK and Scandinavia, is breaking that mould for online video on demand by considering access through captions from a video's first promotion.

European languages added to YouTube's auto-captioning

YouTube has announced automatic captions will be available in another six languages – German, Italian, French, Portuguese, Russian and Dutch – across the video sharing network. The feature is already available in English, Japanese, Spanish and Korean.

While this is good news, YouTube's automatic captions are notoriously inaccurate. They rely on Google's voice recognition technology which is unreliable, particularly when there is background noise, music or unusual accents.

YouTube states in its blog that automatic captions can be used as a starting point, rather than a one-click method of providing access. Once the captions have been created, video owners can edit and correct them, a feature added in August.

Chris Mikul, Project Manager at Media Access Australia, agrees auto captioning is not a total solution but a starting point. "Auto captioning is still in very early stages and is certainly not a suitable form of access for public information or commercial videos. For do-it-yourself captioners, the best thing is that it helps with the accurate timing and placement of the captions in the video."

To turn on closed captions on a YouTube video, press play, click on 'Turn captions on' in the bottom right and then select the language option. You can also filter YouTube search results to only include captioned videos. To do this, enter a search term in the search bar at the top left of the YouTube website. When the search results appear click on 'Filter' underneath the search bar and select 'closed captions' from the fourth column.

sociABILITY translated into Hungarian

Media Access Australia's *sociABILITY: Social media for people with a disability* resource has been made available to people in Hungary through the Australian Embassy's Public Diplomacy Program. To celebrate International Day of People with Disability, the Australian Ambassador to Hungary gave a translated version of the resource to the President of the Hungarian Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Budapest on 3 December.

Funded by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network and first launched in March, *sociABILITY* helps people with sensory or mobility impairment overcome the accessibility barriers found in six of the world's most popular social networking tools. The report and tip sheets guide people through getting started on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Skype and blogging.

Author Dr Scott Hollier said, "It's great that the global nature of the Web and social media means that we're able to support people with disabilities in Hungary to enjoy the benefits that social media can provide."

sociABILITY can be downloaded from the Media Access Australia website:

Sydney Opera House introduces captioned online videos

As part of the celebration of International Day of People with Disabilities on 3 December, Sydney Opera House has published the first four of 31 closed captioned videos from its 2012 Festival of Dangerous Ideas (FODI).

In keeping with the Opera House's recent Deafness Forum captioning award for entertainment, cinema & the arts captioning, its commitment to providing accessible arts continues with the development of a new accessible video player and the top four FODI session videos captioned for everyone's enjoyment.

Similar to the popular TED talks, which offer captions in 47 languages, FODI delivers lively discussions and debates led by Australian and international speakers at the top of their field. The annual festival took place in late September with 31 sessions attracting over 20,000 visitors.

Highlights included the questioning of Israel as an apartheid state, whether powerful technology developments have turned humans into gods, and what it would mean if Australian education abolished private schools.

The first four videos to be captioned are *The Delusion of Free Will*, *All Women Hate Each Other*, *We Are the Gods Now* and *Abolish Private Schools*. They can be watched with captions by clicking the 'CC' icon on the bottom right-hand side of each video.

Within the next six months all of the 2012 FODI talks online will be closed captioned, as well as an increasing number of other online talks and interviews.

YouTube asks users to report lack of captions

YouTube is asking users to fill out a form if they believe a video posted on it should have captions. This follows the mandate set by the *Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act 2010* (CVAA) that makes it compulsory for TV networks to make closed captions available on their content online.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the US recently set a September 30 deadline for all TV networks and web video sites to caption videos that are posted online. The mandate ensures captions are provided for content, to keep up with the increasing number of videos that are posted on websites, particularly by commercial networks and broadcasters.

According to the notification posted by YouTube, users are encouraged to fill out an online form to report a video that lacks captions, if they believe the distributor of the video should also be providing captions. YouTube will then notify the provider about reports and complaints regarding their videos.

Under the mandate, video streaming websites such as YouTube, Hulu and Amazon must ensure videos that have previously been broadcast on TV with captions are also captioned once they are posted on their site. The only videos that are exempt from this mandate are videos that have been made for online-only distribution.

Access to social media can save lives

When Hurricane Sandy bore down on the USA's east coast, people turned to social media such as Twitter for the latest information. Sadly, due to the lack of social media accessibility, many couldn't make use of these potentially life-saving tools. To rectify this, volunteers have come together to create the Emergency 2.0 Wiki Accessibility Toolkit.

The online toolkit provides tips, resources and apps to assist people with a disability to overcome the accessibility challenges of social media. The kit also includes guidelines for emergency agencies and government.

Media Access Australia's Dr Scott Hollier, assisted on the project. "We've witnessed from recent disasters that social media has the potential to save lives, but people with disabilities often have difficulty accessing important messages as the social media platforms are inaccessible," said Dr Hollier.

"For example, the main Twitter website can't be easily read with a screen reader […] but important emergency information can be accessed by using an alternative site such as Easy Chirp to read tweets."

By using the Easy Chirp website to access tweets, people who are blind or vision impaired can access real-time information about where a fire has broken out, whether their area is being evacuated or where to find help.

The Emergency 2.0 Wiki includes:

- Tips and guides for people with disabilities on how to access social media
- Emergency smartphone apps for people with a disability
- Apps and assistive technologies to help people access social media
- Emergency preparedness YouTube videos that are either captioned or use sign language for the Deaf and hearing impaired
- Practical guidelines to assist the emergency sector, government, community and business to make social media messages more accessible

The Emergency 2.0 Wiki is a free volunteer-based resource which aims to build resilience by empowering all sectors of the community with the knowledge to use social media and networks in emergencies. It aims to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing locally and globally.

This article was adapted from a media release provided by the Emergency 2.0 Wiki team.

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
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
CEA	Cinema Exhibitors' Association
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (US)
MAA	Media Access Australia
NAD	National Association of the Deaf