Integrated Described Video

An introduction to how AMI creates original television content that audiences who are blind, partially sighted and fully sighted can enjoy together

Version 2.1.0

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What is Integrated Described Video?

Integrated described video (IDV)[1] is the next generation of described video (DV) [2].

IDV is a method of producing television content for blind and partially sighted audiences from the ground up, whereby the identification of key visual elements is incorporated into the pre-production, production and post-production phases, such that traditional DV is not required after the program has been packaged.

Understanding DV

In order to understand the method of creating IDV, one must first understand the basics of DV.

The term described video, or "DV", refers to the narrated description of a program's main visual elements, such as settings, costumes, or body language.[3] DV provides essential story information in an audio format, enabling television programming to be more accessible to people who are blind or partially sighted.

Creating DV is more of an art than a science. Unlike closed captioning, which is a verbatim transcription of program dialogue and major sound cues,[4] DV is more interpretive. Producing DV requires a combination of listening skills, syntactic creativity, technical aptitude and a keen sense of observation.

The describer's task is complex. In addition to having an innate ability to paint vivid mental images using concise prose, the describer must also structure sentences that synchronize with the onscreen action. Additionally, they must prepare a script that is easy to read and understand, while at the same time reflect the genre and style of the program using vernacular appropriate for the target demographic.

Like any category of art, interpreting visual elements for description is subjective. Ask one hundred artists to paint Mount Everest, and the result will be one hundred variations of it. Subsequently, it would be unfitting to measure description in terms of "right or wrong." However, description is executed with a goal in mind, which is for blind or partially sighted viewers to have the same program experience as their sighted counterparts. The more informative and entertaining the narrative description is without distracting the audience, the closer that goal becomes to being realized.

Formal DV standards do not exist in North America, but there are a number of references with respect to best practices for developing DV, some of which can be found in Appendix 1.

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[1] Integrated Described Video was formerly known as Embedded Described Video.

[2] In North America, DV or described video is also referred to as descriptive video, video description and described narrative. In other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, it is known as audio description (AD). It should also be noted that according to the CRTC, AD has a separate definition from DV: "AD uses a program host or announcer to provide a basic voice-over, reading text and describing graphics that appear on the screen. AD is often used for newscasts, weather reports, sports scores or financial data, and is best suited to live, information-based programming." TV Access for People with Visual Impairments: Described Video and Audio Description *Accessed October 02, 2014*

[3] Ibid

[4] Closed captioning translates the audio part of a TV program into text captions, so viewers who can't hear the program can read the words that are spoken. Captions usually appear at the bottom of the TV screen. TV Access for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Closed Captioning *Accessed October 02, 2014*

The IDV Innovation

When AMI began developing original content for its television service, AMI-tv,[5] programs were created and packaged, and then described as per regular industry practice. But since it is common for blind and partially sighted individuals to watch television with their sighted family and friends, AMI endeavoured to develop a method of creating one version of the program that everyone could enjoy together. Thus the innovation of IDV came to life.

Today, original programs created for AMI-tv's audience are produced from the onset in consultation and collaboration with an experienced describer. The describer ensures that the audio descriptions and natural sound cues are integrated into the program, from the earliest stage of development, right through to the final mix. This enables blind and partially sighted audiences to understand and enjoy programming in a mainstream format, without the addition of traditional DV.

It is important to note that programs produced with IDV do not have descriptive narration that viewers of traditional DV programming are accustomed to. Programs produced with IDV effectively should look and feel like any other mainstream broadcast. Likewise, IDV principles can also be implemented among mainstream media productions.

How is IDV Different from DV?

- **Executed throughout production**
  Whereas DV is traditionally executed after a program is complete and packaged, IDV is executed from the onset of content creation and continues throughout pre-production, production, post-production and packaging.

- **No additional descriptive narration**
  Since a program with IDV is created from the ground up with all accessibility features built right into the original production, a program with IDV does not contain or require any traditional descriptive narration.

- **One delivery format**
  Since a program with IDV does not require descriptive narration, there is no separate or secondary delivery format. A program produced with IDV is accessible to people who are blind and partially sighted, right out of the box.

- **Many production factors**
  When creating a traditional DV version of the program, the production factors typically involve writing the description, narrating the description and then mixing the narration with the program. With IDV, the entire audio palette can be utilized to make content accessible to those who are unable to see the picture. The process is akin to producing a radio play.

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[5] AMI-tv is a national English language, open described video, closed captioned, basic digital TV specialty service, offered by all cable systems and satellite direct-to-home services. AMI-tv broadcasts programs from conventional and specialty TV services and foreign-rights holders in an open described, closed captioned format for people who are blind, low vision, deaf or hard of hearing.

As such, many more production factors can facilitate a naturally descriptive program, including: making the scriptwriting more descriptive, adjusting the narration, training hosts and guests to be more descriptive with their interactions, utilizing and/or omitting environmental audio, using sound effects and music cues to establish action and scene changes, and the list goes on.

Compliance

It is important to note that IDV is a form of DV. This means in order to be compliant with regulatory bodies, IDV must be produced in accordance with standard DV best practices. In other words, one must fully understand the fundamentals of DV in order to produce IDV that is both effective and compliant.

In Canada, best practices for executing DV can be found in the Described Video Best Practices documentation,[6] which was created by the Described Video Working Group.[7] At AMI, describers are required to review and understand the documentation as well as complete a describer training program.

In the case where the television producer wishes to incorporate IDV into the program, but does not have DV experience, regulatory compliance can be achieved by means of cooperation and collaboration with an experienced describer.[8]

The describer essentially becomes involved with the project from the onset, and acts as a consultant to the producer, participating in the entire process from pre-production (scriptwriting, talent coaching, etc.) to post-production (video editing, audio editing, etc.). The describer receives an on-screen credit as "DV Consultant", which serves to credit the individual for their production effort, as well as identify the individual accountable for making the program accessible to blind and partially sighted viewers.

Accountability

There are several risks to producing programs with ineffective IDV, all of which may result in offering a product that is not accessible to some members of the population, and the broadcaster being accountable for it. Therefore, accountability for the process and quality of IDV are some of the highest priorities for AMI.

AMI's process for developing IDV includes the following steps:

1) **Assigning a DV Consultant to each original production**
   Since producing a program with IDV involves consideration at each stage of the production process, an experienced describer is assigned to a program from the onset, and becomes a member of the crew, applying DV best practices throughout production.

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[6] http://www.ami.ca/media-accessibility/Pages/Described-Video-Best-Practices.aspx#DVBP%20Documents

[7] In July 2012, AMI and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) embarked upon a process to develop Described Video Best Practices for the Canadian broadcasting industry with the support of the CRTC. Over the period of one year, AMI worked in partnership with the CAB, producers of described video, and grassroots organizations representing the blind and partially sighted community to create the Described Video Best Practices.

[8] It is recommended that producers incorporating IDV into programs distributed among the broadcast system develop and maintain a thorough DV documentation and quality control system.

DV Consultants have three main functions:

- **Training**
  DV Consultants train everyone involved with the production, including the cast, crew and guests to ensure all parties are aligned with the IDV objectives and best practices.

- **Quality control**
  At each step of the process, DV Consultants ensure the program is written and produced in a manner that makes it accessible for blind and partially sighted audiences.

- **Documentation**
  Notes are taken during each phase of production, as means for relaying lessons learned and to provide accurate records of actions taken to make programs accessible.

2) **IDV ID**
Programs produced with IDV broadcast on AMI-tv have an ID at the beginning of the program identifying the program as such. The following ID is displayed and read aloud:

> *"This Program contains Integrated Described Video. It was written to be accessible for blind and low vision viewers."*

3) **IDV Task Force**
Under the umbrella of the Described Video Working Group, AMI has established an IDV Task Force to formalize a set of IDV best practices based on field experience, lessons learned, audience feedback and stakeholder engagement. Documentation is expected to be publicly available in mid-2015.

4) **Validation**
In early 2015, a research study of 150 participants was conducted by a third party to validate the quality and relevance of AMI IDV[9]. The objectives for the research were to 1) assess whether IDV delivers the same or better viewing experience than DV; 2) identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of IDV and DV from the perspective of the target audience; and, 3) determine whether the target audience wants to watch the types of genres / programs for which IDV is best suited.

The summary of the study is as follows:

- The target audience wants to watch the types of genres / programs for which IDV is best suited.

- In addition to expressing higher satisfaction with IDV than DV, participants were better able to correctly recall details of the real estate show with the IDV format.

- When forced to choose, the majority of participants preferred IDV over DV, both in terms of overall viewing experience and approach to described video.

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[9] AMI IDV Research: conducted by Strategic Navigator in partnership with Northstar; report: June 4, 2015

- That said, it is worth noting that while IDV is clearly a home run for those who are partially sighted, low vision and printed restricted, the blind community was more likely to perceive parity between the two formats. This may be in part because they are more familiar with DV, but also because DV provides verbal cues telling them what is important or what they should pay attention to, meaning that watching / listening to a show requires less concentration. This speaks to the importance of focusing the IDV description on the most important elements or details of the show.

AMI's development and research on the effectiveness of IDV is ongoing.

Feedback

AMI welcomes questions and feedback relating to IDV from content creators, broadcasters and the general public. Please reach out at your convenience.

AMI: Contact Us

Appendix – Described Video Standards & Best Practices

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