

The Impact of Transcripts and Captions on Video Marketing



People tend to think of captions and transcripts in a fairly limited capacity. For the deaf or hard of hearing, putting captions on a video will help them to understand what's being said. If the sound on a video is muffled or otherwise difficult to hear, a transcript can clarify things for the audience. Or if the speaker speaks too quickly to be understood, or speaks with a heavy accent that makes it difficult to follow what they're saying, captions and transcripts can be a helpful aid to clarity.

In essence, captions and transcripts are understood to be important, but they're still seen as secondary to the content's main purpose. However, that couldn't be farther from the truth. Captions on videos can be used for far more than simply helping the hard of hearing. Your content's main purpose is to promote your brand, and captions and transcripts can aid in that in ways you never even realized. In fact, captions and transcripts are an essential part of video marketing. They directly and positively impact SEO and SEM. How? Well, let's take a look at some of their alternate purposes...

The Impact of Transcripts and Captions on SEO

Why should you include captions and transcripts on your content, and what benefits do they have for your brand, other than to aid users who are deaf or hard of hearing? There are actually quite a few benefits, particularly when it comes to marketing. In fact, transcripts and captions are two of your best tools for Search Engine Optimization.

SEO is relatively easy for blogs, articles, and other text-based content. Google searches the entire body of the page, so all you need to do is find the right keywords to attract viewers, and include them in the body of your content, to help bump it higher in search results and increase your web traffic for that page.

For videos, however, SEO is a little trickier. You can't search for the content of a video the way you can a blog. In most videos, particularly ones on video hosting sites such as YouTube and Vimeo, the only searchable text is the title, a brief description of the content, and a few meta tags that highlight some of your basic points.

Even though the video is your content, it's the text on the page that search engines target. So if someone wants to find your video based on, say, a particularly memorable quote, then they're out of luck, unless they can remember the title of the video as well.

Because it's the text that search engines target, it behooves you to include as much text as possible on your video pages. The more descriptive your text is of your video content, the better you'll be able to drive search results for that video.

Therefore logically, the most effective solution is to include a full transcript of what the video says. Including a transcript of the video in the description, and/or on the page on your website where the video is embedded, is a great way to beef up your content with more detailed keywords, and ultimately boost your SEO. In fact, videos that include transcripts in the description have been [proven to attract bigger audiences](#) than those that don't.

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Transcripts can even assist you in [finding specific keyword tags](#) for your video before you post it. What wording is used within the video to discuss each topic? Do different speakers phrase the same point in different ways? If so, then you should have a separate key phrase tag for each wording, to reach viewers no matter which way they search for it.

Does one speaker touch on another topic that's not the focal point of the video, but still important? That can be another keyword as well—one that you might otherwise have missed. Going through the transcript before you post the video allows you to examine the content of your video more carefully, and thus can reveal new SEO opportunities that you might not get from simply watching the video.

But what about captioning? Captions are an important part of SEO as well. Both Google and YouTube actually index the text of video captions, to be included in searches. Therefore, captions can provide content that's rich in keywords as well. So as a rule, it's smart to include both, to increase your chances of reaching a wider audience.

The Impact of Transcripts and Captions on SEM

But do captions and transcripts actually help to improve your overall marketing success? Studies say yes. In general, video content that includes transcripts and/or captions sees more audience engagement than content that doesn't. And in fact, companies that added captions to their existing video content saw an immediate increase in engagement for that content, by over 13% in just two weeks, and more than a 7% all time increase.

And as more people engage with your content, it also boosts sales in general, increasing revenue. A study of web content both with and without transcripts found that the adding of transcripts led to revenue increases of around 16%.



13%

Increase in engagement
in just two weeks with
captions



16%

Increase in revenue after
adding transcripts to
video

Captions and transcripts can improve your marketing in other, less obvious ways as well. One of the things that helps to boost your content's search engine rankings is internal links. There are a number of ways to do this with video, but it doesn't lend itself to linking as much as text content. However, if you have a transcript of, say, a webinar, you can place it on a separate page of your site, and link to that from the video's page—and vice versa. Having a [transcript page](#) that's separate from the page that the video itself is on increases the number of opportunities that viewers have to engage with your website.

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The [more pages of content you have](#), the more traffic you'll be able to drive to your website, and the more leads you'll be able to generate. Therefore, each transcript should have its own page, with its own keywords and overall SEO strategy, just like each video does. And an additional page which catalogs and links to each of your transcripts can be helpful as well, just like a playlist of your videos can.

You can also use written transcripts to repurpose your content. Because of this connection between the amount of content your website has and the amount of traffic you get, it's important to your marketing strategy that you create new content regularly. This means not just videos, but all types of content, from blogs and articles to white papers and eBooks, and more.

Constantly coming up with new content ideas can be draining, which is why repurposing one kind of content into another can be a great way to add to your existing content and increase audience engagement more easily. For example, take several blogs and turn them into a white paper, or take a white paper and break it down into several blog posts.

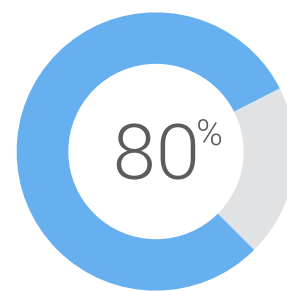
If you have a full transcript of each of your videos, repurposing them into blogs, articles, white papers, or other content becomes much easier. Add a few headlines, a couple of graphs or other images, and some bullet points, and you've got brand new content, hot off the presses, with minimal effort.

If you're going to do this, it's generally better to do it for older videos, that haven't seen as much engagement lately, rather than a new one that's still gaining views. Older content won't be as fresh in your audience's memories and seem more like new content, rather than a rehash. You can, however (and in fact should), still include a link to the original content, with a note saying, "Originally adapted from this video." This will increase your internal links and gain even more overall engagement for your content.

Transcripts and Captions for Understanding Content

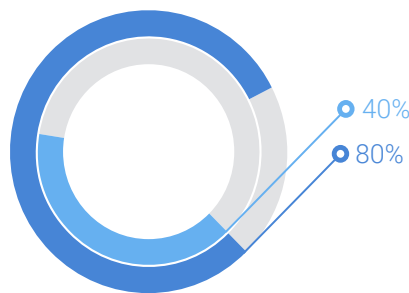
We've been talking a lot about increasing engagement of your videos. But what does engagement actually mean, and how do captions help? Sure, captions and transcripts improve your video's search engine rankings, and get more people to click. But when it comes to watching the actual video, the main audience for captions is the deaf and hard of hearing, right? Actually, no. In fact, [80% of people who use captions when watching a video are hearing people](#). So why do they look at captions and transcripts? It increases their understanding.

Have you ever watched a music video you liked on YouTube, then immediately checked the video description to see if it contained the song's lyrics? That's the simplest form of transcript. You heard the song just fine, but that doesn't mean you registered all the lyrics perfectly accurately. Sometimes singers mumble a bit, sometimes they speak/sing too quickly, or sometimes you just don't remember exactly what they said. Using captions, however, increases our retention of what we've seen.



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Videos that include captions have an 80% completion rate, vs. 40% for videos without

Increased understanding likewise leads to better engagement. Videos that include captions have an [80% completion rate, vs. 40% for videos without](#). That means twice as many people will get to the end of a video if their understanding of it is aided by captions or a transcript. And the more people reach the end of your video, the more people are likely to engage further with your brand, by sharing the content, clicking to other portions of your site, etc.

Not only that, when people get further into your video, it also improves your SEO. YouTube doesn't just track how many people click on a particular video. It also tracks how long each viewer spends watching it, and factors that into its search rankings. So, if there are two videos with similar keywords, the one where most people reach the end will rank higher than the one that most viewers click away from after a minute or two. Thus, adding captions to improve your completion rate will also improve your SEO.

But increasing engagement is more important than just helping people to find your videos. The more people engage with your content, the more likely they are to want to view more of your content going forward. And the more of your content they engage with, the more likely they are to become leads, and ultimately turn into sales. Basically, the better people understand your video and what it's saying, the better engagement you'll get. And adding captions to your videos is a simple and effective way to increase audience engagement.

Ways that Transcripts and Captions Improve Understanding

So, even if you're not hard of hearing, captions and transcripts can improve your understanding of a video if it has low sound quality, or if the subject mumbles, or is otherwise hard to understand. But aren't those just symptoms of poor video making? Shouldn't you work to make sure that your video IS easy to understand for the average person?

Perhaps, but there are plenty of other circumstances wherein a person might have trouble understanding your video, that have nothing to do with how it's made. Let's take a look at a few of these circumstances, and see why captions and transcripts are a good idea in any situation.

- **Captions and Transcripts in Noise-Challenged Conditions.** The rise of mobile devices means that now, people can watch videos anywhere, at any time. Which further means that they may well be watching your video in conditions that are less than ideal for audio playback. Someone might bring out their smartphone at a party and show your video to a few of their friends. Or they might watch it to kill time on the bus, or at the DMV. We can't control the noise levels of the world around us, but that doesn't stop us from trying to bring our entertainment into those environments. If someone is trying to watch your video and can't hear it, the best-case scenario is that they'll miss most of it and not really understand what it was about. The worst-case scenario is that they'll give up halfway through. Maybe they'll remember to come back to it later, when there's less noise around—or maybe they won't. However, if you've got captions on your video, they can understand it much more clearly, under any circumstances.

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- **Captions and Transcripts in Public Situations.** Turning on the captions and transcripts not only helps when the outside world is encroaching on their video, it can also keep their video from encroaching on the outside world. If a viewer is on the bus or at the DMV—or at work, or anywhere else with other people around—playing a video so that everyone nearby is forced to listen to it as well is rude. Even if the viewer is in their own home, a video's volume may be disturbing to their spouse trying to read in bed next to them, or their children doing homework in the next room. Captions allow them to turn the volume down to a reasonable level that won't disturb those around them, while still getting every word of the video they're watching.
- **Captions and Transcripts in Difficult Audio Situations.** Of course, you should always make an effort to have the best possible audio for each of your videos. However, there are times when this isn't feasible. If you're filming an interview or documentary, there may be external conditions beyond your control, such as background noise or heavy wind. Or your interview subject may speak with a heavy accent and be difficult to understand. In cases such as this, captions and transcripts are important for helping your viewers to understand what's being said in your video.
- **Transcripts and Captions for Viewers Speaking Another Language.** There are two aspects to this type of understanding. The most obvious is subtitles. If you're trying to reach a global audience with your video content, then in addition to English captions, you should also include a choice of subtitles, for whatever additional markets you're trying to reach. These can also be done by professional captioning and transcript services, and are a great way to help people who don't speak English to understand your video. But what about the people in your audience who do speak English, but not as their first language? It's not uncommon for these people to turn on the English captions for a video, in order to help them follow along better. Providing that for them will help them engage better with your video, and with your brand as a whole.
- **Transcripts and Captions for the Hearing Impaired.** While we've shown why this isn't the main reason to include transcripts and captions on your videos, it is still an important factor that can't be overlooked. If you don't caption your videos, then you're ignoring the deaf community and making it more difficult for them to engage with your brand. Not only is this inconsiderate, it's also bad business. If you can reach the deaf community with your brand by including transcripts and captions, then why wouldn't you?
- **Transcripts for Student Learning Experience.** A 2012 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) OpenCourseWare study showed that adding interactive transcripts to their online video lectures significantly impacted their learning experience. 97% of the students who voluntarily filled out the survey indicated that "interactive transcripts improved their learning experiences."

In addition to these basic reasons, different people have their own challenges to understanding the videos they watch, and likewise have different reasons for using captions and transcripts in their viewing. Whatever the reason, it's important to provide those captions and transcripts for anyone who wants them, so that they can enjoy and understand your content in a way that's comfortable for them.

Transcripts and Captions to Meet Government Mandates

Not only are captions and transcripts helpful to your viewers and often necessary to their understanding of your content, they're also, in some cases, legally mandated. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, failure to provide accurate, easily accessible captions in certain situations is discriminating against the deaf and hard of hearing, by not providing them with an equal opportunity to experience your content.

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So, does the ADA apply to online content? Yes and no. It was [first passed in 1990](#), before the Internet became widespread, and therefore doesn't actually mention online videos or directly necessitates their captioning. However, in certain situations, organizations can still be held responsible if their online content doesn't meet ADA standards for captioning and transcripts.

Not in all situations, of course. A simple YouTube video that showcases your brand and products won't be in violation of the ADA if it isn't captioned. So what [types of content](#) do have government mandated captions?

Well, educational content, for one. This includes everything from elementary to high school, as well as university and post-graduate content. In fact, both Harvard and MIT were recently involved in a class action suit, filed by the National Association for the Deaf, for failure to comply with these government mandates. The suit claimed that much of the schools' online content, including course content, podcasts, and other audio and video material was not captioned. Furthermore, some of the content that was captioned or transcribed was inaccurate or unintelligible.

Jobs and employment are another area where captions are often necessary for ADA compliance. Many companies include online video content in their application, interview, or training processes. If that content isn't captioned or transcribed, it will be inaccessible to deaf and hard of hearing applicants, and thus discriminatory.

Captions are also required for content related to healthcare, justice and legal matters, and a variety of other situations. In fact, just as they're required for television programming, they can also be required for online entertainment content in certain situations. Another lawsuit was brought against Netflix in 2010, for failure to provide easily accessible captioning to the deaf and hard of hearing. As a general rule, even if captions or transcripts aren't specifically mandated, it's always a good idea to include them. It makes your content more accessible, and allows you to include everyone.

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What Makes Good Captions?

Now that you understand the value of captions for your company's SEO and SEM, let's take a look at what good captioning is, and what you can do to get it. We've all seen movies and videos with captions or subtitles badly translated from another language, or transcripts that have been misheard by the transcriber, and make little or no sense.

These little errors can be amusing, but it also means that the captions aren't doing their job properly. It's a sign of shoddy craftsmanship and reflects badly on your company. So what makes for a good caption? The [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) has set forth a few guidelines for what captions should be like and how they should appear. They include...

- **Formatting.** An individual caption (known as a caption frame) should have no more than three lines of text, with each line being a maximum of 32 characters.

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- **Legibility.** Caption text should be clear and easy to read. It should be in a non-serif font, such as Helvetica. If the background of the video makes the captions difficult to make out, they should be repositioned, or the color changed, so that viewers have no trouble deciphering the words on the screen. Likewise, if the captions obscure some text in the video itself (e.g. a written letter), they should be repositioned so that they do not interfere with the viewer's understanding and enjoyment.
- **Synchronicity.** The text in the captions should sync up as closely as possible with the words being spoken on the screen. To accomplish this, a caption frame should appear onscreen for between 3 and 7 seconds.
- **Accuracy.** Captions should accurately represent the dialogue being spoken. On the surface, this seems easy—easier, at least, than translating for subtitles. However, you also need to consider spelling. Spelling on captions and transcripts should be at least 99% accurate. This also means no guesswork for dialogue that's difficult to understand.
- **Accessibility.** Captions and transcripts should be easy to access for anyone who wants them. On television, there are services you can subscribe to or buttons you can press on your remote to put captions on the program you're watching. With online content, however, you should have a clear, easily accessed button to turn captions on or off. If you're uploading to YouTube or another video hosting service, these buttons are already placed on the video player. However, some brands choose to use their own custom player for video content. If you choose to do this, be sure to include a clearly labeled captioning option.

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These are just a few of the standards for proper captions and transcripts. When creating your video content, it's important to make sure that you're providing a clear, easy to understand viewing experience for anyone who wants to watch it.

Acquiring Transcripts and Captions

Now that you know what you need in order to caption and transcribe your videos well, the question is, how do you do that? On the surface, it seems like a bit of a difficult process. Especially when you consider that the key to success with any marketing content is frequency and volume. If you're releasing two or three videos per week, it can be quite time consuming to go through each one and write down every word before it's released.

Scripted videos at least give you a place to start, but what about interviews? Or webinars, which can take upwards of an hour or more? Transcripts are a big enough project on their own, but captions must also be timed correctly, so that the right words appear on the screen as they're being said. And what if you already have a large archive of existing video content that needs to be transcribed and captioned? How will you manage it all?

One option that some content creators utilize is YouTube's automatic captioning feature. Using speech-to-text software, it can provide captions for a video in real time. However, while the technology to translate spoken words into written text is getting better, it still has a long way to go. As a result, errors abound in these automatic captions. At best, this makes your video look sloppy and unprofessional. At worst, it ends up as complete nonsense. Know, if you want to have captions and transcripts for your videos, you can't do it without the human factor.

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Fortunately, acquiring quality captions and transcripts is easier than you think. There are plenty of captioning services out there that can create captions for your videos quickly, cheaply, and, most importantly, with accuracy. Look around online to see which is the best service to meet your needs.

If you have a large backlog of videos, start with them. After that, start having your videos captioned and transcribed as well, before they're released. A good transcription service can usually finish a video in a day or two, tops, so factor that time into your editorial calendar as you schedule each future video for release. Especially if you have a large volume of videos to be captioned and transcribed, a professional captioning service is your easiest and most cost-effective option for ensuring good captions on all your videos, without taking up a lot of your company's own valuable time and resources.

Conclusion

Including captions and transcripts with your video content is a fairly easy and inexpensive task. But it will pay off in a number of different ways. It increases your SEO and improves your overall marketing. And more importantly, it makes your content more accessible to your audience as a whole, which will increase your engagement levels, leading to higher numbers throughout the entire marketing funnel. The more people you're able to reach with your content, the more revenue you'll be able to bring in.

But the most important reason why you should include captions and transcripts with all of your video content is simple courtesy. No matter if they're deaf, hard of hearing, or just need a little help understanding the words for whatever reason, everyone who views your content should have the ability to understand it and experience it fully. And including transcripts and captions ensures that you'll be able to reach as many people as possible, deaf and hearing alike, with your brand's message.