

ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION
THE BENEFITS OF CLOSED CAPTIONING

2022



Executive Summary

Closed captioning has proven benefits for content creators that go far beyond accessibility. Research shows that captions:

- Create better audience engagement
- Improve the user experience
- Encourage longer average watch time
- Are increasingly expected by audiences, even those who do not have hearing loss
- Are being adopted by many content creators outside of traditional media

Introduction

Technology has a tendency to grow far beyond its original purpose. What starts out as a product that meets essential needs can evolve into a multi-service solution that more people find valuable. Closed captioning is no exception.

First demonstrated in the United States in the early 1970's, closed captions had a focused objective: to provide video accessibility for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. While open captioning is visible to the entire audience, closed captions are viewer-activated. They can describe not just spoken words, but also speaker identity and manner, music, and sound effects.

Captions are different from subtitles, which are used with the assumption that the viewer has access to the program audio. However, due to factors like a foreign language or unintelligible speech, all viewers require additional context that the on-screen text can provide.

Momentum worldwide quickly grew for broadcast closed captions. Within a decade, global systems from Australia to the U.K. were established to offer closed captions with content, both live and post-produced. In 2012, America's Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandated closed captioning for Internet programming as well. Captions can be generated by professional human captioners, by machine-learning-powered speech-to-text solutions, or a hybrid of the two.

Captioning Becomes Commonplace

Today, a vast range of applications have emerged for closed captioning due to several reasons, including legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requiring reasonable accommodations for the disabled across a wide range of media. Over time, audiences who are not Deaf or hard of hearing also recognized their usefulness, such as watching TV with the sound off, or preferring readable video for online streaming content.

As of late, audiences have come to expect captions. And activist

litigation to demand closed captioning on broadcast, streaming, and municipal content has even been filed.

At the same time, closed captioning technology has gotten faster, easier, and less expensive for content creators to use. Closed captioning has come to be in demand at events, and can even drive global content monetization opportunities.

Going Beyond Accessibility

As closed captioning undergoes this rapid evolution, increasingly sophisticated distribution platforms have been proliferating. Audiences now have many more opportunities to engage with closed captioning beyond broadcasting, including streaming media, mobile, education, corporate settings, events, and more.

The presence of closed captioning now has an even greater impact on content and audiences. Captioning benefits have been shown to include:

- Improved user experience
- Longer average watch time
- Helping as-a-second-language speakers learn more easily
- Better SEO, since Google can crawl caption text but not audio alone

Captions Create Engagement

As closed captioning's accuracy, affordability, and reach grew, it's only natural that researchers began to develop an interest in it. People became curious about additional, deeper impacts of closed captioning.

A range of studies have revealed that in educational contexts, for example, the use of captions and subtitling contributed to many comprehension benefits. These include reading speed and fluency, word knowledge, decoding, vocabulary acquisition, word recognition, reading comprehension, and oral reading rates.

Another education-based study found an eagerness among students to use captions when they learned new information. This is due to the

positive impact of captioning with knowledge retention.

The use of text in video may prove critical to winning streaming views on social media platforms. Multiple content publishers believe that as much as 85% of video views on Facebook happen with the sound off. Meanwhile, competition for eyeballs on Facebook is fierce: Data shows that video posts have 135% higher organic reach than photo posts, while Facebook is generating billions of video views daily, adding up to 100 million hours of news feed video viewing by their users daily.

This makes the inclusion of captioning critical, since engagement has to happen quickly on Facebook with the sound off – something that the social media giant acknowledged in a blog post: "We know that 65% of people who watch the first three seconds of a video will watch for at least ten seconds and 45% continue watching for thirty seconds."

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Captions can make a noticeable impact on social media video engagement. In an A/B test comparing captioned to non-captioned video on Facebook, one study found that the captioned video's average reach was 16% higher than the one without. Additionally, there were on average 17% higher reactions to the captioned video. Meanwhile, average shares were down by nearly 15% without captions. Average video views without captions saw a roughly 4% reduction, and 10-second video views were lower by nearly 18%. Plus, CTA clicks fell by 26% with captions removed.

Facebook isn't the only outlet to see increased interest in captioning for social media. Marketing how-to's for TikTok routinely recommend taking advantage of the text editor function to add captions. In addition to enabling accessibility, TikTok captions are noted for their ability to express complex narratives, educate viewers on important topics, and build suspense to increase engagement across multiple clips. For example, overlaying text at the end of a video that says "Follow for

Part 2" can help to keep audiences watching multiple videos.

Captioning for YouTube also drives results on the furthest-reaching social media video outlet of them all. YouTube is the world's second-most visited website (behind only Google, its parent company). Once there, visitors view 1 billion+ hours of video on YouTube daily. With that type of exposure, it's logical that the presence of captioning leads to engagement, since the presence of captions and subtitles allows videos' content to be indexed for a boost in SEO and therefore exposure.

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The opportunity to engage with audiences through captioning means content creators understand the need to grab viewers immediately with a strong message – readable video is one key to engaging audiences in this way. Ecommerce experts Shopify noted, "A strong visual on Instagram can make users 'slow their scroll' and stay locked on your post, but a carefully thought-out caption can do a lot more heavy lifting in terms of marketing and sales."

In fact, all of mobile video is positively impacted by captioning. A survey from Verizon Media and ad buyer Publicis Media revealed that fully 92% of U.S. customers view videos with the sound off on mobile, and recommended to advertisers that they caption their ads, since 80% of consumers are more likely to watch an entire video when it is made available with captions.

50% of the consumers surveyed in the study identified captions as important since they watch videos with the sound off. Reasons given for sound-free video viewing included being in a quiet space, not having headphones, waiting in line, or multitasking.

Engagement received a boost from captioning in this study as well, with 37% of viewers reporting that the presence of captions encouraged them to turn the sound on because the videos seemed more interesting. 29% said that even with the sound off, they were

better able to understand the video thanks to the captioning. Captions also benefited ad performance, contributing to an 8% increase in ad recall, a 10% increase in ad memory quality, plus a 13% lift in brand linkage.

Additional figures released by Verizon and Publicis revealed something even more intriguing about the connection between captioning and engagement: 80% of people surveyed who use captions do not identify as Deaf or hard of hearing. 50% of respondents indicated that they believe captions are important since they often watch videos without audio, via desktop or mobile.

On the advertising front, the engagement benefits of captioning were apparent. "When done right, captioning not only does not detract from brand messaging, but leads to greater ad recall, memory quality, and brand linkage," said Helen Lin, Chief Digital Officer for Publicis Media, about the joint study with Verizon.



lift in brand linkage due to captions

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Readable Video Has Benefits

The boost to business, in advertising and other content categories, has been a consistent driver to captioning adoption. Media producers seeking increasingly global audiences have found the thoughtful addition of onscreen text can notably improve viewer engagement.

For example, live streaming specialist act.tv has earned 1 billion+ views for its progressive programming since launching in 2013. Today, virtually everything that it publishes to YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram is readable video, which is content that features open captioning prominently in its presentation.

“Readable video helps get more eyeballs on your content,” says Brad Gans, Creative Technical Director for act.tv. “It’s included in all our productions. Anything that we produce, for our channel and our clients, is going to have either open captions or closed captions.

“Readable video allows us to communicate with the viewer very quickly and efficiently,” Gans continues. “Especially in the social feed, you want to be able to deliver the meaning and the message of the video as fast as possible. On-screen text is one way to do that, because you can craft it and create the narrative.”

For act.tv, the importance of readable video first emerged during the 2016 presidential campaign. Gans and his team began adding open captions to Facebook streams, which by default play with the sound off, and observed a noticeable increase in views.

“The difference in engagement was huge,” he says. “After that programming debuted, we decided that all our streaming video would be readable, whether its open captioning on Facebook or text overlays on TikTok and Instagram. Captioning is now our baseline: From a user behavior perspective, it’s something that our audience has come to expect.”

As act.tv has branched out from news reporting to client-driven productions, its readable video prowess has helped differentiate them in an intensely competitive media marketplace.

“Making the effort to produce readable video has been very important in our vertical,” Gans confirms. “Adding open captions and subtitles has enhanced our ability to tell stories and communicate narratives, often with minimal speaking or dialogue. It’s become a very big part of our workflow, and now it’s something that act.tv is known for: One reason that livestream clients choose us for their productions is our expertise in high quality captioning.”

Meanwhile, act.tv’s Brad Gans sees captioning’s core promise of accessibility retaining its significance, both in terms of complying with ADA requirements and projecting an ethos of inclusiveness. “Content creators today appreciate the full importance of being accessible,” he says. “Including captions shows that you’re living your values.”

Captions Attract a Wider Audience

Accessibility to content has increased dramatically for audiences with these developments. Meanwhile, content creators' access to captioning has dramatically increased due to rapid technological advances and lower costs.

For example, the introduction of EEG Video's secure IP-based iCap captioning network seamlessly connected broadcasters and content creators with thousands of skilled captioners globally. The world's largest 24/7/365 captioning and subtitle delivery network, iCap is an EEG Cloud Services offering that brings increased accuracy, enhanced security, low operational cost, and more to content creators everywhere.

An AI-driven automatic captioning service makes accurate captioning even more efficient and affordable. Comprehensive captioning-focused companies such as Ai-Media provide captioning, transcription, translation, and technology solutions in one place.

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Due to innovations like these, the availability of captions keeps growing. This increased reach has led to generations of audiences not only becoming accustomed to captioning but embracing it as an enhancement to the viewing experience.

"Closed captioning is a boon to everyone," author and Northwestern professor Lauren Michelle Jackson wrote in the Washington Post. "Captioned text is 'closed' until it is needed. But for that very reason, captions can feel like divulged secrets, windows into what a show thinks it's doing, to a whole interpretive universe, a playground of ideology and messy intentions...Subtitles introduce a gap between what we perceive and know about the media in front of us. The leap is not only valuable, but fun."

With its proven ability to increase information comprehension and

retention, as well as boost viewer engagement, captioning has shown a surprising arc beyond its accessibility roots. These rich capabilities help explain why captions are being adopted far beyond traditional media. Creators including corporate, government, municipal, education, events, and more are reaping captions' full benefits by planning their inclusion from the start of their productions.

And they have more than ever to work with. Captioning solution providers keep evolving their offerings, constantly introducing new technology and workflows to meet the heightened demand. In addition to fulfilling accessibility requirements users expect solutions that are easy to use, highly accurate, and cost effective. The ability to enable translation into multiple languages is an increasingly frequent requirement, streamlining global distribution to open fresh revenue streams.

One example of recent advances in captioning systems is Smart Lexi, an innovative new offering of the Lexi Automatic Captioning Service. A live captioning solution from EEG Video and Ai-Media, Smart Lexi combines machine learning automation with expert human curation, building on Lexi's 96% accuracy for unprecedented accuracy, automation, and affordability.

Solutions powered by Ai-Media and EEG show how captioning methods are growing in step with the needs of viewing audiences and the content creators that seek to attract them. Beyond accessibility, captions are proven to foster comprehension, information retention, and improved engagement with users. As the capabilities of captioning keep expanding, their power to connect with audiences of all types is increasingly clear.