

2013

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Making Television Accessible to Everyone

Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) & The Canadian Experience

G3ict

Global Initiative for Inclusive Information
and Communication Technologies

A M I

ACCESSIBLE MEDIA INC.

Researched in Cooperation with AMI
Accessible Media, Inc.

Making Television Accessible to Everyone: Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) & The Canadian Experience

A G3ict Business Case White Paper Series



ACCESSIBLE MEDIA INC.



Acknowledgments

G3ict is an Advocacy Initiative of the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development, launched in December 2006, in cooperation with the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at UN DESA. Its mission is to facilitate and support the implementation of the dispositions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in promoting e-accessibility and assistive technologies.

G3ict participants include industry, the public sector, academia and organizations representing persons with disabilities. G3ict relies on an international network of ICT accessibility experts to develop practical tools, evaluation methods and benchmarks for States Parties and Disabled Persons Organizations to implement policies in support of assistive technologies and e-accessibility.

Since inception, G3ict has organized or contributed to more than 90 awareness-raising and capacity-building programs for policy makers in cooperation with international organizations such as the ITU, UNESCO, UNITAR and the World Bank.

G3ict co-produces with ITU the “e-Accessibility Policy Toolkit for Persons with Disabilities” (www.e-accessibilitytoolkit.org) which is widely used around the world by policy makers involved in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. For additional information on G3ict, visit www.g3ict.org

G3ict White Paper Business Case Series

The G3ict White Paper Business-Case Series documents innovative accessibility solutions and good practices with real-world case studies for users and organizations seeking to improve the accessibility of their information technology, applications and services.

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“AMI is at the forefront of innovation in fulfilling the mandate of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Why making television accessible to persons with vision loss is necessary

Since the 1980s and '90s, there has been a worldwide effort to expand the number of ways persons with disabilities can more fully participate in society. For the 285 million people throughout the world who are visually impaired and the 39 million who are blind, greater access to the media of everyday life – TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, the Internet and more – has been a much sought-after goal.

As an example, the experience of watching TV for persons with vision loss has been severely limited. While television programs such as talk shows are primarily an audio experience, and therefore easily accessible to persons who are blind or vision impaired, TV series, movies, even news reports do not allow for a full understanding of the action. Except through snatches of dialogue, the blind or vision-impaired viewer is usually unaware of important visual elements such as scene location, body language, change of scenery and all manner of other things that help a sighted viewer fully grasp the unraveling of the action.

“AMI has a plan that can inspire other efforts, both in Canada and in the rest of the world”

Despite the barriers, however, and what may surprise many, most studies show that blind and visually impaired persons watch TV as much as sighted persons. In their landmark report, for instance, Jaclyn Packer, PH.D, and Corinne Kirchner, PH.D, offer a complete analysis of the obstacles to TV accessibility encountered by persons with visual disabilities, and of their desire to improve the television experience.

Their report’s conclusion: “The data shows that visually impaired people have an interest in gaining access to television and video through the technique of video description, and that individuals who are familiar with video description obtain numerous benefits from it.”¹

1. “Whos’ Watching” : A Profile of the Blind and Visually Impaired Audience for Television and Video”, American Foundation for the Blind

The growing adoption of “video description,” or “described video,” and other vehicles that bring about greater accessibility has been fueled by the aid of such legislation as the American Disabilities Act of 1990 and similar legislation in many other countries, which ultimately led to the adoption, in December 2006, of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The CRPD, signed by 155 countries and ratified by 130, clearly recognizes “the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”²

An introduction to AMI and the Canadian experience

Canada took an early lead in promoting media access to persons with disabilities. For almost 25 years, as a result of advocates, government, industry and volunteers coming together, the country has been making media accessible to its citizens with vision loss, in part, through a groundbreaking nonprofit organization called Accessible Media Inc., or AMI, which now offers two unique 24/7 broadcast services plus a fully accessible companion website (www.AMI.ca), with WCAG 2.0 AA compliance.

- AMI-tv: a world first, makes TV accessible to viewers who are blind or vision impaired, and deaf or hard of hearing. It broadcasts a wide range of popular programming – movies, series, specials, current affairs, original programs – that can be enjoyed by everyone. All shows feature open described video and closed captioning.

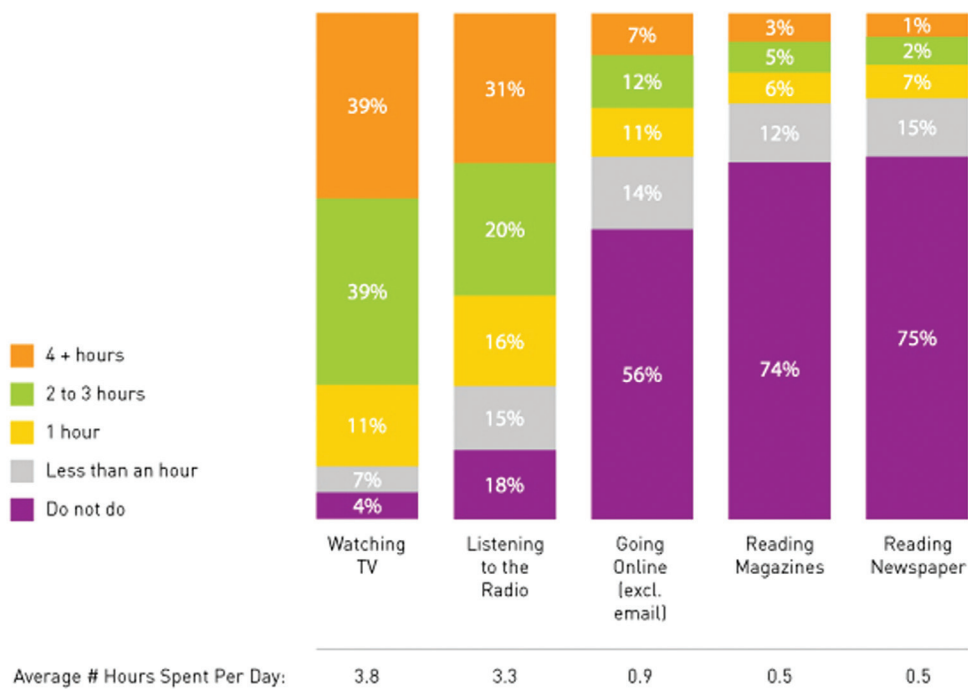
- AMI-audio: the world’s largest broadcast reading service makes local, national and international news and information accessible. Daily, volunteers read and record current articles from leading newspapers and magazines, which are broadcast on TV and online. It also broadcasts original programs and described audio presentations of top movies and TV shows.

This report will describe how the creation and growth of AMI was made possible and what is available to Canadian viewers. In addition, this case study examines international guidelines regarding media accessibility, the regulatory background specific to Canada as well as the needs of the visually impaired community.

². Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>

Media usage among Canadians who are blind or vision impaired

Time Spent on Each Media Activity Per Typical Day



Source: AMI Brand Health Study, Wave 2, Blind/Partially Sighted Study, Oct. 2012

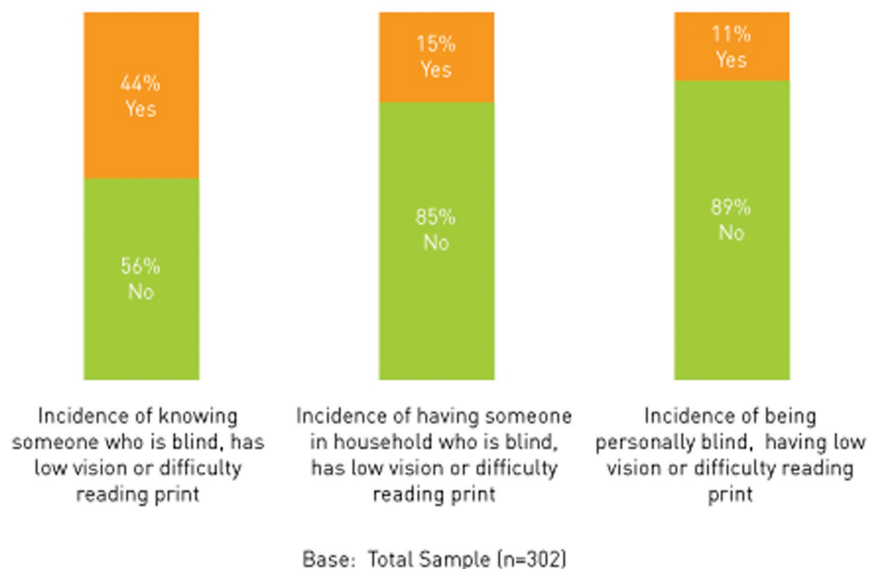
This graph displays daily usage of media by time spent for blind and visually impaired users. AMI's survey shows that:

- *78% of blind and visually impaired Canadians use TV as their main media for 2 hours per day or more*
- *51% rely on radio*
- *30% use the Internet for that same amount of time*
- *56% of respondents do not use the Internet at all*
- *Magazines and newspapers are seldom a source of information or entertainment for this community: 74% and 75% respectively do not use printed media.*

Source: AMI

Indicators of vision loss in Canada

Prevalence of Visual Impairment



Source: AMI Brand Health Study, Wave 1, General Population Study, Jan. 2011

This graph shows three examples of the prevalence of visual impairment in Canada:

- 44% of respondents indicate they know someone who is visually impaired or blind
- 15% of households comprise someone with a visual disability
- 11% of Canadian have some degree of visual impairment

Source: AMI

The complexity of broadcasting in Canada

Excerpted from remarks by Charles Dalfen, then Chair of the CRTC, Canada’s broadcast regulator, at the official opening of AMI’s new national headquarters in Toronto in June 2006:

“...We have in Canada a broadcasting system that is one of the greatest in the world. Why is that? Because it has to be. It has to cover a country that is bordered by three oceans and spans six time zones. It has to serve a diverse population that’s urban and rural, that has two official languages, that includes Aboriginal peoples and cultural communities with their roots all around the world.”

PART TWO: CREATION AND GROWTH

AMI: first came a national broadcast reading service

In Canada, the demands for greater media accessibility for blind and visually impaired persons grew increasingly louder throughout the 1980s, leading to a series of events that brought about the creation of AMI. Instrumental was a 1988 study on access to print information by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Titled “The Right to Know,” it urged the federal government to support the launch of a national reading service that would broadcast full-text articles from current newspapers and magazines. Around the same time, Canada’s Senate released a report on the media titled “No News Is Bad News,” in which it addressed the need for Canadians with vision loss to access print publications: “News matters. No real democracy can operate without informing people about the way their society works, what is going well and, perhaps more important, what’s not going well and needs to be improved.”

Another key factor is Canada’s Broadcasting Act, which states “programming accessible by persons with disabilities should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system as resources become available for this purpose.”³

“Accessible Media Inc. is a shining example of how a regulatory framework can be used to promote media accessibility broadly and rapidly, balancing the efforts of private-sector broadcasters”

In response, the nation’s broadcast regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which monitors the programming and broadcasting of content that addresses the concerns and respects the culture of all Canadian communities, awarded a license for what would become known as VoicePrint (rebranded as AMI-audio in 2012) by saying that an independent audio reading service was “not only in the public interest but a matter of national importance.” And, in 1990, the accessible service was launched.

Ten years later (Decision CRTC 2000-380), the service’s broadcast license became a must-carry license – (9 (1) (h) status – requiring that it be available through most of the country’s cable and satellite distributors.

3. <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/B-9.01/>

This decision recognized the importance of the service for the blind and visually impaired community in Canada, and secured funding through a pass-through fee of \$0.04 per subscriber per month. The CRTC stipulated as well that the audio service be available at no extra charge, apart from the basic monthly general subscriber fee, a recognition that people in the blind and vision-impaired community had, when compared to the general population, fewer financial resources.

Quick facts about AMI-audio

- AMI-audio is available as a digital audio channel, as well as through the secondary audio program (SAP) at CBC News Network on analog cable services, satellite radio and online at www.AMI.ca. In total, the service is available in 10 million Canadian homes
- AMI-audio relies on some 400 volunteers who regularly go into one of AMI's 11 broadcast centres across the country to read and record current newspapers and magazine articles from leading local, regional, national and international publications
- AMI-audio broadcasts more than 70 hours of new programming every week

AMI: next came accessible TV

In contrast to the development and acceptance in Canada of closed captioning for deaf and hearing-impaired TV viewers, the evolution of described video for blind and vision-impaired persons has been slow even though a recent AMI study points out that 76% of blind and visually impaired persons rely first on television for their news and access to various programs.

In fact, the CRTC recognizes that: "Television is a primary source for news, entertainment and sports programming, and reflects a wide range of ideas and perspective that characterize Canadian society. It is important for people with visual impairments to be able to receive TV broadcasts in as complete a form as possible, so that we are all included in this everyday medium."⁴

Starting in 2001, the CRTC required the major Canadian networks to produce 4 hours of programming with described video per week (with 2 hours of that to be original content). In 2005, Canadian specialty channels were required to follow suit. In total, the availability of DV programming represents just 2% to 3% of total available programming (exempt is programming that's not considered as well suited to described video, such as all-news and sports services). By contrast, 100% of all programming is closed captioned. Though a significant step forward, the requirement for programming with DV came with a barrier since it would only be available through the station's secondary audio program, or SAP, which was difficult for most viewers with vision loss to independently access since it relies on a series of on-screen prompts to activate.

⁴ CRTC Consumer Fact Sheet: Access to TV for people with visual impairment; http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/info_sht/b322.htm

Seeing that advances in technology, particularly the development of the digital-TV tier, offered greater possibilities for increasing the amount of programming with described video, in summer 2007, the CRTC awarded a new broadcast license to the same nonprofit broadcaster that operated the country's award-winning audio reading service.

This license was to launch a new station, then named The Accessible Channel (TACtv), dedicated to broadcasting all its programming with both closed captioning and open described video, which ensured that all users would be able to access the service regardless of their technical knowledge or the functionalities of their equipment.

In January 2009, what is now AMI-tv went on the air, HD-ready and a must-carry for distributors with more than 2,000 digital subscribers in the packages of digital basic services. Available to 8 million Canadian households, the service is funded at a pass-through rate of \$0.20 per subscriber per month.

The SAP barrier: a user's testimony

"Accessing DV is tricky. Very few remotes have a SAP button, which automatically turns on SAP. Many remotes and televisions require memorization of a series of button pushing to access the option. Some televisions require sighted assistance to turn on SAP. Each television is different, making it very difficult to access DV on a TV which you are not familiar with. The SAP setting automatically turns off when you switch channels, which requires the entire series of buttons to be pushed again."

Quick facts about Canadians with vision loss

Currently, researchers estimate that:

- More than one million Canadians live with blindness or significant vision loss (that's more than the number of Canadians with breast cancer, prostate cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's combined)
- One in 11 Canadians aged 65 or older live with vision loss (432,000 Canadians) while 23,000 Canadian children (under 15 years) are blind or vision impaired
- The number of Canadians with vision loss has the potential to double within the next 25 years
- 65% of adults with vision loss are employed, and half that group lives on an annual income of \$20,000 or less

Source: CNIB Fast facts about vision loss, <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/media/vision-loss/Pages/default.aspx>

The creation and growth of video description/described video

Developed in the mid-'70s, what first became known as "audio description," or AD, consisted largely of a program host or announcer providing a basic voice-over, reading aloud on-screen text and describing graphics that appear. AD is often used for newscasts, weather reports, sports scores or financial data, and is best suited to live, information-based programming. As TV and video technology changed with digitalization, this first step to better accessibility (widely expected to be provided by most broadcasters) evolved into video description.

Launched on a large scale in the '90s by WGBH in Boston (which trademarked the term descriptive video services, or DVS), the process calls for professional review of the video/TV program in order for it to be made accessible.

It starts with describers carefully watching the program and monitoring where there are gaps in the dialogue or anything else in which a snippet of description narration can be inserted in the soundtrack. Next, a script is written based on where the gaps are and what key visual elements need to be described. The script is then edited by a post-production supervisor who watches for continuity, clarity and style conventions. Next up: the narration is recorded and mixed with the original program audio in a unique “mix to pix” process to create a full audio track. The track is then laid back to the master either on a spare audio channel (for broadcast) or to a separate master (for home video distribution).⁵

There are three types of described video:

Described Video – Post (or DV): Descriptions are added to the program after the show has been produced and packaged and involves the process explained above. On occasion it is necessary to speak over the program dialogue to convey essential visual details.

Described Video – Live (or Live DV): In real time from a studio during the telecast, describers' narration is mixed with the program audio. Describers may be supported from a control room by a director and a researcher, and are cued up with valuable information on upcoming or current visuals.

- **Described Video–Pre-production** (an AMI innovation): Description is built into the script and on-camera performances during the production itself. It allows time to fully describe details using the persons within the scene itself or through the primary narrator of the program. The process involves the inclusion of a description writer or producer into the production team. This person advises and assists the traditional production crew on adding audio that describes the visual details during the shoot or script-writing stages. Description is organically built into the production and results in a seamless experience for all audience members.

The growth of video description/described video in other countries

The United States: As an example of regulatory framework, since July 2012, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission's “21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act” has required covered broadcast affiliates of ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC in the top-25 TV markets, as well as multichannel video-programming distributor (MVPD) systems with more than 50,000 subscribers, to provide 50 hours per calendar quarter (approximately 4 hours per week) of video-described prime time and/or children's programming.

The covered MVPD systems, when they carry any of the top-five non-broadcast networks, i.e., the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, TBS, TNT and USA, must also provide 50 hours per calendar quarter of described-video prime time and/or children's programming.

⁵ From WGBH Access Media Group - <http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/services/description/dvs-faq.html>

Additionally, FCC video-description rules require all network-affiliated broadcast stations and MVPD systems to pass through any video description provided with network programming that they carry if they have the technical capability to do so and are not using it for other program-related content. Once a program is aired with descriptions, re-runs of that program must also include video description unless the capability of providing description is being used for other program-related content.

The European Union: Regulators have imposed media accessibility to broadcasters, including audio description, but did not specify actual goals (European Directive dated December 11, 2007) or number of hours of programming to respect the directives. Some national authorities have negotiated standards with private channels, and integrated requirements in regulatory framework for public channels. In France, several major private channels have for a couple of years broadcast audio-described programs. The German channel Arte (which has provided audio-described programming in Germany since 1996, in France since 2000) focuses on movies and fiction, with 4 programs a month, with TF1 offering 52 programs this year.

The United Kingdom: The BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Five are committed to audio describing at least 6% of their annual output. The BBC is now audio-describing 20% of its content on BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, CBBC and CBeebies. Programs include popular soaps, dramas, comedies and children's programs. Audio description is a free service and is available on digital TV on Freeview (with a suitable set-top box or digital TV), Sky and Freesat from Sky satellite, and Virgin Media cable. It is also available on BBC iPlayer.



In Canada, the introduction of a dv logo and more: To promote the availability of described video, in June 2012 a new symbol for described programming was unveiled, which broadcasters are expected to display before a described program starts. As well, to alert viewers with vision loss that the upcoming program features DV, networks are expected to make an audio announcement before it begins. Distributors must also identify which programs have described video in their electronic-programming guides or in other ways.

PART THREE:

AMI IN 2013 – DRIVING FORWARD WITH NEW GOALS, INITIATIVES, PROJECTS, PROGRAMS AND MORE

An overview of AMI's path ahead in its mission "To Make All Media Accessible to All Canadians"

AMI's mandate goes way beyond providing programming and the technology to access all media. Its mission is also to be an instrument of social integration for the disabled community. The aim is to help reduce social isolation, and create a stronger link for persons who are blind or visually impaired with their local and national communities.

To help achieve this goal and many others, AMI has established the following six core values: Authenticity, Empowerment, Inclusion, Innovation, Passion and Stewardship. As well, in order to promote media accessibility AMI strives to:

- Aggregate, produce, invest in and **CREATE** content, making it accessible via description, closed captioning, audio versioning, web and mobile technologies
- Work together with partners via TV, print and online advertising to create awareness of AMI and to **ADVOCATE** for the need of media accessibility amongst the general population
- **COLLABORATE** with blind/vision-impaired community organizations to build awareness of AMI, its services and the availability of accessible content

"AMI users acknowledge the importance of AMI not only as a service provider, but as a voice for the entire community of persons with disabilities"

OUR CORE VALUES

Y**AUTHENTICITY**AUTHEN
ENT**EMPOWERMENT**EMI
ISION**INCLUSION**INCLUSI
NOVATION**INNOVATION**IN
PASSION**PASSION**PASSIO
SHIP**STEWARDSHIP**STEV

- Establish communication strategies to **ENABLE** friends, family and caregivers of concerned Canadians to develop a social movement with respect to accessibility

AMI's recognized leadership

By participating in working groups with the guidance of the CRTC, and with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and community organizations, but also by presenting its Canadian model at various international venues, AMI has taken a place as a leading force in media accessibility.

In 2012, for instance, AMI:

- Presented the CRTC Described Video Working Group objective to establish described-video best practices, in collaboration with the CAB and community organizations, at the International Telecommunication Union – ITU Focus Group on Audiovisual Media Accessibility
- Was awarded the FCC Chairman's Award in the U.S. for Advancement of Accessibility for its work in launching the DV Guide in collaboration with members of the CRTC Described Video Working Group.
- Was presented with the President's Award from the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB); previously AMI had, in 2004, been honoured with the CNIB's Dayton Forman Award and, in 2009, the American Foundation for the Blind's (AFB) Access Award
- Has promoted accessibility in partnership with other organizations: for example, the Weather Network (national weather every hour described on AMI-audio and AMI-tv); and Sirius XM radio (with a new Canadian channel, "Canada 360," featuring original programming for sports and entertainment, and news and weather in cooperation with Canadian Press and The Weather Channel)

AMI promotes awareness:

Beyond its active participation with distributors in the CRTC and CAB working groups, AMI has also embarked on campaigns to raise awareness about and promote the availability of described-video programming for all broadcasters in Canada. One example: the AMI website at www.AMI.ca has a "DV Guide" page that provides users with a fully accessible and comprehensive list of described-video programming available on most networks in Canada.

This central-information location responds to users' frustrations in finding described programs and planning their viewing as easily as fully sighted persons do. On its website, AMI offers detailed instructions on how visually impaired and blind viewers can use their TV remote controls to access the SAP.

The frustrations of one viewer with vision loss, a barrier ami and other Canadian broadcasters have now addressed with the "DV Guide"

"There are very few program options available with DV. It would be helpful if there was a list and schedule of DV programs available so that leisure time can be planned, instead of 'accidentally' finding out that a show has DV."

AMI helps to establish best DV practices

Described-video best practices were the topic of a major AMI presentation at the 2012 CSUN conference in San Diego:

“Opportunities exist to begin to develop standards now, while the industry practices continue to evolve,” stated Robert Pearson, AMI Director Accessible Digital Media. “As they evolve, best practices will be defined based upon consensus, measurement criteria will become clear and the barriers to achieve the goal will be addressed. Description standards could eventually be considered at an international level on par with internationally recognized web-accessibility standards and guidelines.”

In July 2012, AMI and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters embarked upon a process to begin to develop described-video (audio-description) best practices for the Canadian broadcasting industry with the support of the CRTC. Producers of description along with broadcasting-industry and community-group representatives came forward to develop Described Video Best Practices (DVBP) in an effort to standardize the delivery of description to bring context to a practice that is both science and an art.

Recognizing that the science of DV can easily be categorized, the focus of the DVBP initiative was on artistic elements and, to a minor extent, some technical elements open to interpretation based upon perspective, context and other changing variables. In addition, the DVBP initiative also recognized that industry-adopted best-practice guidelines would be a “living” document that would provide a high level of context to the practice while allowing for consideration of these variables based upon additional qualifiers.

The process of seeking agreement on the elements of high-level context began with a blind cross-comparison of the topics defined within eight selected sets of best practices. Among the topics evaluated: “race,” “profanity” and “scene transitions.” As part of the evaluation for each topic, a detailed definition and industry-recommended techniques for implementation were developed.

Going forward, additional internal qualifiers, such as “years of experience,” “community relationships,” “industry collaboration,” and “quality developed through an understanding of consumer needs,” may be applied to the high-level context guidelines by individual producers of description. Taking direction from the adopted topics, definitions and recommended techniques for implementation, the unique techniques of these producers of description will then be protected, yet defined by the industry standard.

The Canadian broadcasting industry as well as community groups and independent organizations have in the past tried to develop a set of described-video guidelines but could never reach consensus. This time around, it is felt that, given the current regulatory environment and the way this process has been designed, a widely adopted set of best practices allowing for DV producers’ unique contributions can be maintained.

DV BEST PRACTICES: FINDING CONSENSUS

In an effort to standardize the delivery of description to bring context to a practice that is both science and an art, the following best-practice categories have been developed and adopted:



Described Video Artistic Best Practices

- Individual/Physical Characteristics
- Scene Transitions
- Visual Effects
- Non-Verbal Sounds/Communications
- Text on Screen
- Style and Tone

Described Video Technical Best Practices

- Channels
- Loudness
- Peak Levels
- Soundtrack vs. DV Mix Levels
- Equalization
- Sync
- Recording Quality
- Output Parameters

AMI promotes social inclusion

As a major instrument to promote inclusion, accessible media must be visible not only to the immediate communities (persons with disabilities, minorities, ethnic groups and others) they serve, but also to the general public. Experience proves that, as a simpler way to access many things, accessibility features are often used by the general population. In the case of AMI, the organization has over the years received letters from sighted users pointing out how much they enjoy both AMI-audio and AMI-tv.

However, because programs with DV, apart from those featured on AMI-tv, are heard only through the little-understood SAP, general population awareness of described video remains low.

But when sighted viewers are exposed to DV with open description, according to AMI studies, there is little if any adverse reaction. Open description allows for members of a family or a group, both disabled and sighted, to watch exactly the same programming, making DV no longer just a “person with disabilities” feature while respecting the notion of “universal design” promoted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The content provided on both AMI-audio and AMI-tv also brings together communities: beyond the description of popular TV series (Matlock, Murdoch Mysteries, CSI New York) and audio-based newscasts, AMI provides content that combines general interest with programs of specific interest (disability-related). To better understand how AMI builds its broadcast schedules it’s important to understand that the CRTC requires 60% of TV programming and 40% of audio programming to be of Canadian origin.

AMI-audio, for instance, produces 15 hours daily of original programming that includes not only national and international news, but also local stories as well as interview programs like AMI Contact. Covered topics are as diverse as bionic-eye research, human rights and disability, and vision-loss prevention.

In the same spirit, AMI-tv has several series that focus on issues faced by the disabled community, as well as stories on disabled athletes (AMI This Week, A Whole New Light, Sports Access and Canada in Perspective).

AMI acquires programming from Canadian producers and cooperates with other broadcasters (CBC, CTV and Shaw and Rogers) to provide some of their productions with described video. The described program, acquired under copyright, is then available to producers and broadcasters that would wish to include it in their regular programming.

According to one AMI study, users are looking for even more diversified content, including current series and hit movies for AMI-tv, as well as for AMI-audio, which would include audio books and medical and research articles. Efforts in that direction will help AMI to broaden its visibility in the target audience as well as in the general population, and make it an essential service.

A partner's tribute: "AMI is a phenomenal model"



John Rafferty, President and CEO, CNIB – INCA

“CNIB and AMI cooperate on many projects, and use each other’s activities to

promote their services. While CNIB has a specific role in epidemiology, rehabilitation services and awareness of eye diseases, AMI brings to the table the technical knowledge to broaden the media offer to our community of visually impaired and blind Canadians. We can reach out to the disabled community and bring more awareness of AMI’s programs. But AMI is uniquely placed for content creation and distribution. This supports CNIB mission towards digital inclusion. AMI is a phenomenal model, and has shown that the funding model set up by Canada works!”

Achieving much with a modest budget, AMI serves as a leading example to the broadcasting industry in Canada and beyond. With 11 offices, several hundred volunteers and staff (including 20 blind and vision-impaired reporters and producers), and a goal of expanding its services to the French-speaking community of blind and visually impaired persons, AMI is in a unique position to show that technology and expertise combined can promote social-inclusion agendas.

Examples of AMI-tv's disability-related programming – Winter 2012 schedule**PROGRAMMING ON AMI-tv****Original**

- **Accessibility In Action I & II** – 26 half-hours: Joanne Smith explores the accessible world around us – inspiring stories; new technology; great performances
- **A Whole New Light II** – 1-hour documentary looking at the impact on the family when a family member experiences vision loss. Told through the personal stories of 5-year-old Julia; 17-year-old Daniel; Yvonne, a young mother in her 30s; and Bernice, a 70-year-old mother and wife
- **AMI This Week** – weekly half-hour of stories from across Canada
- **Sports Access** – 1-hour roundtable weekly sports talk show from Wayne Gretzky's restaurant in Toronto, discussing the opportunities to make sports accessible to all, featuring athletes who have competed despite physical challenges, teams and individuals who have championed access to sport, and the issues and opportunities for making sport safer for all who play
- **Canada In Perspective** – weekly, half-hour newsmagazine series that examines contentious issues through differing perspectives. With host Anna-Karina Tabuñar, each show includes a personal story capturing a specific issue in a taped segment, plus a panel of guests who analyze and debate the issue

Acquired

- **Push Girls** – follows the lives of four disabled women in Los Angeles, California, with the motto, "If you can't stand up – stand out!" (Half-hour)
- **Attitude** – accessible stories from New Zealand about the lives of people living with disability: important stories, human stories of courage, told with depth and compassion
- **Accessibility Toronto** – weekly half-hour produced by Rogers Tv Toronto
- **Going Blind** – 90-minute documentary on the true-life experience of Joseph Lovett, former Producer of ABC News, and his personal experience of vision loss
- **Hear and Now** – from HBO, a documentary from Emmy® Award-winning filmmaker Irene Taylor Brodsky about her deaf parents' decision to under-go cochlear-implant surgery
- **Dark Light: The Art Of Blind Photographers** - while the concept of a blind photographer may seem paradoxical or unrealistic, the medium provides a unique creative opportunity for three talented artists. A 30-minute documentary from HBO.

AMI leads by example: interior design



AMI is not content with providing accessible content on audio, TV and websites. Its own offices have been made accessible to visually impaired and blind visitors, including AMI staff members: lighting is indirect, colours have

been studied to help with contrast, and floor textures have been added to aid with mobility and orientation.

AMI reaches out to the community

In 2012 the Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) Scholarship Program to assist and encourage an understanding of accessibility at the post-secondary level was launched. Two scholarships of \$5,000 each are awarded annually, one of which is reserved for a student with a permanent disability. The scholarships are open to Canadian or permanent-resident students enrolled in post-secondary school.

In another initiative, AMI actively supports Courage Canada, a national registered charity that leads the development of the sport of Blind Hockey and provides children and youth with the opportunity to learn to skate and try the game. Working with school boards throughout the country, the organization has already engaged some 300 blind children who attend general schools.



For Courage Canada founder, Mark DeMontis: “This is a way to give blind kids’ self-esteem and self-confidence. It helps build the respect and awareness of their sighted schoolmates.” Mark, a gifted hockey player, lost his vision in his late teens. His cooperation with AMI has helped to promote described programming like National Hockey Day.

AMI measures progress: the AMI Research Panel

Initiated in May 2012, the panel brings together blind and visually impaired viewers to better assess the present and future of accessible media in Canada, and to ensure that the services would evolve according to the needs of the community. Recruited through AMI’s broadcast channels and via grassroots marketing with community partners, the panel today exceeds 750 members. Participants are regularly approached to participate in focus groups, online surveys and phone interviews. Questions range in topic from available content to technology, and leverage users’ experience to better adjust programming -- media habits, mobile and fixed equipment usage and other factors are monitored.

Several reports have already been issued that will serve as benchmarks for the future. The respondents that participate (several hundred people for each survey) establish a good basis to measure the evolution of both the content offered and the technology used by the blind and visually impaired community.

AMI's audience tracking, using industry-accepted broadcast measurement, suggests its programming appeals broadly and beyond its core vision-impaired audience. Today, AMI consistently ranks in the top 40% of all Canadian digital specialty channels due in large measure to its broad mix of content (movies, dramatic series, older programs, children's series, hit comedies etc.) and a deliberate effort to encourage family viewing in households with one or more persons with disabilities. Most recently AMI has expanded its live described-programming schedule, broadcasting the Paralympics in London 2012 and several Toronto Blue Jays baseball games – another first for the description of live events.

AMI tracks key performance indicators on a regular basis and adjusts programming selection and communication strategies based on the findings. The research was initiated in 2010 to establish benchmarks following the rebranding of the organization from NBRS (National Broadcast Reading Service) to Accessible Media Inc. and coincided with the transition to a unified-brand strategy, rebranding VoicePrint and TACTv as AMI-audio and AMI-tv respectively.

The Brand Health study, involving both visually impaired and sighted participants, seeks to:

- Understand current attitudes and media behaviour of blind / visually impaired Canadians
- Measure awareness of, familiarity with and perceptions of AMI-tv and AMI-audio
- Measure awareness of AMI-audio and AMI-tv (and sources of this awareness)
- Understand trial / usage of AMI-audio and AMI-tv
- Measure satisfaction / affinity with AMI-audio and AMI-tv

- Measure future usage / recommendation intent among non-users
- Identify opportunities for improving AMI's services, including content / programming preferences

According to the survey results, the awareness of AMI has grown significantly since the rebranding, both in the general population and in the target audience of persons who are blind or vision impaired. Overall, survey results provide invaluable insight into the needs of the community, and the conclusions drawn from the study have already influenced upcoming marketing and communications plans as well as programming schedules.⁶

AMI: "DEBLINKING THE DISABILITY MYTH"



David Errington, President and CEO, AMI Accessible Media, Inc.

"It's about the positive portrayal of persons with disabilities. Beyond the service, we at AMI want to promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities into the community. It is about the office talk around the coffee machine the morning after the new episode of the hit series. It is about visualizing the Blue Jays' pitcher signaling to the catcher. Disability does not have to be excluding anyone from life".

⁶ "Measuring impact – A Pre-Post Study Investigation – NorthStar Research Partners, in collaboration with Strategic Navigator, 2011-2012

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Promoting collaboration among the various stakeholders, keeping a tight monitoring of the pulse of the community, offering a variety of accessible media (TV, satellite radio, web) and content (news, entertainment, sports, specialized programming), AMI has a plan that can inspire other efforts, both in Canada and in the rest of the world.

AMI users acknowledge the importance of AMI not only as a service provider, but as a voice for the entire community of persons with disabilities. Offering a global perspective that includes the viewpoint of persons with disabilities, it is a unique example worldwide of a dedicated channel serving the specific community of blind and visually impaired citizens.

From a global-advocacy standpoint and G3ict's perspective, AMI is at the forefront of innovation in fulfilling the mandate of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: "accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms" – not only promoting one of the best know-how in described video in the world but also by creating, advocating, collaborating and enabling media accessibility with a modest but secure funding model.

"AMI has taken a place as a leading force in media accessibility"

From its inception, the Canadian Broadcasting Act laid the foundation for media accessibility within the Canadian broadcasting system. Accessible Media Inc. is a shining example of how a regulatory framework can be used to promote media accessibility broadly and rapidly, balancing the efforts of private-sector broadcasters.

G3ict

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