



Described Video Working Group

Report to the CRTC

November 15, 2012

On September 28, 2012 the CRTC issued its response to the Described Video (DV) Working Group's Progress Report of May 31, 2012.

In its response, the CRTC expressed its concern that the DV Working Group had not made sufficient progress on a number of issues, and requested that the DV Working Group reply to these concerns by November 15, 2012.

This report constitutes the reply of the DV Working Group to the September 28, 2012 letter from the CRTC. It is organized per the order of concerns set out by the Commission as follows:

1. The Use of Ambiguous Qualifiers
2. Pass Through of DV
3. Audio Silence
4. Simple Access to DV – Short- and Longer-term goals
5. Maintaining a Current List of Programming Services Providing DV Content
6. Status of Public Service Announcement

Appendix 1A – Survey Responses of DV Working Group Members – Programmers

Appendix 1B – Survey Responses of DV Working Group Members – BDUs

Appendix 1C – Survey Responses of DV Working Group Members – CCSA Members

Appendix 2A – Programming Services Providing DV Content

Appendix 2B – CBC – Excel Spreadsheet for Compiling DV Content

Appendix 3 – Members of the DV Working Group

The information presented in this report is based on a survey that was taken of DV Working Groups following the CRTC letter of September 28, 2012. The survey responses are attached to this report as Appendix 1A, 1B and 1C.

In addition, the CRTC had indicated the need for the DV Working Group to provide an updated list of programming services providing DV content. The updated list is appended to this report as Appendix 2.

1. Use of Ambiguous Language

In its letter to the DV Working Group of September 28, 2012, the CRTC notes that

terms such as ‘commonly provide’, ‘commonly used’ and ‘most systems’ are often used as qualifiers when describing the industry’s progress in meeting its obligations related to the four issues identified as a part of the DV WG’s mandate. Staff is of the view that these qualifiers are too vague to be meaningful and do not provide sufficient detail to allow for a fulsome assessment of the industry’s progress.

With respect to instances of audio silence, all programmers have initiated measures to ensure it is eliminated.

With respect to measures to identify programming with DV content, all programmers have taken steps to provide icons and/or voiceover information for users.

With respect to measures taken to provide simplified access to DV programming, including but not limited to one-button access and set and forget functionality, specific BDUs were identified by name in the DV Working Group report to the CRTC of September 30, 2011 (at the Appendix to the report which provided BDU-specific information).

Specific BDUs and the measures they have taken or intend to take to take with respect to simplified access to DV programming are once again identified by name for purposes of this report, at Appendix 1.

2. Pass Through of DV

With respect to the survey of DV Working Group members, BDUs have provided their responses at Appendix 1B and Appendix 1C of report. Where issues have been identified with respect to the pass through of DV, next steps are provided.

It is also noted that, with reference to Section 7 of the BDU Regulations, no condition of licence is necessary for BDUs to compress the DV signal in order to pass it through to subscribers.

3. Audio Silence

The CRTC letter of September 28, 2012 identified that “Shaw Direct has persistent audio silence issues with respect to various programming services.”

As indicated in previous DV Working Group reports to the CRTC, the issue of audio silence has been directly and effectively dealt with by programmers. In the survey taken of DV Working Group members following issuance of the CRTC letter of September 28, no programmers identified any issues with audio silence. Programmers have also, in their survey responses, provided detailed input on their methods for monitoring feeds for instances of audio silence.

The issue of audio silence experienced with Shaw Direct is viewed as anomalous by the DV Working Group. While it is not possible to guarantee that audio silence will be avoided in 100 percent of instances by 100 percent of programmers – a massive power disruption or other uncontrolled event might cause disruption – it is clear from the survey responses provided that programmers take the issue of audio silence very seriously, and have implemented appropriate and effective measures to prevent its occurrence.

As a final comment on audio silence, the DV Working Group notes that U.S. broadcasters recently began airing a limited amount of DV programming (about 50 hours per quarter in the top 25 markets). It was evident from the U.S.-based Working Groups on Video Description that audio silence is still an issue for some U.S. programmers.¹

From the perspective of Canadian BDUs, described programs broadcast by U.S. conventional TV stations are being passed through to consumers when these stations advise BDUs that they have started to offer DV.

However, there are instances where the feed for the DV program does not have 24/7 audio; in other words, audio will accompany the described programming, but non-described programming that follows on the same feed will be silent. Only the DV program will have audio.

Given this situation, it is incumbent on BDUs to reach out to U.S. broadcasters to ensure there is audio available on a 24/7 basis, as is the case in Canada.

4. Simple Access to DV – Short- and Longer-term Goals

BDUs have provided their individual survey responses at Appendix 1 of this report. The responses vary from one-touch/set and forget functionality to multiple steps. Where relevant, each BDU has indicated the steps to be taken toward simplified access for DV going forward.

¹ See *Second Report of the Federal Communications Commission's Video Programming Accessibility Advisory Committee on the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 - Video Description*, p. 26
<http://vpaac.wikispaces.com/file/view/120409+VPAAC+Video+Description+REPORT+AS+SUBMITTED+4-9-2012.pdf>

The DV Working Group notes that its consumer representatives strongly advocate a one-button solution where none currently exists.

A related issue was raised by Jeff Stark, a consumer member of the DV Working Group. Mr. Stark notes that services providers (i.e. BDUs) should integrate the information needs of blind and low vision consumers into their services, and into the mechanisms of delivering information about DV programming to consumers, such as EPGs. Mr. Stark further notes that the ‘spreadsheet format’ used by EPGs for programming information is “sometimes difficult for less technical individuals to navigate/understand/use.”

5. Maintaining a Current List of Programming Services Providing DV Content

It is clear that a more rigorous system should be implemented in order to maintain a current list of programming services providing DV content, since this list is pivotal for BDU pass through of DV programming.

Programmers and BDUs provided a number of comments on this issue in their survey responses, which are compiled in Appendix 1A and Appendix 1B. The common thread of response is that the Commission should play a key role in both soliciting and maintaining a database of DV content providers. The exception to this common thread is from a consumer member of the Working Group, Jeff Stark. Mr. Stark notes that government should not house the list unless any costs are absorbed by industry.

For example, Rogers Cable recommends that the CRTC issue a bulletin advising all Canadian programmers (licensed and exempt) that if they intend to offer DV audio either pursuant to a condition of licence or on a voluntary basis, they must provide the necessary information to the CRTC.² This should include the date it plans to start offering DV. Notice should be provided to the CRTC at least 60 days in advance of launch date.

Rogers notes that the CRTC is in the best position to maintain the list going forward. Recognizing that the existing list (filed February 29, 2012) captured all such Canadian services offering DV audio at that time, the resources required to update the list on an on-going basis should be minimal.

Rogers suggests that, whenever the CRTC receives notice, it could then update the list posted on its website and, at the same time, announce this change in the “Today’s Releases” section of the website. More details of Rogers’ recommended approach can be found in the Rogers Cable survey response at Appendix 1B.

CBC also suggests that the database should reside on the CRTC website, in a searchable (e.g. Excel) format. An example is included as Appendix 2B of this report (which also services as CBC’s input with respect to its stations and services with DV content).

² The formats (SD and/or HD) for which DV audio is provided; confirmation audio is provided on the DV feed 24/7; quality/size of audio stream.

Shaw Media states that the list should include only those stations and services with specific conditions of licence, and/or those services that meet the 50 percent threshold of the CRTC policy for Category A Standard Conditions of Licence. Confirmation of these services should be filed annually, concurrent with annual filings; the database should reside on the CRTC website.

Corus, SaskTel, Bell Aliant and other member of the DV Working Group echo the suggestions noted above, especially with respect to a role for the CRTC in compiling and maintaining a current list of stations and services providing DV content.

6. Status of Public Service Announcement

On October 15, 2012 the Chair of the DV Working Group together with the Coordinator of the Working Group met with CRTC staff to discuss the Commission's letter of September 28, 2012.

At the conclusion of that discussion, CRTC staff requested an update on the status of the DV public service announcement (PSA).

While discussions on the content of the PSA took longer than originally anticipated the DV Working Group has now reached consensus on the PSA approach and script. A PSA Subcommittee provided leadership on the development of a concept and the consumer members of the Working Group were especially helpful in their contributions and ideas.

A production schedule will be released shortly, and the PSA should air early in 2013. It will be produced in both English and French. The storyboard for the PSA is presented on the following page.

DESCRIBED VIDEO PSA – Corus Entertainment

Action	Audio
<p>OPEN ON: INT. – KITCHEN - DAY</p> <p>The mood in the kitchen is bright and cheerful. A woman comes in from outside. Her arms are filled with paper-bagged groceries. She puts down the keys on a side table and turns to face the room.</p> <p>Suddenly a mouse scurries across the floor. The woman screams and drops the bags of groceries. A bag full oranges spills out across the floor.</p>	<p>VO: A woman enters a sun filled kitchen. She is carrying grocery bags.</p> <p>Woman: Hi, anyone home?</p> <p>VO: Suddenly a mouse runs across the floor. The woman drops her groceries.</p>
<p>CUT TO: INT. – KITCHEN-NIGHT</p> <p>The mood in the kitchen is sinister and dark. . Her arms are filled with paper-bagged groceries. She puts down the keys on a side table and turns to face the room.</p> <p>Suddenly a boy with a mask jumps out from a hiding place. . The woman screams and drops the bags of groceries.</p> <p>The shot freezes on a still frame.</p>	<p>VO: A woman enters a dimly lit kitchen. She is carrying grocery bags.</p> <p>Woman: Hi, anyone home?</p> <p>VO: Suddenly a child with a scary mask jumps out and scares her. The woman drops her groceries.</p> <p>VO: Did you see the difference? Not everyone can. That’s why we have Described Video to make television more accessible for the blind and visually impaired.</p>
<p>CUT TO: <i>Information plate with relevant information.</i></p>	<p>VO: To access the full range of described video programming in Canada, visit the Accessible Media website, www.ami.ca/dvguide or call 1-855-855-1144.</p>

Conclusion

The DV Working Group thanks the Commission for the opportunity to file this report and in doing so provide the Commission with an update on work completed to date.