

Audio Description: Making Your Events and Facilities Accessible for Visitors Who Are Blind

Presentation abstract

"Audio Description: Making Your Events and Facilities Accessible for Visitors Who Are Blind"

Shakila Maharaj and Joel Snyder, PhD

This session will provide an overview of the "Fundamentals of Audio Description" (developed by Dr. Snyder) and how audio description (AD) can be used to make tourism more accessible for people who are blind or have a vision impairment.

AD is a translation of images to words—the visual is made verbal, and aural, and oral. AD uses words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative to convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a segment of the population and not fully realized by the rest of us—sighted folks who see but who may not observe. The principal constituency for AD is the underserved population of people who are blind or have a vision impairment; in the United States alone, there are over 21 million people who are blind or have difficulty seeing even with correction (American Foundation for the Blind, 2008). Anyone or any event that presents visual images to visitors can use AD techniques—through careful observation and the skillful use of language, he/she enlivens the presentation for all listeners. AD has proved to provide meaningful access to the wide range of media and arts (television, film, performing arts, museums) that comprise any culture. Touristic events and facilities are an important part of communities worldwide and must be inclusive of all potential visitors.

In live settings, people desiring audio description can use headsets/earplugs attached to small receivers, about the size of a small pocket calculator. A trained describer narrates the performance or event via a simple FM radio or infrared transmitter, avoiding any interruption to people in a group who may not wish to take advantage of the AD. The narrator guides the visitor through the visual event with concise, objective descriptions of critical images without overlapping with other important sound elements.

Visitor centers, city tours, tandem bike tours, cruise ships are only several of the settings that have been made accessible to tourists who are blind. On cruise ships, for example, myriad activities can be enhanced with AD, ranging from land excursions while in port, during performances on board and even during karaoke events, allowing the blind tourist to fully participate in the event.

At the conclusion of the session, participants will know/experience:

- who are "the blind"?
- how Audio Description works—how describers are trained and the mechanics of delivering audio description
- how Audio Description benefits tourists
- how to incorporate Audio Description in your event/facility

There is no reason why a person who is blind must also be culturally disadvantaged. Throughout the world, the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of more than 70%. With more meaningful access to the world's cultures and resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals—thus, more employable.



Lead speaker : Shakila Maharaj

Organisation : Disability Management Services

City (Country) : Durban(South Africa)

Biography : Shakila Maharaj has extensive expertise in areas including: accessible tourism, HR development, design and facilitation of leadership, management and supervisory interventions as well as psychological and competency based assessments. Ms. Maharaj specializes in disability equity and management within the broader framework of organisational transformation and diversity. She has received various awards recognizing her contributions toward the enforcement of disability rights. In this regard, she also continues to present papers and conduct training internationally. She is the owner of Disability Management Services based in Durban, South Africa.

2nd speaker : Joel Snyder, PhD

Organisation : Audio Description Associates, LLC/American Council of the Blind-Audio Description Project

City (Country) : Takoma Park, MD (outside Washington, DC) (USA)

Biography : Dr. Joel Snyder is known internationally as one of the world's first "audio describers," a pioneer in the field of Audio Description, a translation of visual images to vivid language for the benefit, primarily, of people who are blind or have a vision impairment. Since 1981, he has introduced audio description techniques in over 40 states and 53 countries and has made hundreds of live events accessible. In 2014, the American Council of the Blind published Dr. Snyder's book, *The Visual Made Verbal – A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description*. He serves as the Director of the Audio Description Project of the American Council of the Blind (www.acb.org/adp).