

A Guide to Theatre Access: Marketing for captioning

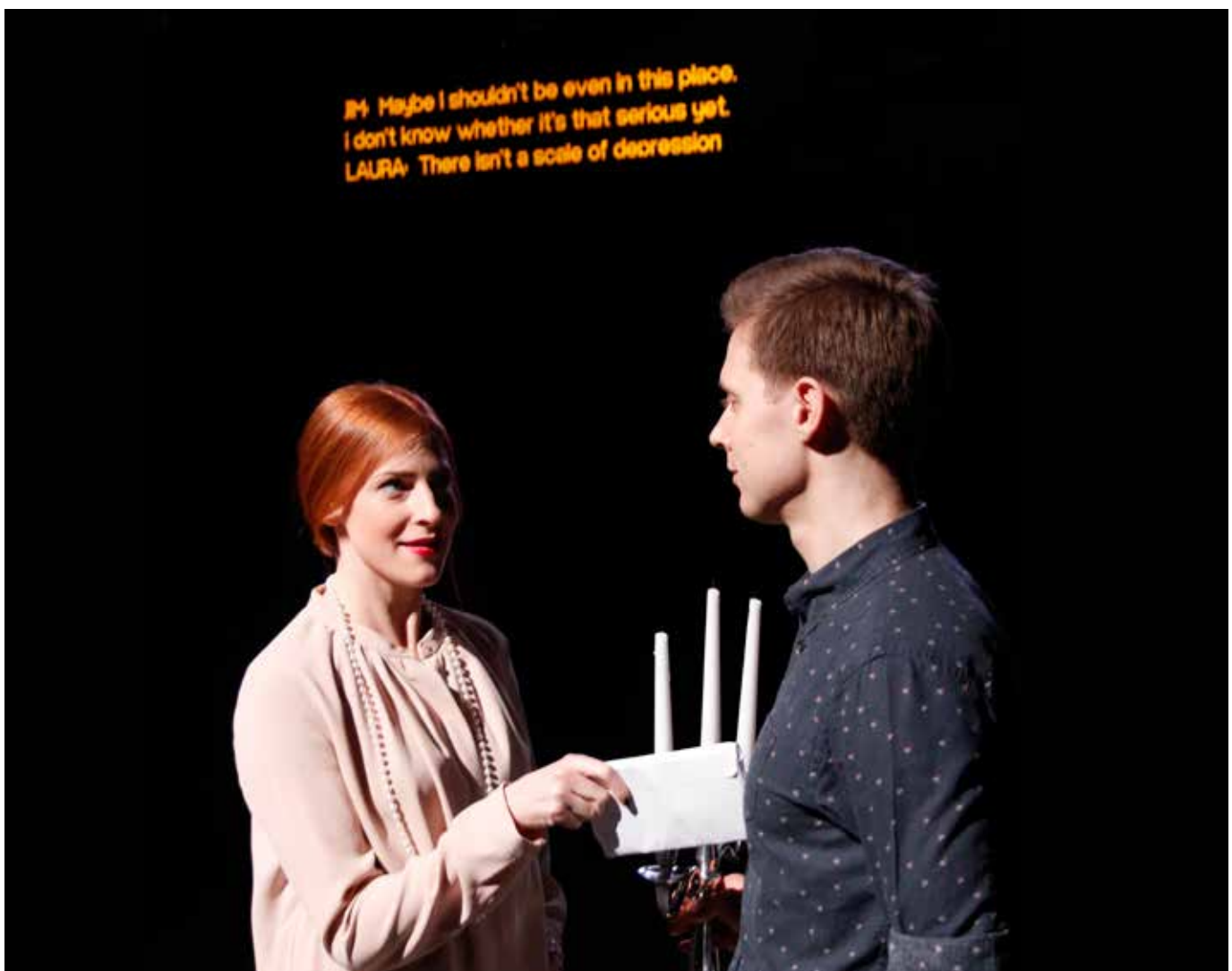


Image courtesy of Stagertext. © Heather Judge. CaptionCue test event at the National Theatre, 2015.

Adapted from www.accessibletheatre.org.uk with material from the See a Voice project led by Stagertext and VocalEyes

Your guide to making theatre performances more accessible.

Guide:

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A Guide to Theatre Access



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Marketing for captioning

making theatre performances more accessible

What is captioning?

Captioning is a way of converting the spoken word into visible text that provides deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people with access to live performance. The text is displayed on a caption unit (LED) situated on or next to the stage.

As well as dialogue, the captions also include the name of the character who is speaking or singing and descriptions of any sound effects or music.

Captioning is a service for anyone who may have difficulty hearing or understanding the audible elements of a live art event.

With theatre captioning, the captions are operated live, with a trained captioner triggering each line of text to be displayed as it is being spoken or sung.

The captioner will have worked on pre-formatting the script into the captioning software, working with a dvd recording of the show and viewing several live performances to make sure the text displayed accurately matches what is being said, as well as how, i.e. mirroring individual performers' timing.

Understanding audiences

Gaining an insight into the existing and potential audience for captioned performances can inform not only your marketing and audience strategies but also your decisions around programming and service development.

Clear and consistent communication strategies will ultimately help your organisation achieve its aims in making a commitment to access and inclusion.

Who is it for?

The primary target audience for captioning is deaf people. What does 'deaf' mean?

The term deaf can be used to cover a range of people with a very broad range of hearing levels. Generally they are broken down into three groups:

- Deaf people
- Hard of hearing people
- Deafened people

Caption users can fall into any one of these categories and each individual may have a different perspective.

Deaf people are just as diverse as any other market sector. Many deaf audience members don't think of themselves as disabled so messages about disability or access may not feel relevant to them. A member of the public who is new to hearing loss, who may have been a regular theatregoer but now finds it difficult to enjoy the experience, is unlikely to pick up a leaflet about services for deaf and disabled people. They will have little to no personal relationship with terms like "accessible" or "assisted performances".

Top tips

- Focus on how patrons see themselves: their preferences, outlook and beliefs.
- Consider their attitudes to the arts generally and to your organisation.
- Highlight captioned performances to everyone, not just those who identify themselves as being deaf.

What motivates them?

Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing audiences think a good theatregoing experience is one where they feel they have had an equal experience, the same as everyone else.

Captioning makes a difference to thousands of deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people in the UK.

Once someone has had a good experience at a venue, whether at an assisted performance or not, they are more likely to become repeat attenders.

For some deaf people it's the social side of a theatre trip that motivates them – meeting up with friends and enjoying a night out with others.

Captions and live subtitles open up the arts to many people with varying degrees of deafness, including those who experience hearing loss in later life and where sign language isn't an option. Most importantly, it enables deaf and hearing family and friends to enjoy cultural trips together.

'It's wonderful to go to a captioned comedy and laugh along with the rest of the audience. I don't feel left out.'

They can also benefit anyone who has English as a second language:

'We found it very useful for my mother who is hard of hearing and not a native English speaker. Absolutely brilliant, thanks!'

Top tips

- Promote your desire to offer equal access.
- Be transparent about any barriers or difficulties that you face in providing equal access and actively engage with deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people in helping to find solutions.
- Consider building social networking structures into the theatregoing experience by encouraging people to come with friends and family or by creating opportunities for meeting and talking to others.

Persuading non-attenders

Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people are potential theatregoers – we just need to persuade them that our events have something to offer.

What patrons say...

‘I think it’s going to be too expensive.’

‘I’ve never been before – don’t think I’ll enjoy it.’

‘It’s too difficult to find the right information.’

‘I didn’t know until recently that any performances at theatre are captioned.’

Going to the theatre needs to be seen as something enjoyable, not hard work.

Some deaf people will have little to no experience of live theatre. Others may have been keen attenders who now, later in life, are having difficulty hearing the performers and think theatre is something they can no longer enjoy.

We do need to target deaf non-attenders separately to existing theatregoers. This may include answering questions such as ‘what is theatre?’, ‘will I enjoy it?’ as well as ‘how will it work for me?’

During the See a Voice project the staff team ran specific venue open days called Discover Theatre for local deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people where they found out more about what theatre, and theatre captioning, is all about. It gave participants an introduction to the venue, the assisted services available, ways they could participate and a chance to meet the staff who are there to make their visit an enjoyable one.

What you can do ...

Consider what some of the barriers to attendance are and how your marketing strategies might help overcome them:

- Let groups know about any discounted tickets you may offer.
- Communicate what a visit to your venue is like; what sort of experience will they have?
- Train frontline staff so that you can confidently promote a policy of clear communication at all times.
- Make sure your brochures and websites have clearly identifiable sources of information.
- Consider varying the days and times you offer assisted performances and consult your local audience about their preferences.
- Advertise your captioned performances to EVERYONE.

Going to talk to local groups, deaf, deafened and hard of hearing clubs or at events, such as local information fairs, is a great way of creating word of mouth. You can use it as an opportunity to introduce captioning, explaining what it is and how it works, as well as promoting forthcoming productions. Understanding the particular needs of your customers and building good personal relationships between local groups and your venue is the key to developing and retaining an audience. Why not invite a local group to hold an event at your venue or offer to give them a backstage tour?

Effective communication

Use all the methods available to you to communicate information about assisted performances to as broad a range of people as possible. This includes raising awareness among your general attenders.

Start with your season brochure. If you already include some information on assisted performances there, ask a friend or colleague who is not familiar with the details to use your brochure to find out more information.

- How easy did they find it?
- Could they quickly tell whether your next show has a captioned performance (CAP) or did they have to flick backwards and forwards between different sections?
- Is there an explanation somewhere of what captioning is?
- Does it include any specific information on how to book appropriate tickets?
- Remember the aim is to make theatre-going enjoyable and not hard work.
- How quick and easy is it to find relevant information that leaves a lasting impression?

[Visit the Accessible Theatre website to read the full guide](#)

www.accessibletheatre.org.uk

Contact [Stagetext](#) to learn more.