ALDACon 2010
CAPTIONING TECHNOLOGY FOR
PEOPLE WITH HEARING LOSS
PRESENTED BY: CHAMEEN STRATTON
with MIKE ELLIS and KEN ARCIA

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming. This is my first conference I have attended and it's been a wonderful experience meeting all of you and learning about some of your experiences over the years. This afternoon I am going to talk briefly about captions on the telephone. I am going to give a brief overview of what CapTel® is, how it works, and what are some of the services that it offers.

How does it work? For those of you familiar with traditional relay service, it's similar to that. CapTel® uses a voice-recognition technology through an agent who re-voices everything that's heard on the phone to a computer system which transcribes sound to text for to us read. Previous model phones always ran on an analogue phone line. Newer models use two lines which make the communication a bit more efficient. For the voice and audio part of the telephone, the phone is like a typical telephone using an analogue phone line, a digital phone line, and VoIP services. The new model, called the 800i--"i" indicating Internet--uses the Internet to provide the captions for everyone to read.

When you receive the phone, for the most part you are ready to go. That is, if your phone and high-speed Internet are located in the same room. If your Internet is one room and your phone is elsewhere, the phone comes with a "power line network" adapter. This runs the Internet through your home's electrical system.

Many new features exist for this phone. The display screen is larger; font size can be changed and menu options make changes easier than on the older model. There's also a customer service button on the phone. That button doesn't necessarily cut you ahead of line of the 800 number. It just means that you don't have to remember the 800 number if you need support with your phone. Also, redial, flash and mute buttons, all standard on most telephones. The tone button adjusts the frequency of the voice, lowering a high voice or raising a low voice tone.

And then there are the captions button. In many homes with hearing and hearing disabled people, the caption button can turn off the captions for those who hear fine on the phone. Or if you don't need the captions at the beginning of the call, but then later decide you're not understanding the caller very well, you can hit the caption button in the middle of the conversation and you will be connected to an agent for captions during the rest of that call. Because the captions run through a separate phone line, you can turn them on and off at any time.

The volume bar helps to boost up that volume, but if the caption button is off, the volume increase. In addition to using the headset, you can use hands-free devices such as a loop. The HATIS can also be plugged in on the side for those marathon conversations with your family members.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can the captions be diverted to the computer screen?
CHAMEEN STRATTON: Not with the 800i. If you are interested in using a computer, the next product I will talk about does that. It's called WebCapTel®.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What about a hands-free speaker phone?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Unfortunately the 800i does not have a speaker phone option. But it does have a hands-free so you can plug in either a loop, a HATIS or a headset.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can you explain a little bit about how to retrieve messages on an answering machine?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: You hook up an external answering machine next to the phone. Scroll down the menu until you see "answering machine." Click on that, put the receiver on the answering machine, and the agent will caption everything that's on that machine or on voice mail.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a message center through SBC and AT&T. I use CapTel® to get all of my messages. I dial a local number in my area, give a password, a mailbox number and the captioning comes on. It works very well for me.

CHAMEEN STTRATTON: Now, I am going to talk about Sprint's WebCapTel®. About two years ago, we worked with CTI to use the CapTel® phone and put it on the Internet. What's needed is probably what many of us already have at home. Instead of waiting to receive a phone call, you log on to your computer, and start receiving captions right away. What you need is a computer with high-speed Internet and any telephone you are comfortable with using, even a cell phone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I heard that you don't need high speed. Can you use dialup?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: I don't fully support using dialup with WebCapTel® because like any website on a dialup modem, it's slow. That's not going to be the fault of the captioner or anything other than your Internet connection.

To sign up with this WebCapTel, you register it like registering for an e-mail account. You click on "register," fill out a series of questions, name, address, username, password, etc., and hit "submit," Then check your e-mail, and click the "activation" link which proves it is you who is signing up a new account. Once you activate the account, go back to the website and log in. Registering your home address is primarily for E-9-1-1 purposes. Since you are using the Internet, agents cannot find your Public Service Answering Point (PSAP. With the Internet-based phones now, it's important to offer as much information as we can about our location in case of an emergency and we need that service.

Once you've logged in, you need to inform the system what phone you are using to be able to connect with a call. In the first box, enter your telephone number, and in the second box, enter the number of whom you are calling. Once you finish, hit "place call." A new screen will pop up indicating you are connecting to the agent who will begin captioning your call. CapTel® only captions the other side of the conversation, not both sides. You only read what the other person says, not what you say.

With WebCapTel®, again, as with the 800i, you can modify the font sizes, background colors, etc. One of the advantages of WebCapTel® is the copy-and-paste function. If you are receiving directions, an appointment schedule or other information you need to remember, you can copy and

paste the conversation into a Word or editing document to save for future use.

One thing that I forgot to mention about the 800i is all inbound calls are automatically captioned. The other party does not need to dial a toll-free number to connect to the calling center and then to you. Incoming calls can automatically be captioned because of the separate phone line. The Internet part is always on. As soon as that phone is picked up and the caption button is lit, every call will be captioned. I like to joke that many people who have been using the one-line CapTel® have never experienced telemarketer calls. Now with the 800i captioning every call, you will be bothered at dinner time like the rest of the world. (Laughter)

With WebCapTel®, you do need to have people who call you dial a toll-free number first, and you must be logged in to receive calls on WebCapTel®. There is also a new CapTel® 800 model which replaces the older 200 model.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I use CapTel® on my computer and I've always wanted to be able to give information to the operator before we start the conversation. Is that possible?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Unfortunately not. CapTel® provides a way for you to direct the communication with the caller. The system is not designed for us as users to communicate with the agent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One of my frustrations with the WebCapTel® service is that at work I am not able to use my extension number because WebCapTel won't accept anything more than the 10 digits. Is that limitation being worked on?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: The manufacturer of the product says they know about that problem and are working on it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have two questions. First, I assume you need to register each computer separately?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: No, it is a website, a web-based service. It's there any time you log onto that website. It's like checking a Gmail or Yahoo! e-mail account. You can log in anywhere. One account.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My other question is how does Sprint capitalize by providing this free service?
CHAMEEN STRATTON: CapTel® 800i and WebCapTel® are reimbursed by the Federal Government, the NECCA fund. A fraction of everyone's phone bill is used to fund the telecommunications Relay Service.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: This is a question about the WebCapTel®. Who is there? Is it a machine? Is there a person in between?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Your call goes through a live agent who has trained his/her computer system to recognize his/her voice. Agents are using a computer, but they hear. For example, if I call my mom, I am talking directly to her. The agent re-voices into the trained computer everything

my mom says which is transcribed into text. The Internet connects you to the agent at the call center. They hear everything that's being said, which is then being transcribed into text onto your phone or computer. At the same time, I am talking directly to my mom and hearing her voice on the phone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was wondering if I could use something like Skype as the receiving phone. Basically I want to get away from having a landline at all. Since, I can't use the branded number on CapTel® or another service, I have to have Skype brand the number for me to be able to use Skype as a receiving phone. Correct? In other words, I bring up CapTel® on the net. I have Skype running in the background on my same computer, different socket, different IP address and I want to use Skype as the receiving phone. So I make the phone call basically from CapTel®. CapTel® calls Skype. Skype rings, and I answer it, and then I have the conversation looking at the CapTel® screen. Is this possible?

KEN ARCIA: I'm not sure if that would be possible because the computer is running two different programs, the computer itself only has 1 IP address. Running Skype and running CapTel®, but there is only one IP address.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That assumes you can run it on a different thread in the background which depends on the ability of the computer to run a second program in the background on a different thread at the same time. Multitasking, is that true?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: I don't know. That's a good question. I'll take it back to my work and find out what we can do.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am wondering whether this technology is running as a private company, or are you running as part of the government? Is it a private company? Can we request you at least make an effort to bring it to our country, Kenya?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Right now the CapTel® service runs CapTel®, a private company. It is not part of the government. The government does, however, fund all relay services in the United States through the NECCA fund. In terms of making this an international product, Mike, do you have anything to say that?

MIKE ELLIS: We would have to work with your government phone company to make sure that they would agree to pay for the service. Today CapTel® is available in Australia on a trial program. So it can be done. We need to find out if your government is willing to pay for the service.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If we're using a competitor's captioning service, how difficult is it to switch over to Sprint?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: It's very easy. Which service are you talking about, WebCapTel® or the actual telephone itself?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The telephone.

CHAMEEN STRATTON: If you receive a phone from a competitor and you want Sprint to provide the services instead, you simply call CapTel® and tell them. Every phone has a branded serial number based on whichever company you bought the phone from. You just call CapTel® and say, "Please switch my phone to the other company," Sprint or whatever. With WebCapTel®, it's a matter of logging on to the particular website.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I use a traditional Relay Service right now, and the operators have trouble with augmented calls, press 1 for…, press 2 for…. How does the CapTel® service handle those kinds of calls with multiple menu choices?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: With CapTel® there is a 2-5 second delay on the call which is similar to the VCO Relay Service. But when the menu choices come on, they are captioned. You just push whatever button you want in the automated system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just push 2, and I wouldn't need the operator to do that?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: That's right. One of the best and beautiful things with this phone is the user has full control over the call. If you don't understand what's being said, or the captions are not understandable, you don't need to apologize for not understanding. Simply ask them to repeat. Many times when I have used the phone and have not understood what the other person was saying, the agent hasn't understood either. When I gave the phone to my hearing husband, he often didn't understand either. The problem is not the agent or the captions themselves, it's really the speaker. We need to take control and say, "I am sorry, can you repeat that or say it differently or speak more clearly?" But with the automated system, yes, you have full control over the call yourself. You select and push the button.

KEN ARCIA: I just want to clarify, you do not ask the operator to press it for you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If I'm making a doctor's appointment, I just try to pick a connection with a live person. That's what I do and avoid the whole "press this," or "press that."

CHAMEEN STRATTON: That's an excellent point. Actually, if you press 0, about 90% of the time you will reach a live operator. Oftentimes I skip that automated system and just hit 0. If I get the response, "I don't understand your request" or something like that, I will figure out which number will get me a live person. Sometimes I go online and to find the number for a person rather than use the number for the automated answering system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are there assurances that private information will be kept private?
CHAMEEN STRATTON: Absolutely.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What about the use of crude and indecent language?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: The agents have been trained to caption everything that is said on the call. The only time where a call will be disconnected is if the language or the abuse is directed at the agent. Then a supervisor may get involved and do something about that call. But if it's between two people, again, the agent is transparent.

About privacy, Federal Government rules in the Tele- communications Relay Service Law state that everything must remain confidential.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When I have my implant on and I am on my WebCapTel® phone, I hear something like mumbling. Is that the person I am calling, is that their voice, or is the mumbling the agent?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: It won't be the agent. I have never heard an agent on the call. It' likely feedback or static on your phone, maybe interference with the computer.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But the voice of the person is heard. If I were a hearing person and I was using WebCapTel®, I would hear as well as read?

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Yes.
AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's what I am hearing.

CHAMEEN STRATTON: You are hearing the other person talking. If the person talking is in a noisy environment, you are going to hear that as well.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can you explain a little bit about the equipment distribution programs? I know it's different from state to state.

CHAMEEN STRATTON: It does get complicated, based on each state's particular rules. Some equipment programs offer the 800i in the program to the residents. Some states don't offer the 800i. Some states allow people to buy the 800i model for $99. Some states do not. There is a huge variation but the 800i phone is available in the United States to anyone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When I used to work in a professional setting, we had what was called the batphone for basically the speaker telephones. Sometimes--this was about 15 years ago--the deaf person would call up something like CapTel®, before CapTel®, and they would let the phone captioning caption a meeting. I actually used that twice, but I am just wondering how does CapTel® feel about it essentially becoming a CART system for someone who just wants to have the captions of a meeting and has a speaker phone?

KEN ARCIA: One time Sprint had a person show the CapTel® phone using the answering machine function. They hit that function and held the phone to somebody who was talking. The words were captioned on the screen. At home, perhaps you couldn't understand what someone was saying, so you just held the phone up to them using the answering machine function, and the captioned showed on the screen. Is that what you mean? Using it like voice recognition?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

MILE ELLIS: The laws are very clear. For a provider to receive reimbursement, there must be an originating and a terminating number. You are not supposed to call yourself and use the agent as voice recognition or an in-room interpreter, or an aid to assist in communicating with someone standing next to you. That's not what this was designed for. If you were to use it for that purpose,

we would have serious challenges from the FCC about getting reimbursed. I would not recommend that you use it for that purpose. It's not that it's illegal, but it's just that we wouldn't be able to get reimbursed for that.

CHAMEEN STRATTON: Any other questions? (No response) I hope that you feel that you benefited from this kind of open discussion. Thank you very much for your participation.