

Captioning



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF THEATRE OWNERS

Talking Points

- NATO strongly urges restraint with respect to any legislation or rulemaking in the area of captioning. In the emerging digital arena, NATO and its partners are very active in development of both standards for interoperability and the captioning technologies themselves. The **digital transition holds great promise for captioning**, but it is at an early and vulnerable stage and premature government involvement could abort significant strides.
- Any requirement of captioning or audio description at this juncture would require **significant expenditures for film-based equipment adaptations that will become obsolete** in the near future.
- Regulations now would also divert attention and resources from new captioning technologies in the digital era that hold the best promise of wide-scale access, and instead return the industry's focus to technologies that have proven to be overly costly and unacceptable to the industry's hearing-impaired patrons.
- Although the ADA does not require motion picture theaters to exhibit captioned movies, NATO, its regional affiliates and its members have long supported efforts to make cinemas more accessible to deaf and hard of hearing patrons.
- For nearly two decades, **NATO and its members have actively supported movie access** for deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons. NATO helped develop the first open caption film program with our partners in the movie studios and at InSight Cinema (formerly "Tripod").
- Despite the efforts of the movie distributors, exhibitors, and technology providers, wide-scale implementation of captioning in the film era has been difficult.
- Open captioned screenings in the film era have encountered limited success for several reasons. The production of open captioned prints is expensive. Movie studios have only been able to distribute a limited number of prints for a limited number of movie titles. Even more problematic, **open captioned screenings draw few deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons** to the cinema and drive away hearing patrons.
- Moreover, despite advertising by theater companies and by WGBH of the availability of closed captioned movies in designated cinemas, **usage surveys by exhibitors that have installed these systems show that they are rarely used**. Closed captioning in the film era, moreover, imposes significant cost burdens on the exhibitors, as the cost of the equipment enormously exceeds the negligible additional revenues generated.
- With the advent of digital cinema, the industry is making great progress toward the goal of greater access, and NATO and its members are at the forefront of these developments.
- At some point after digital implementation, film prints will cease to exist and all movies will be distributed and exhibited in digital format. At the same time, the industry is developing specific technology standards and equipment vendors are creating viable options for increasing access in the digital cinema world.
- Digital cinema cannot solve the problem of open caption movies—as hearing patrons will not accept open captioned screenings regardless of the projection technology used. But digital cinema may reduce the cost burden of closed captioning and audio description compared to the film world. Thus, **digital cinema may greatly facilitate disabled patrons' access to movies**.