



February 8, 2019

One of the most frustrating developments of the past few years has been that “facts” and “truth” have rapidly been becoming slippery concepts in public discourse. In an effort to sway public opinion, facts are frequently reinterpreted, obscured, or misrepresented to bolster a particular point of view. The long-term consequence is that without a common set of agreed-upon facts, it is almost impossible to intelligently debate a subject and arrive at workable conclusions and compromises.

It was always our belief that our little corner of the world – providing services to make content accessible for all users – was occupied by adults, and had not fallen victim to the “disinformation” buffeting the rest of our society. Given this backdrop, it is with great disappointment and dismay that we read the recent posts on 3Play Media’s website touting a comparison between their offering and ours. We have no desire to join the fray in mudslinging or make claims about their service. We are sure they are a fine captioning company.

However, we do wish to correct the record about the claims they make regarding our service. First and foremost, we must address their claim that the accuracy rate of our service is between 93.5% and 95%. To construct these claims, it appears they ran a small incognito test of our service. We were able to locate the test submissions they made, and we measured accuracy on them to check their statements. For the majority of the videos they submitted, we measured the accuracy to be above 99%. Our accuracy dropped slightly for the couple videos with heavily accented speech and technical content, but we would note that they used videos with very poor intelligibility and made no attempt to follow our recommended practices for ensuring high quality captioning. There are far too many inaccuracies in 3Play’s comparison to address here; if you are interested in [a more detailed correction of the record, we invite you to visit the page we have created for this purpose](#).

Accuracy is indeed very important, and [our own research has shown that error rates of 5% would yield a completely unreadable transcript](#). AST has been providing captioning services for 15 years, and over that time we have captioned tens of thousands of hours of video for national libraries, government agencies, top-tier universities, and publishers. If we were really producing captions with 5%+ error rates, we would not have been able to earn and maintain the business of these satisfied clients for so many years.

As much as we work hard to ensure we put out a good quality product, we are not narcissistic enough to believe we are the only folks capable of doing this job. There are hundreds of captioning companies, and many of them feel the same obligation we do to produce quality work for their community. 3Play’s claim that they are the only company that can provide compliant captions is clearly not true.

Having to answer to investors puts pressure on companies to show constantly increasing sales and profits, and we have seen several recent instances in the news of tech companies falling into the trap of disseminating false information or following questionable ethics practices to further those goals. AST comes from a very different lineage: we have no external investors, no

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venture capital, and no quarterly statements to issue. We were originally funded by the US Department of Education's SBIR program, a public-private partnership program that seeks to commercialize innovative research and bring it to bear on an area of public need. We take those goals seriously, and we try hard to be mindful of both the community in which we operate and the public need we are servicing as we operate our company. In our view, misleading you or spreading disinformation has no place in that ethos.

We have never offered a public response to competitor's claims before; we are taking this step because we think folks should take a stance against the misinformation and "alternative facts" that are undermining civil discourse in our society as a whole. AST remains dedicated to accuracy, both in our video accessibility services, and in the claims made about our work. Quality of workmanship is absolutely critical in your decision when choosing an accessibility vendor, but the quality and ethics of the company should be as well.

Kevin Erler, Ph.D., Founder and Partner  
Brent Robertson, Founder and Partner  
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