

Larry Goldberg

I am pleased to be here and to talk about the media. It is a very important part of ICT mentioned in the convention twice actually, under cultural access as well as under technology access. I am going to talk about the access to media worldwide, and I picked the time period from 1955 to 2012 since I have no problems predicting the future as well as the present. Look at the early history of the U.S. captioning. Back in 1955, it began when the U.S. government started funding the capturing of 16mm films that were sent around to the deaf clubs around the country. That is the only formal way where the media was giving access to deaf and hard of hearing people. But in the early 70s, we began the open captioning of television at WBGH. We began captioning the ABC Evening News with the opening of caption so that everyone could see them all at once, but closed captioning was not invented yet. But finally in 1980, closed captioning was invented with the help of federal funding and PBS and ABC.

So with the advent of closed captioning, those users can have a choice whether they want it on or off. The competition began. Some caption agencies actually began business as captioning TV programs. The federal dollars were now beginning to be matched by corporate contributions and by sponsors throughout television, but progress was slow to begin captioning on local televisions and cable networks.

So in 1990, to trigger a greater amount of captioning, at the same time that the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act was passed. Congress approved it in 1990 and the Federal Communications Commission placed regulations that began on the market place in 1993. And that meant that any television sold in the United States that was 13 inches or larger had to have built-in closed caption decoder technology, and this was intended both to help the market and to make captioning more pervasive. Also in the way it was written, one line said, “as television technology advances, so must this act.” So it was future-proofed to bring digital television as a very important aspect on how these regulations are written. But even then, captioning didn’t really spread as far as the cable outlets and broadcast that were

becoming pervasive in the United States. So once again it was revisited in when the Telecommunication Act revamped U.S. regulation of television and telephones, and a little known provision was added to that which required that all television become accessible in a certain period of time. And that was accessible to the hard- hearing-people in particular, though the needs of the people who are blind were also mentioned. Those FCC Regulations were phased in from 1998 to 2006 so that as of January 1st of 2006, virtually 100% of the Television in the United States, from broadcast, cable and satellite television had to be closed with just a few exceptions. We also added captions in movie theaters beginning in 1997 which the development of the closed caption system called “Rear Window” and that was purely voluntary and no federal regulations are required and still has reached only small percent of the movie theaters in the US and Canada. In the year 2000, the Section 508 also required captioning, but what was missing is the requirement for anything that required quality. So that was left purely open to the market place, and what was also missing is the attention to the new distribution technology such as the Internet, where you’ll see a tremendous amount of media these days.

Right now the FCC has a rule making pending the quality and reliability of closed captioning because the deaf and the other community feels that they just have not been receiving the high enough quality and particularly in looking at real-time captioning. That is the captioning is produced for live shows, sports, news and so forth. But also missing is what we are looking for towards the future are the new media platforms, thing like HDDVV, the Blue Ray, ways of hooking up the media in your home using connection like component video, HDMI, and alternate delivery via wireless connections. None of those are protected for delivery of captions and industry as well as the government should address all units. Of course, everyone is looking at media online and on mobile devices, and much work needs to be done on assuring accessibility and all those devices and there is interest in that and digital cinema is also being worked on. Film projectors have replaced by digital projectors and other communications and captioning needs to be adapted for that. The catalyst for this progress over the years has been voluntary industry efforts. Consumer advocacy played a very important role on this, and of course government action for funding and regulations and through Acts of Congress.

I also want to discuss video description. So many people know about closed captioning in U.S., but video description is a little bit less known, so I brought a sample with me. This service is for blind and visually impaired people and it fills in what is not seen in the video through a narrative description that was added to the audio available on digital video online and on television, and is available widely in the United States and some parts of Canada and other places. I mentioned that the video description in the U.S. was first started on television in 1985 when stereo television was invented and we were able to get not only left and right channels of audio but also the extra channel called the secondary audio program and that is when audio description began and developed in the United States. It was started with WGBH, the public broadcaster in Boston, community advocacy and our research and development, through the developments and of course very important is the federal funding and once again the federal involvement is essential to the corporation of the broadcasting as well as to the U.S. Department and Education.

Audio-Video:

A young woman in white uniform opens a magazine and starts to read. "Hello, my name is Forrest, Forrest Gump." The girl starts to nod and returns to the reading. "You, want a chocolate?" She stares at him and shakes her head. "I can eat a million and a half of these. My Mama always said life was like and box of chocolates. You never know what you gonna get." His mouth is stuffed with sweets, and Forrest grins at the young woman who ignores him.

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In the U.S., video description was mentioned in the Tele-com act and the FCC decided to require it under their own initiative in their reading the act, but unfortunately, very quickly, that act was taken to court and industry groups opposed it saying that the FCC has jurisdiction. So the few hours a week, four hours only on a major broadcast from April to November of 2002 and basically it went away. It continues to be supported by other public broadcasting, CBS Network because that is available here and the narrow mandate, which is very limited for the video description in the US. It will be heard on HD

radio, satellite radio, and other audio services to carry the audio portions such as that description. There is a bill in Congress right now, and they are working on the video-audio rules. So in the United States, the caption and description might be plugging along, but in Canada, the film, radio and television also requires captioning and other programming are required to be captioned. The description is expected to encourage as well.

In the United Kingdom, they require the so-called “sub-titling,” which is also like captioning when 90% of their program must be captioned. In the digital realm, they also required 10% of their programming be captioned by 2010. Right now for the 8% of the Programming in the UK is being described and also they require sign language as part of the programming by 2015. That is one of the few countries where sign language is also required. In Japan, the Ministry of Public Management has a target of a 100% of feasible programs to be captioned this year. This idea is for both live and pre-produced programs. In Mexico, they have a requirement for captioning although they are pending their funding in technology development.

In Australia, they have a requirement for analogue and digital television and a target especially on prime time, which is 70% of all their programming from 6 am to midnight. Other countries as well are working on the requirements for captioning and description, and all their efforts are requirements under the federal rule and other country rules with some cooperation from the industry in all those countries as well.

Finally, there are many developments moving forward in the field of media accessibility, and we are pleased to see that countries all over the world are picking this up.