

# The Benefits of Closed Captioning Commercials

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The **ANA Production Management Committee** recommends that all television commercials be closed captioned. Commercials that are closed captioned maximize the impact of an advertising message and communicate to viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing that their business is valued. Plus, the cost to close caption a commercial is minimal.

## Background

Closed captions are the visual (text) representation of the soundtrack of a video, film, television program, or commercial. In addition to dialog, closed captions include sound effects, speaker identification information, music notations, lyrics, and other key aural information. Closed captions are embedded in the television signal and visible, usually at the bottom of the screen, only when activated by the viewer. Closed captions are activated through the equipment remote control or onscreen menu.

Live television programs, such as a live broadcast or special event or news program, may be captioned in real time. Prerecorded programs are captioned after production and before they are aired.

Closed captioning allows persons who are deaf or hard of hearing to maximize their enjoyment of television programming and commercials. Beginning July 1993, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required all analog television receivers with screens 13 inches or larger to contain built-in decoder circuitry to display closed captioning. Beginning July 2002, the FCC also required that digital television receivers include closed-captioning display capability.

In 1996, Congress required programming distributors (broadcasters, cable operators, satellite distributors, and other multi-channel video programming distributors) to close caption their television programs.

Since 2006, 100% of all new, non-exempt, English-language television programming must be produced and presented with closed captions (captioned programs are marked in TV listings by "CC"). Commercials that are less than five minutes are not required to have closed captions.



## The Case for Closed Captioning

Approximately 36 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. Closed captioning provides a critical link to news, entertainment, and information for such individuals. Closed captions also benefit millions of other people (assuming activation by the viewer/owner) who are learning English as a second language, children who are learning to read, and people who watch television in public places such as waiting rooms, airports, bars, or gyms. When commercials are not closed captioned, the audio information—including potentially your advertising message—does not reach its maximum potential. In addition, the advertiser may be unintentionally communicating to viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing that their business is not valued.

“The process is simple, the cost reasonable, and the benefit substantial. There really is no reason not to take this inclusive approach to television advertising.”



John Lick  
Executive Producer  
**Target Corporation**  
Co-chairperson  
ANA Production Management Committee

Many companies close caption their commercials in order to reach the large number of people who need closed captions. While there are no figures available for the percentage of all commercials that are closed captioned, there are some benchmarks. The National Association of the Deaf found that 40% of the 118 advertising spots in the 2009 Super Bowl were closed captioned. In 2010, through the work of the NFL in conjunction with the National Association of the Deaf and CBS, 81% of nationally broadcast commercials and network promotions in the Super Bowl were closed captioned. It is clear that progress is being made, but the Super Bowl is an annual event and much more work is necessary.

## Cost

The average cost to close caption a commercial, according to the **ANA Production Management Committee**, is minimal—only about \$200 for a Standard Definition (SD) commercial and \$350 for a High Definition (HD) commercial. Many companies have special volume deals with their dubbing and shipping houses, so costs can vary. Closed captioning occurs at the very end of the production process at the dub/shipping house or at the captioning vendor and takes between two and three hours to complete.



## Conclusion

The **ANA Production Management Committee** recommends that all television commercials be closed captioned. Closed captioning of commercials makes good business sense because it maximizes the impact of an advertising message and does so at minimal cost.

“As an advertiser, it is the right thing to do ... we value the people our advertising reaches.”



Valerie Light  
Advertising Production Manager  
**Verizon Communications**  
Co-chairperson  
ANA Production Management Committee

## Addendum

Recommended closed captioning framework that should be considered for inclusion in all closed captioning contracts to ensure quality closed captioning is below.

### a. Words

- No deletion of letters.
- Inclusion of all spoken words verbatim and no paraphrasing.
- A 100% accuracy rate.

### b. Music

- Inclusion of the words (lyrics) for all music.
- Description of the type of music when the music does not have words, e.g., dramatic music.

### c. Sounds

- Identification of all sound effects.
- Inclusion of “ums.” The captioner should not make editorial decisions.

### d. Conversations

- Inclusion of background conversations.
- Identification of the speaker when not visible.
- Identification of the speaker with upper case and a colon without parentheses. For example, SUSAN: Yes, I want dinner.



### **e. Synchronization**

- One or two lines of captions are timed to appear simultaneously with, or just before, the utterance of the first word presented and disappear after the last word is uttered in the caption segment.
- Logical caption division is not sacrificed for exactitude in timing.
- Captions may be timed to change with shot changes for readability and aesthetic purposes.

### **f. Caption Placement**

- Captions placed where they do not obscure information relevant to understanding or enjoying a commercial, such as people's faces or descriptive banners.
- Captioning placed in the position of the speaker's location when there are multiple speakers on screen.

### **g. Captioning Style**

- Use of mixed case letters. Digital television screens now permit the adjustment of font size. Updated software no longer deletes the descenders of letters such as "g" or "q." Therefore, upper case should not be used exclusively.
- Use of pop-on instead of roll-up format.

### **h. Passing of Captions**

- Adding of a clearing pulse at the beginning of a group of captions and a release at the end to let the next wave of captions pass unencumbered.
- During duplication and subsequent distribution, the captions should pass through intact with the video.