

Name: Alex Hall

Address: 131 Dartmouth St. Bangor, ME, 04401

The state of described television programming is, in a word, dismal. I am a Time Warner Cable customer, and when TWC announced they would be making more programs available in a described form, I was quite excited. I called TWC for more information, but the rep to whom I spoke had no idea what I was talking about. She ended up reading me the same webpage I had already read, then told me how to enable the feature on my TV that would make programs play their description, if available. I have left that feature on for months now, and have yet to hear one word of description for any program on any channel. TWC does not know what described content is, and the promised descriptions have so far failed to appear. Yes, it is possible that the rep had me set up the TV incorrectly, but all content providers should be familiar with this sort of thing so they can help their customers.

Online content is even worse. Currently, to my knowledge, Hulu and Netflix have between them a grand total of zero described programs. Apple sells a whole three movies with descriptions, out of the thousands and thousands of movies and TV shows it offers for purchase or rental. Other services are similarly lacking.

This leaves blind consumers with very little choice when it comes to described entertainment, despite the wide range of described movies and TV shows that are aired, usually, it seems, in the UK. Described movies and TV shows are rarely available to watch on broadcast or on-demand TV, providers have no idea how to help consumers access whatever might be available, and online content providers fail just as miserably. Yet, closed-captions are available at the push of a button for nearly everything, and mandates are in place to ensure that they continue to be offered. Even Youtube has a mechanism in place for automatic closed-captioning of its content!

While I applaud the effort made on behalf of the deaf community and feel it is a necessary step, blind people have been left out. There needs to be a one-button solution to enable descriptions for broadcast TV, online providers need to offer all content with optional description tracks, and a great deal more education must happen for service representatives of both areas of the entertainment industry (broadcast and online). Thank you for your time.