



The VOICE of Albertans with Disabilities

November 1, 2021

Increasing Accuracy of Auto-Captions for Virtual Meetings

By Sheila Serup, MBA

President, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association - Calgary

With the increased use of videoconferencing for virtual meetings, live auto-captioning creates accessibility of conversations for Albertans with hearing loss.

Auto-captioning in which voice recognition technology converts speech to text, known as captions, serves as an invaluable tool for understanding spoken content. While professional captioners provide real-time captioning for work, medical and educational purposes, for many Albertans it is not practical to use real-time captioning for virtual meetings with friends and family.

Platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams and Google offer auto-captions, some with a subscription service and others free. However, there are still challenges to seeing the correct captions being displayed.

To better understand why errors occur in translating speech to auto-captions, I turned to an expert in the field of Linguistics.

Dr. Benjamin V. Tucker, with the University of Alberta's Department of Linguistics, observes that speech recognition technology still struggles with transcribing voices to text.

"There are lots of other factors that will play a role as well, and there are simple solutions such as getting a microphone close to the speaker's mouth and reducing background noise," Dr. Tucker says.

He recommends using headphones to reduce noise coming from the environment and looking directly into the camera when talking. Any documents or prompts being referred to onscreen should be situated near the camera, so the person speaking is looking into the camera.

Background and lighting play a role as well. Speakers sitting behind a bright window may be seen as a silhouette and speechreading becomes impossible as their faces

become darker with the bright light behind them. Being in a quiet room, away from other conversations in the room or background noise assists the technology in only transcribing the virtual conversation.

As captions are normally displayed along the bottom of the screen, the speaker's face could be positioned so that his or her lips will not be obscured by the captions. "Users can slow down to help listeners," notes Dr. Tucker. "Reading lips and reading captions - the task is very difficult as the user is multitasking."

"When the input voice is highly accented, the system will have a hard time. It also struggles with background noise."



Dr. Tucker, who is also a Mercator Fellow in Quantitative Linguistics at the German University of Tübingen, suggests that before joining a call, participants spend a few minutes adjusting their position and equipment for an optimal presentation. Practising with headphones and microphones will also enhance everyone's audio-visual experience.

Dr. Tucker points out that if a powerpoint presentation or documents are included in a video-conference meeting, recording a video with captions about the document makes it easier for participants to understand.

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association has developed a Virtual Meeting Platform Guide to enable people to better access virtual meeting platforms. The Guide provides step-by-step tips to turn on the captioning function, and tips to increase its effectiveness. (It is posted on the CHHA.ca website at: <https://www.chha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Virtual-Meeting-Platform-Accessibility-Guide-1.pdf>)

Information in the Guide along with tips shared by Dr. Tucker will increase the accuracy of speech-independent auto-captioning in video conference meetings.

As current trends indicate, virtual meetings are becoming the norm for all of us.





www.vadsociety.ca; vad@vadsociety.ca
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter: @VADisabilities

ACCESSIBLE DRIVER APPRECIATION WEEK NOVEMBER 8-12, 2021

Thank You Drivers



2017



2018



2020

2019

#AccessibleTransportation

VOICE OF ALBERTANS WITH DISABILITIES (VAD)

ALBERTA ABILITY NETWORK (AAN)

Together, We Hold the Power!
Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity



www.vadsociety.ca; vad@vadsociety.ca
 Follow us on Facebook and Twitter: @VADisabilities

Annual Accessible Driver Appreciation Week

Second week of November! From November 8-12, 2021. Please let the people who drive and schedule accessible transportation know they are appreciated. It is through their daily work that many people get to live, work and play in our communities. Thank you for your welcoming manner, your professional driving skills, and your organization of complicated scheduling demands. Your work is essential to support the full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

#AccessibleTransportation

Alberta Ability Network and Voice of Albertans with Disabilities would like you to share our campaign posts on your social media accounts. There are links to our Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, respectively.

AAN

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AbAbilityNet>
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ababilitynet>
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AbAbilityNet/>

VAD

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VADisabilities>
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/vadisabilities>
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VADisabilities/>



VAD Website Reboot 2021



Voice of Albertans with Disabilities is currently recreating our website to be a fully inclusive platform. We are weeks away from launching a brand new site and are very pleased with the progress made so far. The new site will be interactive and have a portal for members to access projects and update business or personal information directly on the site.

The new site is meeting the needs of inclusion and full participation in user engagement and VAD is grateful for all the time spent working with Fresh Focus Media to create this wonderful new site. We are looking forward to being able to interact with website users in an accessible fashion and with the new site capabilities, we are able to digitalize our membership applications and renewals.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities - IDPD

Save the Date - December 3, 2021
11am - 1pm Virtual Event

The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992, by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 47/3. The observance of the Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.



The main programme of the observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at the UN Headquarters in New York will include the Opening, panel discussions and cultural events. Member States, civil society organizations and the private sec-

Together, We Hold the Power!

Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity



www.vadsociety.ca; vad@vadsociety.ca
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter: @VADisabilities

tor are welcome to organize their own events to celebrate the International Day to raise awareness and promote the rights and perspectives of persons with disabilities around the world.

Watch for Edmonton's IDPD event on December 3, VAD will be promoting the event on social media. Want more information, contact Sam at 780-488-9088.



International
Day of
Persons with
Disabilities

3 DECEMBER



Save the
Date!

December 3,
2021

11 am- 1pm

On Zoom



International Day for Persons with Disabilities
Edmonton 2021



Together, We Hold the Power!

Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity