

Getting The Word Out

-- by John Ford, hearing impaired advocate

We know there is a need for text-based access for deaf and hard of hearing people. For sure, we know that reporters like you are capable of providing that access. The one frustration many people are discovering is finding a way to spread the word that a church is providing CART/captioning.

The logical first step is to make sure you have an information brochure and a press release sheet that tells people exactly what you are offering, when and where. Publicity will bring inquiries. Have a contact person who can hand out or mail your information package.

Now let's look for ways to get the word out. Here are some things we all can do.

Is there someone who writes on disability issues in a local paper? If so, invite them to see what you are doing. Maybe, if you give them a preview of your program that is starting up, they will write an article and publish it the week before you begin providing captioning. Most newsies love to get all the information they need handed to them on a platter. It is the finest cure for writer's block they will ever get! Fax or e-mail a news release to anyone you can think of to advise them of a kick-off. The more that know, the more exposure you will get.

Invite TV news people, too. They crave for human-interest shorts to keep in stock as fillers to finish out a time slot. If they never air it, at least you have exposed the crew to a service they may not have been familiar with or knew very little about. Offer to do a short interview after the service so they can get a nice shot of your equipment without disrupting things.

Those little steno machines drive the average keyboard user to curiosity trying to figure out where they hide the rest of the keys. Do a show and tell. If they send an on-camera reporter, let the camera shoot a scene of you sitting in front of your writer while you guide them through a few words like "welcome to our accessible church". They just love stuff like that!

Of course, invite all self-help support groups for Cochlear implant, Deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing people. Do not forget parent groups for hearing impaired kids, too. A local hearing aid dealer, audiologist or hospital should be able to give you contact people. Offer to provide light refreshments and a "meet our captionist" meeting after the service. Many consumers are very interested in how you get all those words inside their TV. Check out any consumer or service provider publications that might give you a blurb. Offer to host field trips for groups from outlying areas to see your new technology.

Check out Christian news media for any hearing aid dealers who run ads. Likely, they are Christian, themselves, and might be willing to let you place some of your brochures in the waiting room as a service to their clients. While you are looking at Christian media, offer to be interviewed for an article or TV show. It is, after all, a Christian interest story. Even check out the big ones far away, they often have mobile crews roving for stories.

Make a round of hospitals and private audiology clinics, too. They usually have staff who counsel people on dealing with hearing loss and, believe me, being on an equal footing with hearing people is one of the best ways of coping with the barrier created by hearing loss. Services to seniors and public health nursing units may also have counselling people who might help.

Are there people in your church who wear hearing aids? Check out family connections, too. When they go to get an adjustment or buy batteries, have them request permission to leave your information brochures for other clients. A private dealer may not be excited about helping some church somewhere on the other side of town. However, if it is an established client, to whom they hope to sell more hearing aids in the future, they may be more receptive.

Once you get the word out, people requiring CART/captioning will begin to arrive.

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