**Web and TV Accessibility**

For decades, the accessibility of TV has been a concern. Being a medium that is consumed through sight and sound, the needs of those experiencing deficiencies in these two capacities have never been fully met. The technology of closed captioning for the hearing impaired and audio description/described video for the visually impaired have evolved at different rates and the availability of these two technologies continues to be limited. Although, being a more straightforward technology to implement, the availability of closed captioning on both analog and digital signals have been much more significant than audio description. Closed captioning technologies benefit from established standards, while audio description standards do not yet exist. These technologies have not typically been a significant requirement of licensing; therefore their availability continues to be limited along with the methods and appropriate processes for their implementation.

The accessibility of TV has historically not been amongst the top priorities of the industry. For instance, despite the length of its existence, closed captioning has changed little since it was first conceived. Television though has evolved from analog to digital to 3D along with significant increases in available programming. In response to this inconsistent evolution of the medium and the deployment of accessible technologies, advocacy organizations have been critical of the broadcasting industry for not doing enough to meet their needs for social inclusion in the consumption of media. However, while slowly progressing, the needs of those requiring a special accommodation have received significantly increased recognition in recent years. New standards, laws and regulations have shown that the community that requires accessibility accommodations has been patient long enough. These new policies are allowing broadcasting technology the ability to evolve to allow for enhanced captioning and standardized audio description to ensure that everyone’s needs are met and no one is left behind, everyone feels included and that the world becomes a more accessible place.

Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) is a not-for-profit multimedia organization operating two broadcast services, VoicePrint and The Accessible Channel – TACtv along with a companion website (<http://www.ami.ca/>). The Accessible Channel is the only 100% open-captioned and 100% described television station in the world to serve the needs of blind and the hearing impaired. We are focused upon providing media accessibility to all Canadians. We work closely with our industry partners to increase the availability of captioned and described programming across the spectrum, while also ensuring that we provide accessible content onto other platforms.

TV is evolving onto these other platforms. An opportunity exists to ensure that at the beginning of this evolution, accessibility becomes a priority and practice as the medium of television becomes widely available via the medium of the web or on mobile. This will be accomplished through the use of universal and inclusive designs and the application of standards such as HTML 5 that provide for accessible design. The evolution needs to be consistent and take into consideration the mistakes that were made in regards to accessibility in the past. There is an opportunity to unite two historically opposed communities on the topic of accessible TV with standardization and education. TV on the web or on mobile can be made to be accessible if the intent of the industry is to focus upon accomplishing it correctly.

There are two critical requirements.

1. Throughput of closed captioning on television content displayed on the web with considerations for the evolution of the technology along with considerations for the quality of that captioning. The user also needs to be provided with the ability to turn it on and off. New technologies also need to be considered including; the usage of graphics within closed captions and the question as to how one is able to caption 3D television content.
2. Throughput of audio description on television content displayed on the web with considerations for the evolution of the technology along with considerations for the quality of that description. The user also needs to be provided with the ability to turn it on and off. Standards also need to be considered including; international techniques, local considerations and different language structures. Being partly an art and partly a science, a variety of techniques can be developed to provide accurate and universally inclusive description of television programming.

In order to address these requirements, an accessible and secure media player is required. The HTML 5 standard could allow for the creation of an accessible player once support for its framework exists. Copyright, the rights to produced television content and security will need to be considerations. The accessibility of player controls with assistive technologies such as speech browsers and zoom tools will also need to be considerations. While television is already available over the web with some of these considerations, a fully accessible solution does not yet exist. The implementation of these two critical requirements to ensure the delivery of fully accessible television content over the web is only in its infancy with solutions available such as those on Youtube and only for closed captioning. In the absence of standards, audio description has yet to see any mainstream implementation.

We believe that the formation of an Accessibility Task Force within the W3C’s Web and TV Interest Group could provide direction to the establishment of these requirements to ensure the availability of accessible television content over the web. The opportunity exists as TV evolves onto other platforms that the accessibility concerns of the past do not continue to be an issue going forward.