
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Report to

**Minister for Broadband, Communications and the
Digital Economy**

Audio Description Trial on ABC Television

December 2012





Report to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy on the Trial of Audio Description on ABC Television

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Executive summary

The ABC completed a 13 week Trial of broadcasting television programs with audio description (AD) commentary on ABC1. The Trial commenced on Sunday 5 August and finished on Sunday 4 November 2012.

The key findings from this Trial are as follows:

Technical

- The delivery of a mono audio description track within the ABC's digital television spectrum holding is possible. However the approach adopted for the AD trial is unlikely to be practical over the longer term.
- An AD track integrated with a television program can be broadcast and received alongside main audio and vision utilising digital audio tracks 3 and 4. Significant testing and configuration amendments are required to ensure the service is delivered and does not significantly impact other services.
- The ABC adopted a manual approach to deliver an AD service for a range of reasons. However, a manual approach is not recommended as a best practice approach for the implementation of AD on television services.
- A minimum 18 months lead time is required to develop, assess and implement an automated process to provide an AD service.
- A comprehensive audio processing capacity within the broadcaster should form the foundation for any AD service to limit the risk of audio problems and provide users the best experience.
- The ABC's internal broadcast systems are not currently configured to provide a permanent AD service. For the ABC to provide a permanent AD service, its internal broadcast systems would require an upgrade so that digital receivers would be able to indicate to viewers when an AD service was available for a program.

Content

- Different types of content lend itself to AD more effectively than other types. A prescribed number of daily hours of audio-described content is not recommended where content that is not conducive to be audio described is in the television program schedule.
- Television program delivery times make a significant impact on the ability to make an AD script for the program.
- In order to deliver a meaningful AD television experience programs in the drama or documentary genre are considered the most suitable.
- AD appropriate content can be found throughout the TV schedule and not just in prime time. There would have been more options for AD appropriate content had the Trial not been limited to prime time (5pm to 12midnight).
- The audio-description providers, CSI and RedBee Media, were commissioned on a price per broadcast hour for the development, scripting, recording and delivery of an audio-described file to the ABC. There may be another formula for commissioning audio-description content that would deliver better value for money.
- When commissioning and acquiring AD content consideration should be given to:
 - choosing program content based on audience value, availability of program, consistency and Australian-made criteria;
 - negotiating a pricing model with AD providers, so that the cost of the AD can recognise the volume of actual AD produced for each program; and
 - confirming ownership and rights of approval as part of contractual arrangements.
- The ABC compared two suppliers of AD content during the Trial and found:
 - The ABC and the two proponents were able to put in place an effective supply chain for delivery of audio described content.
 - There were only relatively minor differences between the potential AD providers in regard to their cost per hour and “turn-round” time-lines.
 - Whilst AD suppliers were similar in costs – the price for acquiring existing AD tracks from international broadcasters was much higher than originally anticipated. The ABC will contemplate the inclusion of AD files in its program acquisition process.
 - There may be some scope for negotiating with AD suppliers to reduce the 10 day turn-round to more accurately reflect the complexity of the AD program.
- There are a small number of potential AD suppliers in Australia. Most are likely to require several months lead time to prepare facilities and resources should AD become more widely available. A dialogue with potential vendors around “lead time” requirements should be factored into any AD roll-out.
- The Ofcom regulation and original ITC style guidelines appear to provide a valuable basis for any future Australian AD guidelines.
- It is necessary to explore the operational and technical options available to add AD tracks to the final point of transmission rather than embedding the tracks on the digibeta tapes as in the ABC’s Trial.

Reception

- The various ways in receivers react when presented with an additional audio description track was more detrimental to viewer experience and more widespread than anticipated.
- A Standard for new receivers may address many of the problems associated with AD and should form a central part of any thinking about a future roll out of AD. However it will not address issues with legacy receivers.
- A list of receivers that were reported to the ABC as presenting problems is attached (in Appendix 5).
- One option to address reception problems would have been to provide the AD service on only one of the LCN's used to broadcast ABC1. Such an approach would only work on ABC1 (as it has 2 LCNs) and would not address problems with receiver behaviour.

Audience Feedback

- Feedback from AD users via the survey and anecdotal feedback from stakeholder groups indicated a strong level of support for the AD service.
- Feedback from viewers without a vision impairment via the survey and ABC reception advice line indicated a strong level of dissatisfaction with the service – mainly as a result of problems with ABC1 main audio or unwanted reception of AD.
- Given the way in which receivers in Australia respond to AD any approach to introducing a permanent service will unavoidably result in dissatisfied viewers.
- A full cost/benefit analysis on viewers and broadcasters is required.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background to Trial

During 2008 and 2009 the Government conducted a Media Access Review. The Media Access Review Final Report was tabled in Parliament in December 2010 and made 22 recommendations. Recommendation 5 of the Report was that the Government commission a trial of Audio Description (AD) on the ABC in the second half of 2011.

On 22 February 2012, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy announced the Government would fund a 13-week technical trial of AD on ABC1 (the Trial). The Minister's press release is attached. The ABC was directed to commence the broadcast element of the trial in August 2012.

2.2 Parameters of the Trial

The technical Trial ran for 13 weeks from Sunday 5 August to Sunday 4 November 2012. The Trial was broadcast on the ABC's primary television service ABC1. The Trial was limited to the Free-To-Air Digital Terrestrial Transmission platform and was not available on other platforms such as analogue transmission, VAST, Foxtel and Austar or on the ABC's catch-up service iview.

The AD service provided during the technical Trial was a "closed" service. This means that a separate audio track was broadcast by the ABC that appropriately configured receivers (set top boxes (STBs) and Integrated Digital Televisions (IDTVs)) could decode and play. A "receiver mixed" approach was adopted for the Trial - the additional AD track was mixed with the main audio and visual at the receiver end.

The broadcast window of the Trial was 5pm to midnight. The target volume of hours for the Trial was an average of two hours per day, 14 hours per week for a total of 182 hours. The Trial was conducted using content that the ABC already intended to schedule (or would have scheduled) in the normal course of operation. No content was specifically acquired or commissioned for the Trial.

The technical Trial tested the broadcast delivery path for AD services within the ABC and the availability of appropriate content in Australia and overseas. The aim of the Trial was to provide a greater understanding of the issues associated with the public's access to and use of such a service. This Report addresses these issues and outlines the ABC's experience in delivering an AD service for 13 weeks.

3 Management Approach and Stakeholder Liaison

3.1 Management

The ABC formed an internal steering committee to develop and manage the AD Trial.

Decisions about procurement and the selection of AD content providers were undertaken by a procurement committee with sign off by the Steering Committee (see section 6.5 below).

3.2 Stakeholder Consultation

The relevant stakeholder groups, Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Council and Media Access Australia (MAA), were consulted by the ABC prior to the Trial about the proposed approach, informed of the progress made at the testing stage and consulted as to how best to inform their stakeholders of the Trial. The stakeholders were consulted throughout the Trial on topics that related to accessibility for their members to the AD service, to the AD website and the AD Survey.

The ABC also consulted with stakeholder groups regarding possible changes to the Trial to address the complaints received by viewers experiencing audio problems. Because of the concerns expressed by stakeholder groups that such changes may negatively impact their members' ongoing access to the Trial, the ABC did not vary the Trial output. This issue is explored in more detail in section 5.1.1 below.

3.3 Consultation with Department

In the lead up to the Trial, the ABC regularly met with the Department of Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy (DBCDE) and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). These meetings were to update DBCDE and the ACMA on the testing and progress of the Trial, including any unintended consumer impacts.

Communications with DBCDE about the Trial also occurred regularly.

3.4 Communications Plan for the Trial

The ABC adopted a focussed publicity strategy, in which the ABC worked with the stakeholder groups to educate vision impaired users of the service through stakeholder newsletters and publications.

3.4.1 Audio Description Webpage

The ABC built an accessible website that contained information on the Trial. This page included:

- A explanation of AD;
- How to access AD commentary during the Trial period;
- Background to the Trial, including links to the Minister's announcement;
- How to give feedback on the Trial, with links to the ABC's feedback (survey) page and telephone number;
- Links to the DBCDE's website and MAA's website for more information; and
- A schedule of upcoming AD programs including dates and times.

The schedule of programs that would be accompanied by AD commentary was updated on a weekly basis.

The website address was distributed via Vision Australia and Blind Citizen's Australia newsletters. Vision Australia and Blind Citizen's Australia provided further support through interviews in the press and updates for their members.

3.4.2 Audio Description Symbol

At the commencement of the broadcast of each AD program the following symbol appeared (next to the closed caption symbol and the ABC1 symbol) in the bottom right of screen:



At the same time the ABC included an audio logo before AD programs.

The inclusion of the audio AD logo created confusion for some users of the Trial who were unsure whether the presence of the logo had activated their service or not. The ABC took the decision to retain the AD audio logo as it provided more information on the presence of AD and would be of value to audiences particularly given the idiosyncratic behaviour of some receivers (see Section 7.2.1).

The ABC also notified viewers that programs were audio described by including AD in the synopsis included in the Electronic Program Guide (EPG).

4 Technology Issues

4.1 Spectrum Capacity and Television Transmission

The inclusion of an AD track on the ABC1 broadcast placed an additional demand on the ABC's digital spectrum capacity. Because of the "closed" nature of the Trial a separate audio track was broadcast along with the main audio.

Currently the ABC runs its digital terrestrial television transmissions at approximately 23Mbps within its allocated 7Mhz of radiofrequency spectrum. This is the maximum amount of spectrum available to the ABC and currently accommodates the carriage of three standard definition television channels (ABC1, ABC2/ABC4Kids and ABC3) and one high-definition channel (ABCNews24). In addition within the ABC's digital television spectrum the ABC also carries two digital radio services (Dig and DigJazz), the Freeview EPG and a data service to upgrade receivers.

In order to accommodate the AD stream for the Trial, the ABC considered that it would need to remove one of its digital radio services. In the lead up to the Trial the ABC worked with its "headend" vendor to develop technical solutions that would allow the ABC to maintain the Dig radio services in the television broadcasting spectrum while also delivering an AD track. The headend is the encoding point that compresses all signals for delivery to the satellite and ultimately to the viewer.

By testing a number of different configurations and reducing the data throughput on other services carried on the ABC's digital television platform the ABC was able to accommodate a 96Kbps mono-audio track without significantly degrading the picture quality of the television channels or removing a digital radio service. However the nature of the solution means it is unlikely to be viable for any extended period. Picture quality on ABC2 is already adversely affected by programs with high data demands (given existing spectrum limitations) and any future EPG developments may further stretch the ABC TV spectrum capacity.

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| Learning: | Delivering a mono audio AD track within the current ABC digital television spectrum holding is possible. However it is likely that future demands on the ABC's digital TV spectrum would render the solution adopted for the technical Trial unworkable over the longer term without the removal of a digital radio, or other, service. |
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4.2 Technical requirements to enable audio description

The delivery of an AD service has not been attempted by an Australian broadcaster before hence there were no local precedents upon which to base the Trial. As a result the testing of the technical parameters of the service formed a major part of the Trial.

4.2.1 Identifying a process for the transmission of AD tracks

The ABC's Broadcast Operations group identified a process which would allow AD tracks to be presented alongside a television program. This involved the use of an additional pair of audio lines to convey the additional AD track to the broadcast stream. Television audio is provided on tracks 1 and 2 which the viewer receives as stereo or dual mono audio.

The ABC decided to use tracks 3 and 4 to deliver the additional AD track into the broadcast stream.¹ Track 3 contained the additional audio track that viewers could hear at home. Track 4 contained a data signal to modulate the audio level across tracks 1, 2 and 3. These two tracks worked together so that when the AD was 'voiced' on track 3, the data from track 4 would decrease the volume on tracks 1 and 2 to allow the AD to be heard. When the AD voice was not required – where there was narration in the television program – track 4 would decrease the volume on track 3 (the AD track).

During the Trial, tracks 1, 2, 3 and 4 were passed through to receivers and mixed via the data control track on track 4 within the receiver². This meant that in order for viewers to receive the AD track on their receivers, the AD function needed to be enabled in the consumers' equipment. In practice many types of receivers enabled this function automatically upon detecting the AD data – causing unintended disruption and confusion for many viewers who did not want the AD service but received it anyway (unintended impacts on consumers are described in more detail in section 5.1).

4.2.2 Testing the audio description broadcast stream

The process described above was tested by the ABC's Broadcast Operations to assess if new workflows and adjustments to infrastructure and equipment in the supply chain were able to deliver an AD service without unintended effects on ABC1. Changes of this nature would ordinarily be tested over a longer period than that which was available for this Trial.

While adjustments were being made in the transmission chain, configuration adjustments were implemented for the broadcast ingest systems at ABC Ultimo and the playout systems at MediaHub. Four basic workflow areas had to be confirmed as able to accommodate the new requirements for AD. These included:

1. Confirm the ability to ingest the AD tracks into server and archive systems within Ultimo;
2. Confirm the ability to compress the file and deliver via File Transfer Protocol to MediaHub, while retaining the AD;
3. Confirm the ability of the AD tracks to successfully pass through the MediaHub transmission chain; and
4. Confirm the complete video and audio stream was successfully reaching the encoder at the headend for final compression prior to satellite delivery.

¹ By contrast New Zealand uses tracks 11 and 12.

² In contrast, in New Zealand the audio-described content is mixed at the point of transmission.

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

Prior to the Trial commencing, the ABC refined the testing while configurations were implemented and adjusted. By early June 2012, the ABC and MediaHub had successfully confirmed the four prerequisites above and were ready to commence live testing within the consumer domain.

Prior to commencing broadcasts of the AD track, the ABC's Broadcast Network Services Department separately organised a test of the effects of AD across a range of the set top boxes sold in Australia at a Lab in Auburn, Sydney (Appendix 5). The testing was not exhaustive but indicated that some receivers in the market would react differently when presented with the AD provided on tracks 3 and 4.

The theory was put into practice for the first time on 14 June 2012. The table at Appendix 5 details the results from the testing environment.

The testing schedule allowed technical and software problems within the ABC's transmission and broadcast environment to be identified and fixed prior to the commencement of the AD broadcast period. The testing also confirmed that the reception of the audio track would be different from receiver model to receiver model. There are over 100 set top boxes in the Australian market and based on consumer feedback, the ABC became aware that the ways in which boxes reacted when presented with an additional audio track varied significantly. Many boxes turned on the AD automatically, others turned off the main audio while others turned off all audio. Many of these issues could be addressed by resetting or reconfiguring the boxes. However in a limited number of cases it was impossible to regain sound on ABC1 or it was necessary to reset the box every time it tuned away from ABC1. Ultimately this resulted in a number of complaints to the ABC about the technical Trial (see Section 7 below).³

The constant adjusting of profiles (configurations) on the headend during testing meant that several set top boxes would have to be rescanned for reception in order to receive ABC1. Viewers expressed frustration at this impact.

Learning: An AD track integrated with a television program can be broadcast and received alongside main audio and vision utilising digital audio tracks 3 and 4. Significant testing and configuration amendments are required to ensure the service is delivered and does not significantly impact other services.

³ The details of these complaints are outlined in Chapter 7

4.3 Process to trigger and track audio description materials

The ABC's steering committee evaluated and weighed the risks of an automated process, as opposed to a manual process. As the facilitating technology and associated work flows and processes are new to Australia and there was very limited local expertise or experience in this field the steering committee determined that the likelihood of implementing an automated workflow successfully in the limited timeframe was low. In order to meet the timeframe for the Trial a manual solution was implemented.

A manual solution by its nature is human resource intensive and would involve increased staff hours for a defined period. While a manual approach allowed the ABC to deliver a Trial of AD in the timeframe required it does not represent an efficient or sustainable approach over a longer period.

4.3.1 Identifying and triggering programs for audio description

The ABC originally intended to utilise the same tagging processes it uses to provide a captioning service for its television programs. However, after more detailed analysis it became clear the necessary software development to its broadcast systems could not be made within the timeframe of the Trial. There was an unacceptable risk that the required software upgrade would compromise the existing functionality of the system.

As such, ABC Television adopted a manual approach to incorporate AD content in its workflow, using excel spreadsheets and human intervention.

The diagram below outlines the process adopted for the ingestion of audio-description tracks:

Audio Description (Simplified Ingest and Play out)

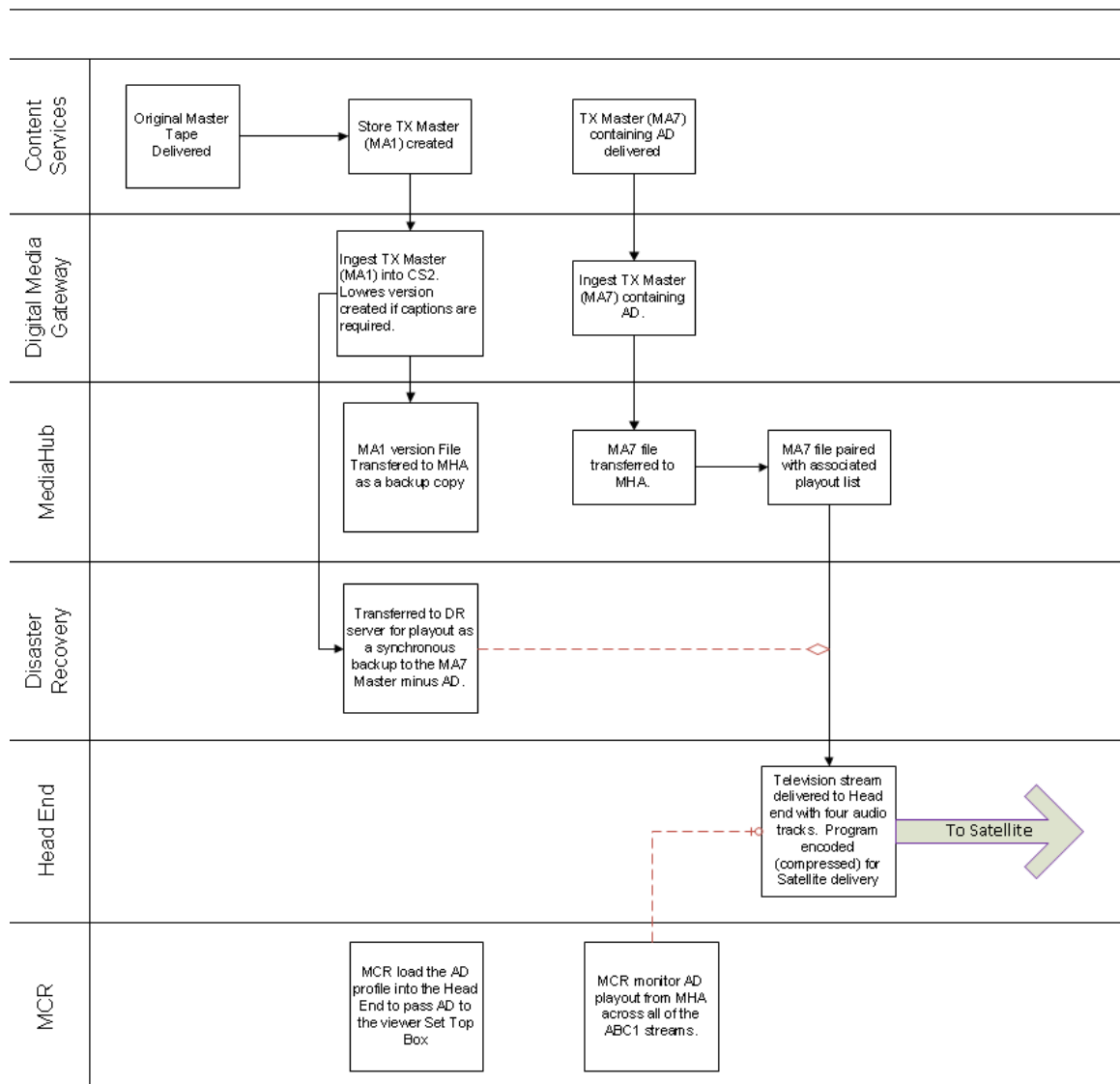


Diagram 1: ABC's Broadcast Operations workflow with Audio Description

The ABC's Digital Media Gateway (DMG) is responsible for the ingestion of content into the ABC's broadcast streams. A bespoke, unique version of the audio-described program had to be created. The original transmission master program was identified as MA1 and the audio described version identified as MA7. When the MA1 version was complete it was copied (to create the basis for the MA7) and was ingested by the DMG and then sent to Media Hub as a back-up file sitting off-line (just in case the audio described version was delayed).

The digibeta tape clone of the MA1 master program tape was then sent to the relevant supplier for the insertion of AD tracks. The AD tracks were added to the digibeta clone copy and it was returned to the ABC where it was ingested and this version was identified as MA7. A caption file was then also supplied and attached to the MA7 version of the program. This version was then assessed for quality control. The complete MA7 version was then transferred to Media Hub Australia for playout in accordance with the ABC1 schedule.

The ABC's Disaster Recovery playlists mirror the playout events at Media Hub Australia. These lists were adjusted to run the MA1 version of the program should the AD content or workflow processes encounter difficulties or an outage. This was not used during the Trial.

The ABC's Master Control Room is responsible for turning on, off and monitoring the headend profile. Preparation prior to all AD transmissions was conducted on the basis of this headend configuration. It was not until the program was physically in transmission that the Operators in Master Control could confirm the AD signal and then react to any alignments required.

4.3.2 Limitations of a manual approach

The labour intensive nature of the Trial placed an additional burden on numerous areas of the ABC's standard workflow. While the ABC was able to manage this for a defined period it would be onerous to implement this approach on a permanent basis. The use of a manual process had an impact on staffing for the DMG team as additional hours were required to verify AD broadcast material manually. Usually quality control checks would be carried out pre broadcast by the Broadcast Operations Team however due to the absence of specific hardware all checks had to be performed by the Gateway Team.

In the Master Control Room, AD introduced an additional element to check. With 15 separate encoder inputs to monitor and with access only available to the Sydney output at the Ultimo Master Control point, ABC Broadcast Operations relied heavily on feedback from other departments and regions to notify any problems with reception of ABC1.

Training was required for the profile of the headend adjustment. As the complexity increased, new profiles were added to incorporate AD. Within both the Operations and Television Divisions some staff were moved away from some tasks to assist with AD and other staff brought in to backfill. Other areas took on additional hours and duties to facilitate the Trial.

In conclusion, the technological complexity of developing, implementing and managing the AD service within the ABC's internal operations was far greater than initially estimated. Given these complexities it was not possible in the lead time preceding the Trial to make all the necessary alterations to seamlessly incorporate the production of audio description tracks as part of an automated process. As such a manual approach was adopted. In addition the purchase and installation of the necessary hardware and software required to undertake the Trial as if in a live production environment was not possible.

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| <p>Learnings: The adoption of a manual approach is not recommended as a best practice approach for the implementation of AD on television services. A minimum 18 months lead time would be required to develop, assess and implement an automated process for AD.</p> |
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4.3.3 Difficulties in accessing AD equipment for the Trial

As there is no active market for AD equipment in Australia, vendors lack knowledge of the impact on their products and the availability of stock was limited. The ABC liaised with European suppliers and broadcasters familiar with providing AD services in the lead up to the Trial and during the Trial. Reliance on foreign operators meant that questions could take up to two business days to receive a response and equipment, if ordered, had a long lead time.

This hampered the ABC's ability to automate several aspects of the process particularly in the build and test phase. Instead, the ABC undertook a manual testing with already available technical equipment. This identified that the required data components were available within the broadcast stream without being able to hear the final mixed tracks.

In the testing phase the ABC was unable to verify that the data track 4 controlling the audio mixing levels across tracks 1, 2 and 3 was operating as intended. Consequently workflows proceeded with a best endeavours approach and were not fully proven until reaching the initial transmission test on 14 June in Darwin. Once the pre mixing box arrived it proved a valuable asset and allowed the ABC to assess the content and quality of the AD mix.

4.4 Transmission methodology

4.4.1 Audio Processing

The ABC does not have a comprehensive audio processing capacity to compress and limit audio on its digital television platform. Audio processing is only available to a limited extent on ABC1.

Transmitting programs using the full digital dynamic audio range is possible on the digital terrestrial networks and on ABC1 as it currently operates, however broadcasting audio tracks using the full dynamic range on ABC1 without the full audio processing capacity has the potential to render audio either too soft or too loud.

To limit the risk of audio highs and lows, which would have been more detrimental to the AD service than the main audio, the ABC did not broadcast the AD service using the full dynamic range. Using the full dynamic range may have resulted in a better experience for users of the service. It produces better audio quality.

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| Learning: | A comprehensive audio processing capacity which provides the best user experience should be a service attribute or foundation upon which an AD service could be built. |
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4.4.2 Digital Television Headend (encoding and multiplexing)

The ABC digital television headend is a fully compliant Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB) system. The AD technical Trial has confirmed that encoding and multiplexing of an additional audio track, to accompany the main television audio tracks, is possible on the ABC's DVB system.

One element of the ABC DVB System is the DVB Systems Information (DVB-SI) server. In the course of conducting the Trial the ABC encountered problems with the operation of the DVB-SI server. The DVB-SI server is signalled from the program player automation system, which provides the cue to present or not present the additional audio description track to the set top box or integrated digital television. In effect this was the mechanism for telling the consumers' equipment that an audio described track was available and for triggering the activation of the audio description function within the reception equipment.

To get the DVB-SI server to properly present the additional AD track to receivers every time one was present the ABC would need to upgrade and modify its playout and Broadcast Management System (BMS). (BMS is software that schedules programs, manages on-air graphics, other related material and the automation system at MediaHub).

As an alternative the ABC switched on the mechanics of AD for the duration of the Trial. This meant that the marker within the data stream that flags to the receiver that programming is audio described was broadcast for the entire Trial (this is in contrast to an automated system which would toggle the marker on and off as appropriate when AD content was being transmitted). Even when programming was broadcast without an AD track the ABC transmission centre behaved as if a track was present. Hence every receiver in the market that was capable of receiving AD behaved as if AD was available on every program. This led to confusion amongst some users of the service and to audio problems for other viewers throughout the Trial and not just when AD programs were being broadcast.

One possible solution was to manually disable and re-enable the AD marker whenever AD programming was presented. Such an option presented a number of problems including the introduction of instability into the ABC system (ie every time a manual change was made the possibility of human error and an outage affecting the wider audience grew) and the potential that some set top boxes would reset each time a change was made at the ABC end.

Leaving the AD marker turned on even when no AD programming was broadcast presented the best option in the circumstances.

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| <p>Learning: Were an AD service to be provided on a permanent basis, internal broadcast systems would require an upgrade so that each program could be broadcast with the appropriate associated data streams. This would allow each receiver to indicate when an AD (or other) service were available for a program. This method of dynamic profile changing is used extensively in other DVB Digital terrestrial environments including Europe, Asia and New Zealand.</p> |
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4.5 Audio description on other broadcast platforms

As noted above, the technical Trial of AD on ABC1 was limited to the digital terrestrial platform and did not extend to the retransmission of ABC1 via alternative platforms such as VAST, Foxtel and Austar. AD was not provided for the ABC iview service.

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

The ABC's iView service is delivered using a completely different set of technologies and formats than that used in the delivery of digital terrestrial television broadcasts. As such, a significant amount of work and investment would be required to make the AD service available via iView. The AD tracks commissioned or acquired for the Trial could not simply be retransmitted via iView. They would have had to be completely re-made and re-purposed. This would have exceeded the parameters for the technical Trial.

Similarly, it was considered that testing and modifying the VAST rebroadcast of ABC1 to allow the delivery of the AD service would not have been cost effective in this Trial.

The pay television platforms are privately owned and operated and the ABC is not in a position to comment on the capacity or capabilities of those platforms with regard to AD.

5 RECEIVERS

5.1 Set top boxes and integrated digital televisions

There is a wide variety of set top boxes and integrated digital televisions in Australia. Unlike subscription television services where broadcasters supply and have control over reception equipment, free-to-air television broadcasters are not vertically integrated and the ABC has no control over how reception equipment will behave when presented with an additional audio track for AD.

While there is an international standard for DVB, feedback to the ABC during the Trial suggests each brand and model has the potential to react differently when presented with an audio stream that contains an additional track.

As explained further in Section 7 of this report, feedback received through audience complaints suggests the problems caused by the AD track presented differently across the different receiver brands.

Even though the ABC had conducted a limited survey of the effects of an AD service on receivers in Australia (as explained in Section 4 above), it soon became clear the detrimental impact on the viewers' experience was more substantial and more widespread than anticipated.

Over one thousand complaints were received by the ABC from consumers. They related to issues such as:

- Automatic activation of AD viewers complained about the additional audio track that they had not turned on and (in some cases) could not turn off
- Loss of all audio on ABC1
- Loss of main audio but with unwanted reception of AD track
- AD available or deactivated upon changing the receiver settings but then absent or present again after navigating away from ABC1 viewers needed to reactivate or deactivate the AD setting every time they changed channel away from and back to ABC1

One of the worst faults reported was a mainstream brand of integrated digital television that, when tuned to either logical channel number (LCN) for ABC1 (LCN2 or LCN21) presented the viewer with no audio at all.

In other cases, some receivers would only present the AD track and not the main audio. In some instances this could be rectified within the relevant menu settings. However, in other instances, this re-setting was required each time the channel was changed. In a small number of cases it was not possible to change the settings and restore main audio on ABC1. For these users ABC1 was effectively inaccessible during the Trial.

These faults created a significant number of calls to the ABC reception advice line (see below). The reception advice line received over 1000 complaints about reception issues during the period when the AD profile was activated on ABC1 (during and immediately

preceding the Trial). The viewer survey that was created for the Trial (see below in Part 4 for more detailed discussion) received an even split of responses between people who were genuine users of the service and those who were receiving it unintentionally or were experiencing audio problems.

On the face of it these responses indicate a far higher level of dissatisfaction with the AD service in the general community than positive sentiment – or to put it another way, a far more widespread problem with the behaviour of receivers in Australia than expected.

A number of callers to the ABC reception advice line reported that they had called the manufacturer of their receiver only to be told that this was a fault generated by the ABC's transmissions and not the manufacturer's equipment.

In the future, should AD become a priority, it may be possible for a coordinated and cooperative approach between the ABC and manufacturers to eliminate a significant number of the problems reported with receivers during the Trial. This could be achieved by loading a new version of software (sometimes referred to as 'firmware') in the consumer equipment (subject to contractual arrangements and agreement on testing and liability issues).

In addition, the ABC notes that the ACMA has the power to enforce the Australian Standards for digital terrestrial television reception equipment imported into Australia. Given that the relevant standard accommodates the additional audio track, this could eliminate the particular problems that manifested during the Trial for new receivers but would not address the issues encountered with existing receivers. Of course, this would not address the legacy population of non-complaint reception equipment. In other countries it is a legal requirement to have products tested and confirmed for compliance with the relevant standards before import licences are granted.

5.1.1 ABC1 on Logical Channel Numbers (LCNs) 02 and 21

In response to the growing amount of the negative feedback received during the Trial, the ABC's Steering Committee investigated options to address the problems being reported.

One option considered was to turn off the AD track on one of the ABC1 channels. (ABC1 is available on two separate LCNs – 02 and 21.)

Most receivers in Australia automatically tune into LCN 02 when scanning for ABC1. Given this, the ABC considered turning off the AD track on LCN 02 leaving it running on LCN 21 only. This approach may have alleviated the unintended reception issues being encountered by most callers to the ABC. Under this approach, users wishing to receive the AD service would have been required to tune to LCN 21.

The original technical advice to the AD Steering Committee prior to the Trial was that turning the AD track off for one LCN was not possible. A further investigation suggested it may be possible but was untested and carried risk. The risks included potential broader detrimental impacts on the ABC1 service and the likely re-setting of many receivers (again) resulting in more calls/complaints to the ABC.

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

Before progressing with this approach the ABC consulted with Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia and the MAA. The stakeholder groups were concerned that such an approach would be detrimental to the Trial. Many users of the Trial on LCN 02 would find the AD service was no longer available. The lead time to educate users had been considerably and it would not be possible to advise users to tune into LCN 21 in the time remaining for the Trial.

As an alternative the stakeholder groups proposed turning the AD service off LCN 21 and leaving it on 02. This would mean that the majority of AD users would be unaffected and the ABC would have an option for viewers with unresolvable complaints. The ABC felt that this proposal would not address the majority of the reception issues being encountered by viewers who were most likely watching LCN 02.

Given the small benefit to the majority of viewers, the risks of creating more reception problems at both the broadcast end and the reception end, the fact that complaints were steady (and not increasing) and the potential risk to the Trial the ABC decided to maintain its original configuration.

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| <p>Learnings: The various ways in which consumer reception equipment reacted when presented with an additional audio description track were more detrimental to viewer experience and more widespread than anticipated.</p> <p>A mandated Industry Standard for receivers would address many of the problems reported to the ABC and should form a central part of any thinking about a future roll out of AD. However it would not address the issues with existing equipment.</p> <p>A list of receivers that were reported to the ABC as presenting problems is attached (Australian Digital Testing Report in Appendix 5)</p> <p>One option to address reception problems would have been to provide the AD service on only one of the LCN's used to broadcast ABC1. Such an approach would only work on ABC1 (as it has 2 LCNs) and would not address problems with receiver behaviour.</p> |
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6 Content

6.1 Broadcast hours

The ABC exceeded the required target hours for the Trial and broadcast 193 hours of AD programming on ABC1⁴.

Of the 193 hours broadcast, Drama programming represented nearly 75 per cent of the total content with 143 total hours. Factual and Documentary program genres made up the remaining 25 per cent with 25 hours each.

The suitability of each programming genre for AD is discussed in Table 4.

Table 1: Total Hours of Audio Described programming by genre

| Genre | Duration (hrs) | % of Total AD Hours |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Arts | 0.44 | 0.23% |
| Documentary | 24.52 | 12.71% |
| Drama | 143.60 | 74.43% |
| Factual | 24.37 | 12.63% |
| Total | 192.94 | 100.00% |

Of the total broadcast hours in the Trial, 16 per cent of the hours were Australian programs.⁵ Of the remaining audio described programs, just under 84 per cent were from the UK with less than 1 per cent from the USA.

Table 2: Total Hours of Audio Described programming by genre and country of origin

| Genre | Australia | UK | USA | Total |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Arts | 0.23% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.23% |
| Documentary | 3.44% | 9.27% | 0.00% | 12.71% |
| Drama | 10.81% | 62.91% | 0.71% | 74.43% |
| Factual | 1.19% | 11.44% | 0.00% | 12.63% |
| Total | 15.66% | 83.62% | 0.71% | 100.00% |

Correspondingly the source of the AD programming followed the pattern outlined above, with 16 per cent of broadcast hours in the trial ABC commissioned Australian content. Nearly 50 per cent of the AD programs accompanied were sourced from the BBC with a further 14 per cent from Channel 4 and 9 per cent from ITV, as the table below demonstrates:

⁴ ABCTV created 215 hours of Audio Description but due to a number of changes in the ABC1 schedule it was not possible to transmit 22 hours during the trial period.

⁵ It was not possible to Audio Describe live or late arriving topical programming such as News, Current Affairs and Sport.

Table 3: Source of Audio-Described Programming

| Genre | ABC | BBC | Channel 4 | ITV | "others" | Total |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Arts | 0.23% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.23% |
| Documentary | 3.44% | 8.08% | 1.19% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 12.71% |
| Drama | 10.81% | 37.30% | 4.75% | 9.40% | 12.17% | 74.43% |
| Factual | 1.19% | 4.03% | 7.41% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 12.63% |
| Total | 15.66% | 49.41% | 13.35% | 9.40% | 12.17% | 100.00% |

A full list of AD programs broadcast on ABC1 is at Appendix 7.

6.2 Planning and scheduling audio described content

Two factors were important in planning and scheduling AD television content:

- a) Suitability of content, and
- b) Timing for the delivery of content

6.2.1 Suitability

Creating and commissioning television content can be a complex, contentious and subjective process. Television programs can have a wide audience appeal or be created to serve a niche audience. ABC1's program schedule reflects this range of programming. The ABC continued to conduct scheduling and programming decisions as per its normal processes during the trial. There was no intention for the Trial to influence scheduling decisions, which are based on a complex series of factors.

The programming genres which are most appropriate for AD are drama and documentary. This is because programs of these genres contain the highest proportion of visual imagery not accompanied by audio content. This provides content for the AD track to comment on but also provides the necessary gaps in underlying audio to allow for the AD commentary to be accommodated. Program genres such as sport, news, entertainment (such as panel shows) are commentary-heavy and this does not allow for additional audio or makes additional audio redundant.

A summary of program genres' suitability to be audio described is as follows:

Table 4: Programs suited to be audio described

| Program Genre | Indicative Suitability for AD | Audio Description Issues / Notes |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Arts & Culture | Potentially | Depending on the medium of the art, AD may be able to add value. For example, the visual arts may benefit from AD however, art in the form of music or poetry (readings) is already in an audio form. |
| Children's Programs | Potentially | The AD Trial was conducted between 5pm and midnight and as such no children's programming was featured Trial. |

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| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|---|
| | | It is anticipated that Children’s programming sub genres would typically follow the same suitability patterns as shown for other genres listed in this table. |
| Drama / Fiction | Yes | <p>The nature of drama and works of fiction are appropriate to be audio described. Drama programs usually contain non-verbal human communications like tears, smiles, nods, frowns, grimaces, glances, pointing, touching as well as many pauses in the dialogue. This allows for meaningful audio-description added into the program.</p> <p>AD has been found to add subjective value to the audiences of drama programs.</p> |
| Documentary / Factual | Potentially | <p>Documentaries were assessed on a case-by-case as their suitability for AD was dependent on the nature of the content, as the following examples demonstrate:</p> <p>Time-Team: is a UK factual based program about archaeology. The narration is non-stop (allowing few opportunities to meaningfully insert AD) and typically describe exactly what is seen on screen. For these reasons the ABC did not select this program for inclusion in the trial.</p> <p>David Attenborough’s Kingdom of Plants: is a BBC factual program about the development of different plant species. The narration and direction had numerous pauses and intricate shots of various exotic plant-life.</p> <p>This was suitable to be audio described as it provided added value for audiences in describing the detail of on-screen content as well as opportunity to insert the additional editorial explanations.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that the level of research required behind Documentary and Factual programming can be extensive. Fact checking is essential. In <i>Kingdom of Plants</i>, a lingering shot of a sunset over a building need to be verified that it was, in fact, the Fern House at Kew Gardens.</p> <p>It should be considered that documentary and factual programming is usually delivered to a broadcaster quite close to the broadcast date. This means that the window to prepare a script for audio-description can be limited and sometimes impossible to create prior to broadcast.</p> |
| News | No | News by its very nature is typically transmitted live, leaving no room to prepare AD. It is also not possible to know in advance when the reporters / presenters are going to speak. News also tends to contain descriptive reporting built into the main audio which reduces the need for AD. |

| | | |
|-----------------|----|--|
| Current Affairs | No | Whilst it is not so frequently transmitted live it is very similar to News in that it tends to have descriptive reporting built into the main audio, which reduces the need for AD. |
| Sports & Events | NO | <p>Like News, Sports and Event coverage is mostly live and therefore it is highly unpredictable for Audio Describers to know when the commentators will be speaking.</p> <p>Even if Sports and Events are recorded they are typically not delivered until only a few hours before transmission, thereby making AD preparation virtually impossible</p> <p>Notable Exceptions Recent British AD coverage of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics opening ceremonies attracted some press coverage because it appeared to deviate previous approach to live coverage.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that in both cases the BBC and Channel 4 did not provide AD alongside existing commentary but instead arranged for a completely separate and discrete Audio narration to be fed onto AD tracks. This effectively “dipped” the main audio on the program and entirely replaced it with a different audio experience. The ABC does not and will not in the short to medium term have the capacity to provide such a service.</p> |

The effect of the variation in suitability between genres was that on some days no audio described programs were broadcast, due to the scheduling of contiguous blocks of news or documentary programming. For example on ABC1 on Monday evenings the schedule contains news, current affairs and factual programs such as *ABC News, 7.30, Australian Story, Four Corners, Media Watch, Q&A, Lateline* and *The Business*. None of these programs are suitable to be audio described due to format, live broadcast or timing of delivery.

6.2.2 Timing

A second important aspect of the commissioning process was to ensure there was sufficient time prior to the selected program’s broadcast date for an audio description script to be developed, recorded and married to the content.

As ABC1’s program schedule is planned several weeks in advance of broadcast it was possible to select content appropriate for AD from the advanced schedule. The ABC needed to ensure that the selected programs were received from the content maker with enough lead time before broadcast – in this case, two weeks – to ensure an AD track could be produced by the AD supplier.

Learning: This varying suitability of programming genres for AD demonstrates a twofold problem. One, a prescribed number of daily hours of audio described content is not realistic in a broadcast environment where content that is not conducive to be audio described is in the schedule. Two, program delivery times do impact on the ability to make a script for the program. The ABC also notes that limiting the Trial to the period between 5pm and midnight restricted the selection pool of programming suitable for AD. In order to deliver a meaningful television experience to people who are blind or visually impaired, a broadcaster should be able to select programming from its schedule that is suitable to audio description rather than having a set amount of hours prescribed regardless of the types of content being broadcast. It is possible that prescribing a number of hours of audio described content per day may not increase accessibility to television services for people with a vision impairment.

6.3 Selection of programming

With the aim of achieving the Trial's target of averaging 14 hours per week of AD content over the course of the Trial period, the ABC selected programs based on audience value, availability and consistency and also prioritised Australian content.

In determining audience value, an assessment was made of the extent to which extra or meaningful information could be added to the program for vision impaired users.

Programs were also assessed to determine if they would be available in sufficient time to complete the necessary preparation for audio description, quality check and editorial controls.

The target audience was likely to have a valid expectation of consistency in the programming selected. If episode one of a series was audio described the audience was likely to expect the remainder of the series to also be audio described. An assessment was made to determine which series and programs would be available within the window of the Trial.

6.4 Programming "value for money"

In reviewing and assessing the audio-described programs commissioned for this Trial, it became apparent that not all programs or program genres are of equal "value". Value in this instance indicates the frequency, volume and quality of the interjected audio-described content.

The table in Appendix 2 provides some comparison between program genres and the frequency of AD commentary, the amount of AD words delivered within the entire program and the overall cost per AD word.

An analysis of "value for money" such as this does not address all relevant components of the AD experience. An audience members' enjoyment may be enhanced by the addition of 400 well-chosen words, than it would by an unnecessarily verbose audio track of 4000

words. However, this analysis is included to demonstrate that there is difference in audio description output and the amount of broadcast hours.

Learnings: The AD providers, CSI and RedBee Media, were commissioned on a price per broadcast hour for the development, scripting, recording and delivery of an AD file to the ABC. There may be another formula for commissioning AD content that would deliver better value for money.

With regard to commissioning and acquiring AD content consideration should be given to:

- choosing program content using the Audience value, Availability, Consistency and Australian-made prioritisation criteria;*
- pricing models that can be deployed with AD providers, so that the cost of the AD can recognise the volume of actual AD produced for each program; and*
- confirming ownership and rights of approval as part of contractual arrangements. For acquisitions this may entail confirming AD file and captioning files as part of the deliverables under the contract.*

6.5 Commissioning audio description content

The process of making the AD script to accompany the television program is one that requires a significant level of skill and experience in story-telling, timing and commentary. The AD skill set is not well-developed in the Australian market.

6.5.1 Selecting and audio description supplier

A number of Australian companies have experience in preparing AD for cinema, theatrical performances and the DVD market. However, few organisations were positioned to rapidly scale up their workflows to meet the sudden expansion necessary for the Trial. AD for television places a premium on the ability to deliver high-quality and volume of content within a short timeframe.

6.5.1.1 Audio description Trial – request for quote

In May 2012, following analysis of the Australian AD market, a limited Request For Quotes (RFQ) was issued to four organisations to provide AD services for the Trial.

Given the process timeframe and the fact that broadcast AD services are not supplied in Australia, the ABC limited the RFQ to four companies most likely to be able to provide the service. The limited RFQ was released directly via email by ABC Procurement on 21 May 2012, with a closing date of 2pm 30 May 2012.

The RFQ set out that the ABC sought delivery of approximately 182 hours of AD television programs to be broadcast on ABC1 over a 13 week period, in compliance with a request and provision of funding from the Australian Government. The RFQ further noted that the Trial would include both commissioned (ie, originally produced) AD tracks and acquired (ie, previously produced in another market) AD tracks.

Three of the organisations responded to the RFQ. A fourth organisation wrote to the ABC advising that it did not have the capability to meet the project's needs.

An evaluation committee, with representatives from ABC Television, ABC Resources (Broadcast Operations) and ABC Operations Group, developed selection criteria based on price, technical ability, broadcast accessibility service credentials and the ability to deliver the service in the timeframe.

6.5.1.2 Evaluation criteria

Respondents were assessed on the following criteria:

Ability to undertake the assignment within the time frame / deliverables

- Proven editorial standards / controls
- Proven ability to meet tight deadlines
- Proven / previous track record with AD (including overseas)
- Proven flexibility in approach (given unpredictability of a trial)
- Confirmed editorial capacity to handle to variations in volumes.

Pricing:

- Pricing per unit (including by volume)

Industry experience and expertise:

- Proven financial stability
- Existing reliable track record in this arena.

Technical ability:

- Appropriate technical infrastructure
- Proven technical ability to handle the formats and volumes required (including track record)
- Proven technical quality of product.

On the basis of these criteria the ABC selected two providers, Captioning & Subtitling International (CSI) and Red Bee Media (RBM). The ABC decided on a panel approach with two organisations given that one key objective of the AD trial was to develop an understanding of issues associated with sourcing, creating and providing broadcast AD content and services. It was felt, as both organisations met the selection criteria, a panel arrangement would enhance the Trial's effectiveness.

Following the selection process the ABC entered into negotiation for engagement and contracted for supply.

CSI offered benefits in the following main areas:

1. CSI already supplied captioning files to the ABC and knew the ABC processes very well and would be able to integrate with existing captioning processes;
2. Via their UK based parent company ITFC/Deluxe they could call upon 15 years experience in providing audio description to the UK market;

3. Via their UK operations they would be well placed to access a significant volume of existing AD scripts and audio files for ITV and other non-BBC and non-Channel 4 content;
4. CSI were able to confirm that they would be able to locally service, with Australian voices, the creation of original AD for ABC commissioned Australian-made content; and
5. CSI confirmed that they would be able to “turn-round” audio description requests within the projected 10 day window.

RBM brought a slightly different set of benefits to the environment:

1. Although widely utilised within the Australian TV market to provide captions they were untried by the ABC and so the Trial would provide a valuable opportunity to compare and assess the AD procedures of an international AD provider who had no prior knowledge of ABC systems and processes;
2. Like CSI they also offered, via their UK base, 15 years of experience supplying AD to the BBC and Channel 4;
3. Like CSI they could access potentially significant volumes of existing AD scripts and audio files – in their case for programming originated by the BBC and Channel 4.
4. Like CSI, RBM confirmed that they would be able to “turn-round” audio description requests within the projected 10 day window; and
5. Significantly, RBM differed from CSI in that although they could provide the creation of original AD for ABC commissioned Australian-made content, due to infrastructure constraints for their Australian branch, it would need to be handled via their UK operation with UK voices.

Eight weeks prior to the commencement of the Trial, in June 2012, both CSI and RBM were confirmed to provide AD services for the duration of the Trial. The broad understanding from all parties was that CSI would provide AD for ABC content and programs sourced from ITV. RBM would supply AD content for BBC and Channel 4 programs. Programs sourced from other suppliers would be allocated on a case-by-case basis.

| |
|---|
| <i>Comment:</i> Despite the short timeframe for making arrangements to source and acquire or produce audio described programs, the ABC and the two proponents were able to put in place an effective supply chain for delivery of AD content. |
|---|

6.5.2 Costs of providing audio description by suppliers

The costs of providing AD content for television programs is calculated per broadcast hour, with hours rounded up to the nearest 15 minutes. For example, a program with an actual duration of 25 minutes is charged at 30 minutes.

Details of costs are commercial in confidence – see Appendix 2.

Learning:

1. There are a small number of potentially viable AD suppliers within the Australian market place. However, most are likely to require several months lead time to prepare facilities and resources should AD be provided on a longer term basis. A dialogue with potential vendors around “lead time” requirements should be factored into any AD roll-out time-line.
2. There were only relatively minor differences between the potential AD providers in regard to their own cost per hour and ‘turn-round” time-lines.
3. Whilst AD suppliers were similar in costs – the price for acquiring existing AD tracks from international broadcasters was much higher than originally anticipated. It may be prudent to consider building into contractual arrangements with program suppliers that AD files and the rights to edit them are included within the overall program contract deliverables. For example, the BBC and Channel 4 content often had tight restrictions on the use of the original AD file. This meant that where the ABC had a different version of the program, it had to arrange for the entire AD track to be revoiced to fit with the program.
4. There may be some scope for negotiating with AD suppliers to reduce the 10 day turn-round timeframe to more accurately reflect the complexity of the program audio described.
5. The ABC compared two suppliers of AD content during the course of the Trial and found:
 - a. Despite the short timeframe for making arrangements to source and acquire or produce audio described programs, the ABC and the two proponents were able to put in place an effective supply chain for delivery of audio described content.
 - b. There were only relatively minor differences between the potential AD providers in regard to their own cost per hour and “turn-round” time-lines.
 - c. Whilst AD suppliers were similar in costs – the price for acquiring existing AD tracks from international broadcasters was much higher than originally anticipated. The ABC will contemplate the inclusion of AD files in its program acquisition process.
 - d. There may be some scope for negotiating with AD suppliers to reduce the 10 day turn-round timeframe to more accurately reflect the complexity of the AD program.

6.6 Editorial standards and quality control of audio description material

The ABC has well-established guidelines, policies and procedures to ensure its content meets certain editorial and community standards. These standards are found in program classification, audience advice and the ABC’s editorial policies. These standards are aligned with technical checking of the content to ensure a high quality product is delivered to audiences.

There are currently no editorial standards for AD content. As a result, the ABC developed its own baseline standards and applied quality control. Given the short time-frame of the Trial

the ABC adopted the guidelines and principles for AD content developed by the UK communications regulator Ofcom⁶. In adopting this approach, the ABC also noted the MAA background paper of 2011 (see Appendix 8).⁷

6.6.1 The subjective nature of audio described content

AD commentary differs significantly from other access services, such as captioning and signing. In relation to captioning, for example, whilst there is interpretation and sub editing of dialogue, the majority of the captioner's skill focuses on transcribing the existing program audio in a coherent and informative text stream.

AD commentary requires the author of the track to interpret the emotional content of the scene, such as distinguishing between *a smile* and *a grimace*, or *a look* and *a glare*. In doing this, they must also recognise the importance of retaining ambiguity where a sighted viewer would not be certain as to what they have witnessed.

AD should be objective and avoid imbuing scenes with personal interpretation and language but still remain sympathetic to mood engendered by the sound and vision created by the program's producers.

6.6.2 The ABC's process for quality control

The AD programming broadcast during the Trial came from one of three sources:

1. **Acquired AD content** – this content was either acquired by the ABC directly from program suppliers or via CSI or RBM. The existing AD voice tracks were then added to the relevant ABC program tapes and supplied back to the ABC for both technical and editorial checks.
2. **Re-voiced Acquired AD scripts** – this content was created by the contracted AD suppliers (RBM or CSI) and attached the relevant ABC program tape and delivered back to the ABC for technical and editorial checks.
3. **Commissioned AD content** – this content required full end-to-end AD scripting and voicing. It was then attached to the relevant ABC program tape and supplied back to the ABC for technical and editorial checks.

The ABC requested CSI and RBM supply a digibeta with the audio-description commentary on track 3 and control signal on track 4, and a viewing DVD with the audio description commentary mixed with the primary program's audio. This was to enable the ABC to view the program for editorial checks.

However, the DVD delivery was not possible since the AD was delivered to the home audience via a "receiver mix". This meant that the point at which all the relevant tracks were mixed occurred in the set-top box or digital television. Neither CSI nor RBM were able to re-create a virtual transmission signal to merge the tracks replicating a set-top box. Both offered

⁶ http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/guidance/other-guidance/tv_access_serv/guidelines/

⁷ At Appendix 8

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to create a manual mix of the audio tracks for the purpose of creating a viewing DVD, but since this would not necessarily demonstrate that the AD tracks had been accurately configured and would significantly add to the costs this offer was declined and checks were made on the master digibeta.

Subsequently it also became apparent that even if the request had been met, because the master transmission tape had left the ABC and been edited to add AD tracks the ABC would still need to review the master tape prior to broadcast to ensure it had not been damaged in anyway and that the primary program remained intact.

Consequently the ABC's workflow for editorial and technical checks for AD programs was adjusted to include a second review of the master transmission tape post the addition of the AD, as Diagram 2 demonstrates:

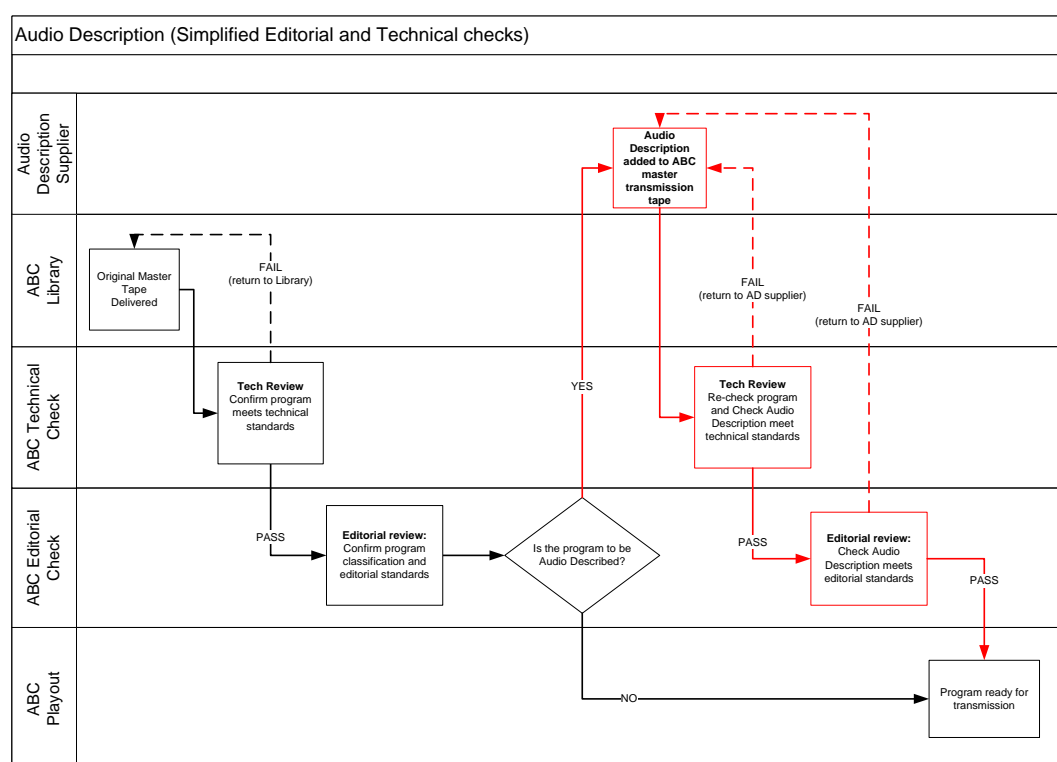


Diagram 2 – ABCTV's workflow for AD programming (the red lines depict the additional activities required to manage the audio description process)

In this review, although the editorial quality and style of the AD was checked, the main focus became the re-checking of the primary audio and video. As noted earlier the technical checking of the AD control track prior to transmission remained a difficulty for the first half of the AD trial as the ABC had no equipment that could truly confirm the validity of that track ahead of transmission.

Learning: The Ofcom regulation and original ITC style guidelines appear to provide a valuable and viable basis for any future Australian AD guidelines. It is necessary to explore the operational and technical options available to facilitate the addition of AD tracks to the final point of transmission rather than embedding the tracks on the digibeta tapes as in the ABC's Trial.

7 Audience Feedback

For the duration of the Trial there were two feedback mechanisms established to assess the effects of the Trial on consumers – a bespoke audience survey and the ABC’s standard audience feedback channels.

7.1 Audience Survey

In July 2012 the ABC commissioned Australian Survey Research (ASR) to conduct an audience feedback study around the trial of the AD service. The aim of the study was to collect and evaluate users' feedback on the provision of the service. The Trial and the survey were conducted from 5 August to 8 November 2012.

During programs when AD was turned on, the audience was given information about how to give feedback on the service by:

- Visiting the ABC website and following a link to a web survey hosted by ASR; and
- Calling a 1800 number where the caller was given a message to leave the contact details and best time to be called. Call Assist (a Victorian-based call centre) phoned people who left a message and recorded their feedback into the web survey. The 1800 method was used to help ensure that a person only called once and that visually impaired people were not reliant on a web only method of providing feedback.

Two associations representing the vision-impaired in Australia were also provided their own direct links to the web survey, but these were not used during the survey fieldwork period.

7.1.1 Questionnaire

The ABC and ASR drafted the questionnaire used to collect audience feedback on the Trial.

Four questions were asked of respondents to assist in identifying demographic sub-groups: level of visual impairment, age, gender and location of residence. All respondents were asked if they were aware of the AD service and then asked if they had the audio description service turned on in one or more of the TVs in their residence. Only respondents who answered yes to both of these questions were presented with the rest of the questions in the questionnaire. In other words, these questions acted as screening questions so that only users or those who had experienced the service were included in the user survey response set.

7.1.2 Survey results

A total of 309 people completed the AD survey. Of those 135 “AD users” (ie, people who actively used the service) completed the online survey accessed via the ABC website and 28 people gave feedback through a telephone interview⁸. A similar number of people (n=146)

⁸ Given the small number of users captured within the user survey, the results must be treated as indicative only of the entire population of the ABC’s visually impaired audience, and the visually impaired population within Australia.

also used both these mechanisms to advise that they did not want the AD service and/or that they wanted to know how to turn it off.

The majority of AD users to the survey identified themselves as blind or were answering on behalf of someone who is visually impaired, were over 45 years of age and resided in New South Wales or Victoria.

In order to further participate in the survey respondents had to have experienced AD commentary (this question screened out the 146 respondents who had called to complain about unintended reception). Seventy-two per cent of respondents indicated they had experienced between 1 and 10 hours of content.

Hours of AD viewing/use was cross tabulated with four demographics: level of impairment, age, gender and location. The only statistically significant difference in terms of hours of viewing was for the 4-10 hour viewing bracket. Older people (45 and older) are significantly more likely (44.3%) to watch for this length of time compared with younger people (less than 45) where only 25% of them watched for 4-10 hours. All other comparisons had statistically similar results.

Respondents were asked what sort of set top box or digitally integrated television they were using with the AD service. The answers provided for the *other* option were recorded where possible into the options provided. Samsung, Bush and Sony were the most popular brands (refer to the table on the following page). Note that the Bush brand is offered by visually impaired associations and that this brand was provided through the *other* answer option.

Respondents were asked how easy it was to set up the AD service on their set top box / TV and a majority indicated that it was *very easy*. However from the following open-ended question which asked what could have made set up easier, it is clear that the service turned on automatically for most users – a plus for those who wanted it and a negative for those who did not want it.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they experienced any unexpected effects on their TV or viewing once the AD service was activated. Just over 77% reported *no unexpected effects* on their viewing.

Respondents were asked to indicate what the AD service added to their viewing experience. The response was split between making a considerable improvement and making minimal or no improvement to the viewing experience. Not surprisingly, the only statistical difference for affect on viewing experience was around level of visual impairment. Blind users were significantly more likely to have a greatly enhanced viewing experience (95.5%) compared with all other levels of visual impairment (45.6%).

Respondents were given the opportunity to select the most memorable way in which they found out about the AD service. Most commonly, the source of information was an organisation or association that they belonged to, followed by the ABC.

Respondents were asked if they would recommend the AD service to others who were visually impaired. Over 70% of respondents indicated that they would recommend.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any other feedback on the AD service and 114 people offered comments. Most commonly (63 of the 114) indicated that they liked the service or wanted it to continue while 20 commenters did not like it, wanted to get rid of it or turn it off. Other comments were about more communication of the service or improvements to it.

From the web survey and telephone messages left on the 1800 number, a total of 146 people indicated that the service had turned on automatically for them and that they did not want to be users / receivers of the AD service. Responses indicated significant frustration with the situation.

The overall findings from the survey of 309 people indicate:

- Intended users, particularly blind ABC audience members, greatly appreciate the AD service. Interest declines as the level of visual impairment declines
- Associations representing the visually impaired are key sources of messages about this service
- When the service occurs by default it causes considerable viewer frustration. Turning it off needs as much promotion / information as turning it on and this information needs to be simple to access
- There are some technical improvements which may need addressing, particularly around sound levels and captioning.

The full results of the Audience Survey are in Appendix 3.

7.2 Feedback to the ABC

Audience & Consumer Affairs is a department within the ABC separate to and independent of the content producing areas. The department manages correspondence from the public in regard to ABC program content as well as corporate matters. Within Audience & Consumer Affairs, the Transmission Advice unit primarily deals with the public on technical matters regarding the transmission and reception of ABC Television and Radio.

The technical circumstances that arose out of the AD trial are not a usual part of the brief for Transmission Advice. However, given this unit had the relevant infrastructure, including telephony and a record-keeping database, and the team has expertise dealing with the public on receiver issues and other technical matters, the unit fielded any technical enquiries arising from the AD Trial. The broader Audience & Consumer Affairs department logged and when appropriate, responded to broader corporate matters raised by the public about the Trial.

The Transmission Advice unit provides a toll-free telephone service to the public (1300 13 9994), which is staffed from Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm eastern time. Members of the public may also contact the unit through its [website](#). Comments, questions and

complaints from the public regarding content and corporate issues are submitted through the [ABC Contact site](#).

7.2.1 Contacts about technical problems

The official AD Trial commenced on 5 August 2012, however the broadcast profile required to deliver AD was switched on and maintained from 31 July through to 5 November 2012. As outlined above, this means that the AD track was required to run 24 hours each day, even when programs which included AD were not being broadcast.

During the period from 31 July to 5 November 2012, the Transmission Advice unit logged and responded to **1060** distinct contacts (**678** calls and **382** emails), from the public regarding technical problems they experienced due to the audio description trial. The following table outlines the concerns raised by the public.

| Issue | Contacts |
|---|----------|
| No main audio on ABC1 | 579 |
| AD broadcasting by default but not required by viewer | 391 |
| No main audio on recorded ABC1 programs | 81 |
| Audio fluctuations on main audio and other general feedback | 9 |

The most significant number of contacts were from viewers who lost the main audio on ABC1 (logical channel numbers 2 and 21), when the AD profile was turned on from 31 July 2012.

This loss of audio was experienced on all ABC1 programs, including those that did not have the additional AD commentary. As this was an immediately apparent problem for viewers, most of these contacts were received within the first few days of the profile being switched on. It was not always possible to capture information about receiver type (some email complainants did not provide details), however affected receivers included **Panasonic**, **NEC** and **Sony**.

In most cases this problem could be resolved by changing the audio format either through the remote or the receiver menu A/V settings, however in some circumstances certain receivers, including some **Panasonic** models, needed to be reset each time the receiver was changed to ABC1. Call time resolving the issue was dependent on the caller's familiarity and confidence with their receiving equipment.

In the case of **DGTec** and **Hotchip** receivers, viewers were unable to select an alternative audio setting and so could not access the main audio on ABC1 for the duration of the trial which (including testing time amounted to 16 weeks).

The ABC also received **391** contacts from viewers who could hear the additional AD commentary but did not require it. Primarily these contacts were received as emails via the general contact form rather than through the Transmission Advice phone line or website, as

viewers associated the service with the specific program that included the AD. It appears that certain receivers had the AD set as part of the default audio and the ABC advised the complainants that this may be resolved and the AD turned off by changing the A/V settings through the receiver remote or main menu. Although many of the emails did not identify the receiver type, **Samsung** appeared to be the most prevalent receiver affected.

The third form of complaint was that ABC1 programs recorded on certain receivers during the trial and played back did not contain the main audio track. The ABC received **81** of these complaints and they were primarily **NextWave** PVRs. There was no resolution for this issue.

The balance of technical contacts were less obviously linked to the trial, however there were some complaints that the main audio fluctuated on programs that contained the audio description commentary. The ABC has not been able to identify specific receivers that experienced this problem.

7.2.2 Other audience feedback

The ABC received **nine** other distinct and unsolicited emails providing general feedback about the trial. **Four** of these were emails of appreciation for the trial or aspects of the commentary. There were **four** general enquiries about the trial (which program would be included, duration of the trial etc) and **one** general complaint about the trial (quality of the commentary etc).

At the time of preparation of this Report, the ABC has received approximately **1950** postcards and **94** emails requesting that the audio description remain a permanent ABC service. These petitions were part of a [coordinated campaign](#) by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Blind Citizens Australia and Vision Australia. A small percentage of the postcards were unsigned and/or did not have a postage stamp. Postcards continued to be received well after the trial concluded on 4 November.

The ABC was also contacted by Vision Australia and the MAA and provided anecdotal evidence of the impact on users. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact on individuals was significantly positive. Vision Australia reported feedback from one member who said that AD was, “life changing”. Other feedback was that many members felt “included” for the first time in many years.

The number of contacts during and post the Trial to the ABC should be considered in context:

- The number of viewers of ABC1 with a vision impairment is lower than the number without
- Viewers are more likely to contact the ABC to complain than to voice positive sentiment
- Many viewers with problems would not have contacted the ABC but would have turned it off
- Over the course of the Trial many millions of viewers tuned into ABC1
- In the majority of cases the ABC was able to assist callers to rectify the problem

Learnings: Feedback from AD users via the survey and anecdotal feedback from stakeholder groups indicated a strong level of support for the AD service; Feedback from viewers without a vision impairment via the survey and ABC reception advice line indicated a strong level of dissatisfaction with the service - mainly as a result of problems with ABC1 main audio or unwanted reception of AD;

Given the way in which receivers in Australia respond to AD any approach to introducing a permanent service will unavoidably result in some dissatisfied viewers; and

A full cost/benefit analysis on viewers and broadcasters is required.

Appendix 3 – Audience Research of TV Audio Description Evaluation 2012, Survey Findings

Introduction

In July 2012 the ABC commissioned Australian Survey Research (ASR) to conduct an audience feedback study around the trial of a TV audio description service. The aim of the study was to collect and evaluate users' feedback on the provision of the service. The trial and the survey were conducted from 5 August to 8 November 2012.

This report outlines the survey methodology and presents the key findings. A copy of the questions asked of users can be found in the attachment at the end of the report.

Audio description – an explanation

Audio Description (AD) allows visually-impaired TV viewers to hear additional information about what is happening within a scene. The service consists of a narrator talking through a presentation and describing what is happening on a screen during pauses in the audio track or sometimes during dialogue, if necessary.

With around 2.1% of all Australians suffering from blindness or low vision, the AD service, if fully implemented, would give the vision impaired access to something that most of us take for granted. The trial involved the broadcast of drama, documentary and other content with audio description on ABC1 for 14 hours per week during prime time over a 13 week period beginning on 5 August 2012.

Methodology and response

Method

ABC staff involved in the evaluation in conjunction with Australian Survey Research developed the questions used to collect user feedback. During programs when AD was turned on, the audience was given information about how to give feedback on the service by:

- Going to the ABC website and following a link to a web survey hosted by ASR.
- Calling a 1800 number where the caller was given a message to leave the contact details and best time to be called. Call Assist (a Victorian-based call centre) phoned people who left a message and recorded their feedback into the web survey. The 1800 method was used to help ensure that a person only called once and that visually impaired people were not reliant on a web only method of providing feedback.

Two associations representing the vision-impaired in Australia were also provided their own direct links to the web survey, but these were not used during the survey fieldwork and evaluation period.

Response

A total of 135 AD users completed the online survey accessed through the ABC website and 28 people gave feedback through a telephone interview. A similar number of people (n=146) also used both these mechanisms to advise that they did not want the AD service and/or that they wanted to know how to turn it off. We have termed this group *non-intended users* and their feedback has been excluded from the analysis of user feedback. However, we have summarised the nature and amount of non-intended user feedback later in this report.

Given the small number of users captured within the user survey, the results must be treated as indicative only of the entire population of the ABC's visually impaired audience, and the visually impaired population within Australia.

Analysis

Simple, descriptive statistics have been used in analysis and presentation. Four questions were asked of respondents to assist in identifying demographic sub-groups: level of visual impairment, age, gender and location of residence. Where there were statistically significant differences in answers between these sub-groups, comments about differences are made in the corresponding section. Where there were no demographic statistically significant differences, no comments have been made. Statistical differences were calculated at the 95% confidence level.

All verbatim comments from both users and non-intended users have been provided to the ABC separately.

Screening

All respondents were asked if they were aware of the AD service and then asked if they had the audio description service turned on in one or more of the TVs in their residence. Only respondents who answered yes to both of these questions were displayed the rest of the questions in the questionnaire. In other words, these questions acted as screening questions so that only users or those who had experienced the service were included in the user survey response set.

Key findings

Level of visual impairment

Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate their level of visual impairment with definitions provided for three levels of impairment. Respondents were also given the option to indicate that they were answering on behalf of someone who was visually impaired and they were then asked to indicate the level of visual impairment of the person they were answering for. For analysis purposes the self and other responses for level of impairment have been combined. For example, using the data in the table below, 28 respondents have been included in the visually impaired category.

Note that when conducting demographic sub-group comparisons, the *don't know, not sure* and *no answer* responses to level of impairment have been excluded from analysis.

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| Level of visual impairment | Freq | % | Freq | % |
|---|------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| I am visually impaired | 24 | 14.7 | | |
| I have low vision | 22 | 13.5 | | |
| I am blind | 61 | 37.4 | | |
| Answering on behalf of someone who is visually impaired | 56 | 34.4 | | |
| What is their level of visual impairment? | | | | |
| Visually impaired | | | 4 | 7.1 |
| Rated as having low vision | | | 7 | 12.5 |
| Blind | | | 7 | 12.5 |
| Don't know / not sure | | | 13 | 23.2 |
| No answer | | | 25 | 44.6 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 | 56 | 100.0 |

Age

Respondents were presented with broad age ranges and they fell into two fairly clear bands which we have used for analysis.

| Age bracket | Freq | % |
|----------------------|------------|--------------|
| 44 years and younger | 48 | 29.4 |
| 45 years and older | 111 | 68.1 |
| No answer | 4 | 2.5 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Gender

There was a fairly even distribution of males and females who offered feedback.

| Gender | Freq | % |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Male | 78 | 47.9 |
| Female | 83 | 50.9 |
| No answer | 2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Location

Respondents were asked to indicate where they lived. For analysis purposes, locations with smaller numbers were grouped together.

| Residence | Freq | % |
|-----------------|------|------|
| New South Wales | 59 | 29.4 |
| Victoria | 45 | 27.6 |

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| | | |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Queensland | 24 | 14.7 |
| Rest of Australia (SA,WA,TAS,ACT,NT) | 31 | 19.0 |
| No answer | 4 | 2.5 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Hours of viewing

Respondents were asked how many hours they used or viewed TV with the AD service turned on within the last seven days. Their answers are displayed in the table below

| AD use in last 7 days | Freq | % |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| Less than 1 hour | 17 | 10.4 |
| 1-3 hours | 56 | 34.4 |
| 4-10 hours | 62 | 38.0 |
| More than 10 hours | 23 | 14.1 |
| No answer | 5 | 3.1 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic differences on AD viewing hours

Hours of AD viewing / use was cross tabulated with four demographics: level of impairment, age, gender and location. The only statistically significant difference in terms of hours of viewing was for the 4-10 hour viewing bracket. Older people (45 and older) are significantly more likely (44.3%) to watch for this length of time compared with younger people (less than 45) where only 25% of them watched for 4-10 hours. All other comparisons had statistically similar results.

Brand of set top box or digital television

Respondents were asked what sort of set top box or digitally integrated television they were using with the AD service. The answers provided for the *other* option were recoded where possible into the options provided. Samsung, Bush and Sony were the most popular brands. Refer to the table on the following page. Note that the Bush brand is offered by visually impaired associations and that this brand was provided through the *other* answer option.

| Brand | Freq | % |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Samsung | 46 | 28.2 |
| Bush | 31 | 19.0 |
| Sony | 28 | 17.2 |
| Panasonic | 20 | 12.3 |
| Other | 16 | 9.8 |
| Hills | 10 | 6.1 |
| LG | 3 | 1.8 |
| Sharp | 2 | 1.2 |
| Bauhn | 2 | 1.2 |
| Sanyo | 2 | 1.2 |
| No answer | 2 | 1.2 |
| Grundig | 1 | .6 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic differences on brand of set top box / digital TV

- Male respondents were significantly more likely to use Samsung products than female respondents, (37.7% and 20.5% respectively).
- Blind respondents were significantly more likely to use a Bush set top box (39.3% of blind respondents) than any other brand, most probably because the Bush Australia company in conjunction with Vision Australia designed a set top box for the visually impaired.
- Visually impaired respondents were significantly more likely (32.1%) to use a Panasonic product than low vision users (6.8%).

Ease of set up

Respondents were asked how easy it was to set up the AD service on their set top box / TV and a majority indicated that it was *very easy*. However from the following open-ended question which asked what could have made set up easier, it is clear that the service turned on automatically for most users – a plus for those who wanted it and a negative for those who didn't want it.

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| Ease of set up | Freq | % |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Very easy | 87 | 53.4 |
| Easy | 38 | 23.3 |
| A little difficult | 24 | 14.7 |
| Very difficult | 10 | 6.1 |
| No answer | 4 | 2.5 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic difference on ease of service set up

Significantly more respondents with low vision (37.9%) found it easy to set up compared with blind respondents (13.6%).

Unexpected effects

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they experienced any unexpected effects on their TV or viewing once the AD service was activated. Just over 77% reported *no unexpected effects* on their viewing – a positive result.

| Level of effect | Freq | % |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------|
| No unexpected effects | 126 | 77.3 |
| Minor unexpected effects | 5 | 3.1 |
| Major unexpected effects | 11 | 6.7 |
| Don't know / not sure | 20 | 12.3 |
| No answer | 1 | .6 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Respondents were provided the opportunity to detail the unexpected effects, if they experienced any. Of the 16 respondents who provided a comment, only 11 valid comments were offered (valid in the sense that they answered the question asked). The valid comments indicated that users were able to receive the AD track but not a normal audio track, and that volumes differed between the normal audio track and the AD track which made it hard to listen to a program.

Viewing experience

Respondents were asked to indicate what the AD service added to their viewing experience. The response is quite split between making a considerable improvement and making minimal or no improvement to the viewing experience.

| Difference to viewing experience | Freq | % |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Greatly enhanced what I was watching | 43 | 26.4 |
| Made some improvement | 6 | 3.7 |
| Made minimal improvement | 70 | 42.9 |
| Made no improvement | 16 | 9.8 |
| Made viewing worse | 13 | 8.0 |
| Varied depending on the TV program | 13 | 8.0 |
| No answer | 2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic difference on ease of service set up

Not surprisingly, the only statistical difference for affect on viewing experience was around level of visual impairment. Blind users were significantly more likely to have a greatly enhanced viewing experience (95.5%) compared with all other levels of visual impairment (45.6%).

Finding out about the AD service

Respondents were given the opportunity to select the most memorable way in which they found out about the AD service. Most commonly, the source of information was an organisation or association that they belonged to, followed by the ABC.

| Source of information | Freq | % |
|---|------------|--------------|
| From an organisation or association I belong to | 70 | 42.9 |
| From the ABC | 43 | 26.4 |
| From the internet | 16 | 9.8 |
| Somewhere else | 13 | 8.0 |
| From a friend or family member | 6 | 3.7 |
| Don't know or remember | 13 | 8.0 |
| No answer | 2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic differences on sources of information

- Significantly more respondents in the 44 years or younger group found out about the service from the internet compared with the 45 years and older group (19.1% and 6.3% respectively).

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- Significantly more male respondents found out about the service from the ABC compared with female respondents (36.4% and 17.1% respectively).
- Blind respondents were significantly more likely to have found out about the service from an organisation or association they belonged to (77.9%) compared with all other levels of visual impairment (30.3%).
- Respondents who were visually impaired (40.7%) or had low vision (31.0%) were significantly more likely to find out about the service from the ABC, compared with blind respondents (2.9%).

Recommending to others

Respondents were asked if they would recommend the AD service to others who were visually impaired. Over 70% of respondents indicated that they would recommend – a positive result.

| Recommend? | Freq | % |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| Yes, definitely | 105 | 64.4 |
| Yes, possibly | 10 | 6.1 |
| Mixed views | 9 | 5.5 |
| No, possibly | 6 | 3.7 |
| No, definitely | 26 | 16.0 |
| Don't know | 5 | 3.1 |
| No answer | 2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 163 | 100.0 |

Demographic differences on recommending to others

- Females were significantly more likely to *definitely recommend* the service than males (73.1% and 57.1% respectively), but females were also significantly more likely to *definitely not recommend* the service than males (23.4% and 9.7% respectively).
- Blind respondents were significantly more likely to *definitely recommend* the service (97.1%), compared with all other levels of visual impairment (51.7%).

General comments about the service

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any other feedback on the AD service and 114 people offered comments. Most commonly (63 of the 114) indicated that they liked the service or wanted it to continue while 20 commenters didn't like it, wanted to get rid of it or turn it off. Other comments were about more communication of the service or improvements to it. Below are some other comments that were difficult to code but which provide user insights.

- *The service came with CLOSED CAPTIONS. Not by choice. We find it a complete distraction. Make it so we have a choice to have it with CAPTIONS or not. CAPTIONS ARE FOR HEARING IMPAIRED. A.D. is for vision impaired. They are two separate things and need not be on with each other.*

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- *It would be good if AD is provided in a split audio system with other brands such as Samsung*
- *A user guide for the most popular makes and models. (The elderly may need some assistance with the menus).*
- *I cannot say, as I cannot access it via Foxtel. I think the concept is really good as a service, but I cannot access it currently, due to poor TV reception and that it doesn't work via Foxtel.*
- *I thought it was part of the show, the flat deadpan commentary was a hilarious augmentation of the lowdown script. Although on watching a documentary I initially thought I was hearing the worst narration in history until I realised that it was the AD service.*
- *I would like to have the ending of a documentary where there is script also have audio description, for example, at the end of Australian Story, or have foreign languages audio described and not just captioned within a documentary, such as Foreign Correspondent. Some of the programs produced in the UK have the names of the cast as well the characters they play audio described. This feature is really useful. Could you please ensure that this feature is included if the credits allow this to happen, time wise, to have all programs include this feature.*

I am really going to miss the audio description service. Please bring it back as soon as technically possible. Thank you ABC for making my television experience so more meaningful and enjoyable.
- *It would be better if the volume of the programme is not lowered when the AD is inserted. Some times when the AD is finished and the programme sound level is adjusted back to normal a word or part word is chopped.*
- *It would be good if there were two levels of description. The person I am answering for cannot read any more but can see enough to follow the action. Just reading out any signs, captions, translations etc would be great. Having every action read out distracts her.*
- *No sound audible from the programme, only the AD track.*
- *Not working as no sound. The program is not viewable.*

Non-intended user feedback

From the web survey and telephone messages left on the 1800 number, a total of 146 people indicated that the service had turned on automatically for them and that they did not want to be users / receivers of the AD service. Some were extremely frustrated about this situation. We understand that the ABC also directly received complaints about the service happening without viewers requesting it.

The most common question / complaint (n=84) of non-intended users within this study was about how to turn off the service. In a similar vein 31 people said that they did not like it or that the ABC should get rid of the service. Below are some other comments that did not fit into either of these categories and which offer some insights into non-intended users' experiences. The verbatim comments have been edited slightly to correct spelling and grammar. Some comments were self-completed (web survey) and some have come from telephone interviewers. All telephone callers were given the ABC general complaints number.

The first comment below probably sums up the non-intended user situation. The last comment indicates the degree of frustration (and wittiness) of some viewers.

- *Trial technically how such a product is landed next time.*

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- *Interesting survey. I am not visually impaired nor is anyone in our home. The audio description just arrived with no activity on my part. Your survey assumes that I turned it on. My Sony TV just did it. As a by product of your survey I would appreciate TV producers doing something about background music/noise. Like many men I have difficulty breaking out voices from the background and I find it more and more difficult to hear speech*
- *Caller said that he is having some issues with the audio. Said that he has to keep changing his settings when going from ABC 1 to the other ABC channels.*
- *Caller said he has a next wave set top box and it's playing up. They are getting no audio when recording on ABC1. OPERATOR: Gave her the ABC General Complaints number. CALLER: Said that she did speak with someone from the ABC and they said that there was nothing they could do for her because she had a next wave set top box.*
- *Caller has a next wave recorder and said that she will have this issue with the description for the next 3 months because of the trial. Said that her programs play but there is no audio. There was a narrator but the actual sound was not working. She is also unable to record anything on ABC 1.*
- *Caller said that she is blind and that she would really like it if someone would read out the captions at the end of TV programs. OPERATOR: I asked Elsa if she was using the audio description. Elsa had not heard of it before. I let her know what it was and how it would benefit her. Elsa was very interested in turning it on. I gave her the ABC General Complaints number in case her family members had difficulty setting it up.*
- *Jim said that he has no sound whatsoever at times on ABC. Said that he keeps having to re-setup the audio for it to come through. At times this happens half way through watching a program. Isn't sure why though. Said that he doesn't need the audio description on and would also like that off permanently.*
- *Caller said that her husband has a hearing impairment and he finds it very irritating trying to read the captions and having the voice over at the same time. Says it's very conflicting. Did say that it's definitely beneficial for people who have sight issues, but they don't need the feature on.*
- *Caller said that the description was incorrect sometimes which was more frustrating than the actual description itself. Said that he wasn't blind and that he has already called the number left on the voicemail for the ABC general complaints line. He has turned off the description already. Thanked me for calling back though.*
- *Man turns TV on one evening, finds that usual viewing is now mysteriously being commented on by a disembodied straight-jacketed schoolteacher. Man tries to switch off ridiculous and unwanted commentary by furrowing brows at remote control. Man consults manual, in vain. Man wonders whether he is dreaming, insane, Friday bloated or newly schizophrenic. Man tries flipping through other channels and discovers no disembodied schoolteachers. Man returns to ABC. Man endures. Man gives up and switches off. A day passes. Rain blesses Hobart. Man tunes into another favourite show and finds it being occupied once again by a say-the-obvious martinet. Man howls like a primitive beast heading for extinction. Man wonders whether there are worse swear words than f*** to put in comment to ABC. F*** f*** f***.*

Conclusions

Below are some conclusions ASR has drawn from this study.

- Intended users, particularly blind ABC audience members, greatly appreciate the AD service. Interest declines as the level of visual impairment declines.
- Associations representing the visually impaired are key sources of messages about this service.
- When the service occurs by default it causes considerable viewer frustration. Turning it off needs as much promotion / information as turning it on and this information needs to be simple to access.
- There are some technical improvements which may need addressing, particularly around sound levels and captioning.

Appendix 4 - Copyright Issues

Ownership of content in audio-described programs

An unresolved aspect arose during the commissioning of audio described content for television programs, namely the ownership of the audio described work in relation to the television program. Under the ABC's contractual process, audio-description rights are not currently included within its commissioning and acquisitions contracts.

This meant that the ABC was commissioning audio description commentary to accompany copyrighted works without the editorial sign-off by the copyright holder. Currently an exemption exists in relation to the provision of captioning on television services

The ABC did not receive any complaints from program owners whose work had been commissioned to be accompanied by audio description. However, it is expected that producers will seek to have influence and right of approval over the audio description script commissioned by the broadcaster.

Conversely for broadcasters who generate a large volume of original works, such as the BBC, that are also audio described, this could prove to be financially advantageous in terms of overseas sales of their programs.

Appendix 6 – Testing schedule for broadcast of AD content

| Date | Program | ABC 1 Test Market/s | Results |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 12.30 pm Thursday 14 June 2012 | The Casebook of Sherlock Homes | Darwin | <p>The first test was conducted to test the theory and configurations through the entire workflow.</p> <p>Darwin was selected as it contained the least amount of viewers to be potentially affected. The test program was played via a live ployout into the Darwin market.</p> <p>The transmission was successful and provided the first example of an AD mixed program.</p> <p>Arising from the test, the ABC identified that further work would be required on the audio mix. The test also provided the first example of “real world” irregularities with set top boxes.</p> |
| 12.30pm Thursday 21 June 2012 | The Casebook of Sherlock Homes | Darwin and Northern Territory | This test was designed to run the audio-description through the 30 minute delays for Darwin and the NT to prove the delayed states could carry the AD signal. |
| 12.30 pm Thursday 28 June 2012 | The Casebook of Sherlock Homes | Darwin and Northern Territory, Hobart and Tasmania | The test was expanded into Tasmania to test in a completely digital television market. |
| 12.30pm Thursday 5 July 2012 | The Casebook of Sherlock Homes | Sydney and NSW, Darwin and NT, Hobart and Tasmania | SNSW was identified as a digital only signal and Sydney as a major test bed. |
| 12.30 pm | The Casebook of | All 15 | Completing the rollout of the |

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| | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Thursday 12 July 2012 | Sherlock Homes | Television Markets | headend configuration all markets on ABC1 were tested for AD. Profile changes were communicated to MasterControl for implementation. |
| 12.30 pm Thursday 19 July 2012 | The Casebook of Sherlock Homes | All 15 Television Markets | Software upgrades for other areas of the television broadcast workflow (ie, separate to the Trial) had been made but did not allow for the audio-description testing configuration. As such the trial failed in Vic, Tas, Qld and SA. It was agreed at this point Operational checks post engineering works would cover audio-description and the headend profiles would not be adjusted without authorisation. |
| 12.30 pm Thursday 26 July 2012 | The Memoirs of Sherlock Homes | All 15 Television Markets | Continued testing and further training of MCR Operators to adjust the headend configurations. |
| 21.30 Friday 27 July 2012 | Taggart | All 15 Television Markets | Prime time testing to gauge the impact on a wider audience. |
| 20.30pm Tuesday 31 July 2012 | Three Men Go to Scotland | All 15 Television Markets | The AD profile was turned on permanently from this point as media coverage and impacts were being more closely monitored. It also provided a full week prior to the formal commencement of the trial to identify any outstanding broadcast issues. |
| 20.30 Wednesday 1 August 2012 | Monty Don's Italian Garden | All 15 Markets | Continued testing to monitor workflows and consumer effects. |
| 14.00 Thursday 2 | Monty Don's Italian Garden | All 15 Markets | Continued testing to monitor workflows and consumer effects |

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| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| August 2012 | | | |
| 12.30 pm Thursday 2 August 2012 | The Memoirs of Sherlock Homes | All 15 Markets | Continued testing to monitor workflows and consumer effects |
| 14.12pm Friday 3 August 2012 | Marchlands | All 15 Markets | Continued testing to monitor workflows and consumer effects |
| 21.32pm Friday 3 August 2012 | Taggart | All 15 Markets | Continued testing to monitor workflows and consumer effects |

Appendix 7

The following table contains the list of programs broadcast on ABC1 during the AD Trial. Titles highlighted indicate the AD track was created locally.

| Date broadcast | | Program with AD |
|-----------------------|-----|--|
| 05/08/12 | Sun | Natures' Great Events |
| 05/08/12 | Sun | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 05/08/12 | Sun | Birdsong |
| 05/08/12 | Sun | Inspector George Gently |
| 06/08/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 06/08/12 | Mon | Grand Designs |
| 07/08/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 07/08/12 | Tue | Three Men Go To Scotland |
| 08/08/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 09/08/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 09/08/12 | Thu | Monty Don's Italian Gardens |
| 09/08/12 | Thu | Midsomer Murders |
| 10/08/12 | Fri | Marchlands |
| 10/08/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 10/08/12 | Fri | Grand Designs |
| 10/08/12 | Fri | Silent Witness |
| 10/08/12 | Fri | Taggart |
| 11/08/12 | Sat | Kidnap and Ransom |
| 11/08/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 12/08/12 | Sun | Natures' Great Events |
| 12/08/12 | Sun | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 12/08/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 12/08/12 | Sun | Inspector George Gently |
| 13/08/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 13/08/12 | Mon | Grand Designs |
| 14/08/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 14/08/12 | Tue | Three Men Go To Venice |
| 14/08/12 | Tue | Inland Heart: The Photography Of Jeff Carter |
| 15/08/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 16/08/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 16/08/12 | Thu | Monty Don's Italian Gardens |
| 16/08/12 | Thu | Midsomer Murders |
| 17/08/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 17/08/12 | Fri | Grand Designs |
| 17/08/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 17/08/12 | Fri | Taggart |

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| | | |
|----------|-----|-------------------------------|
| 18/08/12 | Sat | Agatha Christie's Poirot |
| 18/08/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 19/08/12 | Sun | Natures' Great Events |
| 19/08/12 | Sun | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 19/08/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 19/08/12 | Sun | Inspector George Gently |
| 20/08/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 20/08/12 | Mon | Grand Designs |
| 21/08/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 21/08/12 | Tue | Three Men Go To Venice |
| 22/08/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 23/08/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 23/08/12 | Thu | Monty Don's Italian Gardens |
| 23/08/12 | Thu | Midsomer Murders |
| 24/08/12 | Fri | Marchlands |
| 24/08/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 24/08/12 | Fri | Grand Designs |
| 24/08/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 24/08/12 | Fri | Taggart |
| 25/08/12 | Sat | Agatha Christie's Poirot |
| 26/08/12 | Sun | Natures' Great Events |
| 26/08/12 | Sun | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 26/08/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 26/08/12 | Sun | Inspector George Gently |
| 27/08/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 28/08/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 28/08/12 | Tue | Three Men Go To New England |
| 29/08/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 30/08/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 30/08/12 | Thu | Midsomer Murders |
| 31/08/12 | Fri | Marchlands |
| 31/08/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 31/08/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 31/08/12 | Fri | Taggart |
| 31/08/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 01/09/12 | Sat | Agatha Christie's Poirot |
| 02/09/12 | Sun | Last Chance To See |
| 02/09/12 | Sun | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 02/09/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 02/09/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 02/09/12 | Sun | Tess Of The D'Urbervilles |
| 03/09/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 04/09/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 04/09/12 | Tue | Three Men Go To New England |
| 05/09/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

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| 06/09/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 06/09/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 06/09/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 07/09/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 07/09/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 07/09/12 | Fri | Taggart |
| 07/09/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 08/09/12 | Sat | Doctor Who |
| 08/09/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 08/09/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 09/09/12 | Sun | Last Chance To See |
| 09/09/12 | Sun | Kevin's Grand Design |
| 09/09/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 09/09/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 09/09/12 | Sun | Tess Of The D'Urbervilles |
| 10/09/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 11/09/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 12/09/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 13/09/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 13/09/12 | Thu | River's With Griff Rhys-Jones |
| 13/09/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 13/09/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 13/09/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 14/09/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 14/09/12 | Fri | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 14/09/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 14/09/12 | Fri | Taggart |
| 14/09/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 15/09/12 | Sat | Doctor Who |
| 15/09/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 15/09/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 16/09/12 | Sun | Kevin's Grand Design |
| 16/09/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 16/09/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 16/09/12 | Sun | Tess Of The D'Urbervilles |
| 17/09/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 17/09/12 | Mon | Collision |
| 18/09/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 18/09/12 | Tue | Rick Stein's Spain |
| 19/09/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 20/09/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 20/09/12 | Thu | River's With Griff Rhys-Jones |
| 20/09/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 20/09/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 20/09/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

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| 21/09/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 21/09/12 | Fri | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 21/09/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 21/09/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 21/09/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 22/09/12 | Sat | Doctor Who |
| 22/09/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 22/09/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 23/09/12 | Sun | Great Southern Land |
| 23/09/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 23/09/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 23/09/12 | Sun | Tess Of The D'Urbervilles |
| 24/09/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 24/09/12 | Mon | Collision |
| 25/09/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 25/09/12 | Tue | Rick Stein's Spain |
| 26/09/12 | Wed | As Time Goes By |
| 27/09/12 | Thu | As Time Goes By |
| 27/09/12 | Thu | River's With Griff Rhys-Jones |
| 27/09/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 27/09/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 27/09/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | As Time Goes By |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | Grand Designs Revisited |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | Miranda |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 28/09/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 29/09/12 | Sat | Doctor Who |
| 29/09/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 29/09/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 30/09/12 | Sun | Great Southern Land |
| 30/09/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 30/09/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Miss Marple |
| 30/09/12 | Sun | Single-Handed |
| 01/10/12 | Mon | As Time Goes By |
| 01/10/12 | Mon | Collision |
| 02/10/12 | Tue | As Time Goes By |
| 02/10/12 | Tue | Rick Stein's Spain |
| 04/10/12 | Thu | River's With Griff Rhys-Jones |
| 04/10/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 04/10/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 04/10/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 05/10/12 | Fri | Grand Designs |
| 05/10/12 | Fri | Miranda |

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

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| 05/10/12 | Fri | Scott and Bailey |
| 05/10/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 05/10/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 06/10/12 | Sat | Doctor Who |
| 06/10/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 06/10/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 07/10/12 | Sun | Auction Room |
| 07/10/12 | Sun | Great Southern Land |
| 07/10/12 | Sun | Call The Midwife |
| 07/10/12 | Sun | Agatha Christie's Poirot |
| 07/10/12 | Sun | Single-Handed |
| 08/10/12 | Mon | Collision |
| 09/10/12 | Tue | Rick Stein's Spain |
| 11/10/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 11/10/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 11/10/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 12/10/12 | Fri | Grand Designs |
| 12/10/12 | Fri | Miranda |
| 12/10/12 | Fri | New Tricks |
| 12/10/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 13/10/12 | Sat | Doc Martin |
| 13/10/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 13/10/12 | Sat | Hustle |
| 14/10/12 | Sun | Auction Room |
| 14/10/12 | Sun | Great Southern Land |
| 14/10/12 | Sun | Jack Irish |
| 14/10/12 | Sun | The Slap |
| 14/10/12 | Sun | Single-Handed |
| 15/10/12 | Mon | Collision |
| 16/10/12 | Tue | Life At 7 |
| 17/10/12 | Wed | Last Of The Summer Wine |
| 18/10/12 | Thu | Last Of The Summer Wine |
| 18/10/12 | Thu | Greatest Cities Of The World |
| 18/10/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 18/10/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 18/10/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 19/10/12 | Fri | Last Of The Summer Wine |
| 19/10/12 | Fri | Miranda |
| 19/10/12 | Fri | New Tricks |
| 19/10/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 19/10/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 20/10/12 | Sat | Last Of The Summer Wine |
| 20/10/12 | Sat | Doc Martin |
| 20/10/12 | Sat | Kingdom |
| 20/10/12 | Sat | Sinbad |

ABC Report on Audio Description Trial

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| 21/10/12 | Sun | Last Of The Summer Wine |
| 21/10/12 | Sun | Auction Room |
| 21/10/12 | Sun | Kingdom Of Plants with David Attenborough |
| 21/10/12 | Sun | Jack Irish |
| 21/10/12 | Sun | The Slap |
| 21/10/12 | Sun | Strike Back |
| 23/10/12 | Tue | Life At 7 |
| 25/10/12 | Thu | Greatest Cities Of The World |
| 25/10/12 | Thu | Rake |
| 25/10/12 | Thu | Lowdown |
| 25/10/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 26/10/12 | Fri | Miranda |
| 26/10/12 | Fri | New Tricks |
| 26/10/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 26/10/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 27/10/12 | Sat | Doc Martin |
| 27/10/12 | Sat | Kingdom |
| 27/10/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 28/10/12 | Sun | Auction Room |
| 28/10/12 | Sun | Kingdom Of Plants with David Attenborough |
| 28/10/12 | Sun | The Mystery Of A Handsome Cab |
| 28/10/12 | Sun | The Slap |
| 28/10/12 | Sun | Strike Back |
| 30/10/12 | Tue | Chateau Chunder |
| 01/11/12 | Thu | Greatest Cities Of The World |
| 01/11/12 | Thu | Summer Heights High |
| 02/11/12 | Fri | Miranda |
| 02/11/12 | Fri | New Tricks |
| 02/11/12 | Fri | Waking The Dead |
| 02/11/12 | Fri | My Family |
| 03/11/12 | Sat | Doc Martin |
| 03/11/12 | Sat | Kingdom |
| 03/11/12 | Sat | Sinbad |
| 04/11/12 | Sun | Auction Room |
| 04/11/12 | Sun | Kingdom Of Plants with David Attenborough |
| 04/11/12 | Sun | Desperate Remedy |