

ROI Analysis of Transcription & Captioning



Overview

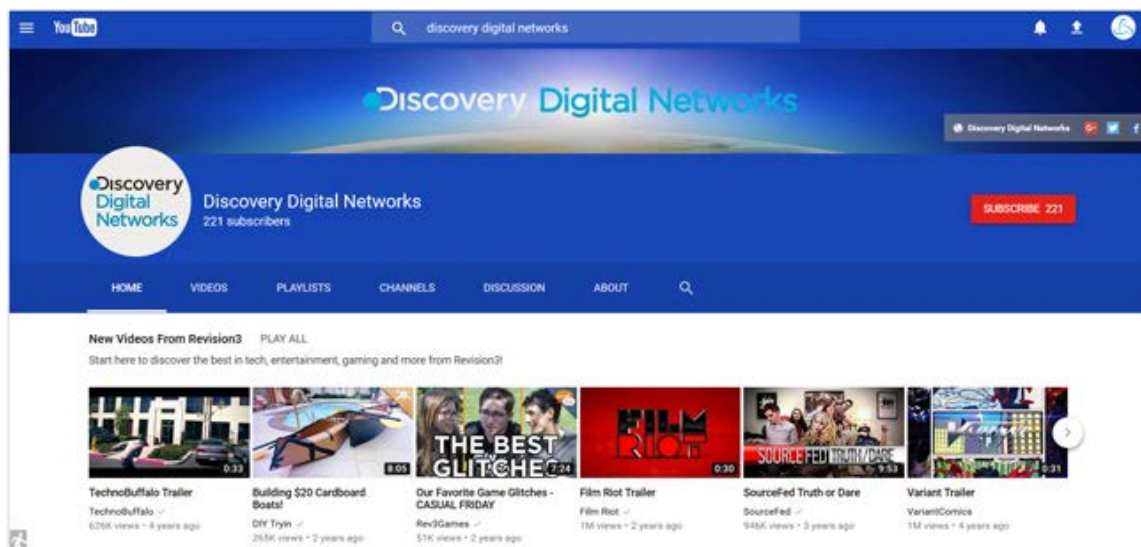
Are you making the most of your audio and video content?

Well, transcribing and captioning them is one simple way to optimize them for search traffic.

Search engine optimization (SEO) studies conducted by Discovery Digital Networks, SafeNet, and This American Life reveal transcripts and captions to have a positive impact on search traffic, page views, search rank, and engagement. These studies examine the effects of transcribing audio content, transcribing videos, and adding closed captions to YouTube videos.

Let's explore these study results and calculate an inferred ROI of transcribing and captioning your own content for SEO.

Discovery Digital Networks: SEO Study of YouTube Captioning



Discovery Digital Networks (DDN) produces original video programming for passionate audiences via the original video networks Revision3, TestTube, Animalist, SourceFed, and The DeFranco Network. Discovery Digital Networks is part of Discovery Communications, the world's leading non-fiction media company.

In September, 2013, Discovery Digital Networks decided to try adding closed captions to their YouTube videos, but they wanted to quantify the value of doing so.

Using [3Play Media's captioning and transcription services](#), Discovery Digital Networks conducted a controlled study on the effects of adding closed captions to YouTube videos.

Video SEO Experiment Methodology

Through 3Play Media, Discovery Digital Networks transcribed 125 of 334 videos published between January, 2013 and April, 2014. The transcribed videos were published across 8 of their channels, including DNews, What's the Big Deal?, and Tekzilla.

Data was collected corresponding to the date that captions were turned on for each individual video and was analyzed on a day-by-day basis. This process normalized the difference in views between recently published videos and videos that were published prior to being captioned; it also normalized the effects of viral videos on the data.

Discovery Digital Networks controlled the experiment by measuring the data obtained from the 125 transcribed videos against the remaining 209 uncaptioned videos.

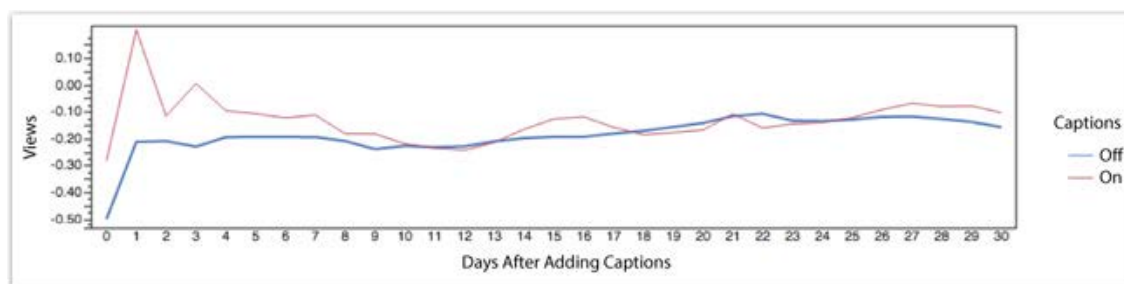
Adding Captions to YouTube Videos Increases Views Significantly

	14 Days After Adding Captions	All Time
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Increase in YouTube Views	13.48%	7.32%
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Discovery Digital Networks found an **overall increase of 7.32% in views for captioned videos**, a statistic that they were very pleased with.

They also found that the greatest gains in views were seen during the first 14 days after adding captions, with a 13.48% increase. They established no significant impact on shares and other engagement metrics.



Closed Captions Are Indexed by YouTube Search

Discovery Digital Networks wanted to be certain that the closed caption files were being indexed by YouTube's search engine.

To test this, they searched for a phrase that appeared in the transcript of the video, but not in the video title, description, or tags.

The example below shows that their captioned video ranked 4th on YouTube for the query, proving that YouTube indexes closed captions and factors them into search rank.

Search term: "transcience Dylan Thomas"

Search term does not appear in tags

Existential Bummer x shots of awe x jason silva x

awareness x uniwue x discovery x digital network x

ernest becker x freud x rlike x raine x

impermanent x decay x end x beautiful x life x

disappear x testtube x technology x human existence x

science x society x inspirational quotes x inspiration x

inspirational journey x the hero's journey x brain games x

national geographic x depression x sadness x loss x

happiness x jason silva brain games x love x

what is love x how to fall in love x

transcience dylan thomas

About 157,000 results

Do not go gentle into that good night: Dylan Thomas Season - BBC Cymru Wales
by BBC · 2 months ago · 15,891 views
Programme website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dylanthomas> Welsh stars of stage and screen get together to perform Dylan Thomas' ...
HD

Dylan Thomas: crafting the words - A Post in New York - BBC Two
by BBC · 2 weeks ago · 522 views
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dylanthomas> His work sounded effortless but Dylan Thomas was a serious and diligent craftsman at work.
HD

Igor Stravinsky - In memoriam Dylan Thomas (1954)
by Epogdous · 3 years ago · 18,537 views
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) in memoriam Dylan Thomas (1954) Alexander Young, tenor Columbia Chamber Ensemble Igor ...
HD

Existential Bummer
by Shots of Awe · 8 months ago · 2,486,488 views
More on HuffPost Good News: ...
HD CC

Discovery Digital Networks Adds Captions to All Its YouTube Channels

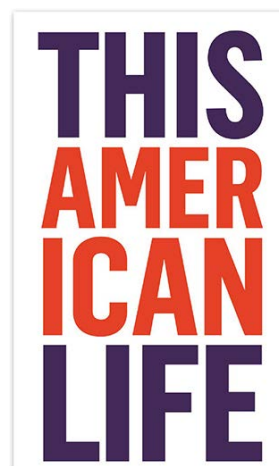
Based on the results of this study, Discovery Digital Networks decided to roll out captioning for the rest of their video content. They were very pleased with the demonstrated increase in views, and believed that the projected gains would be profitable for their channels.

Discovery Digital Networks' study shows that adding closed captions to YouTube videos can have a dramatic immediate impact on views, and by extension, ad revenue.

How Audio Transcripts Helped This American Life Boost SEO

Now that video closed captioning has proven its value, let's look at transcription: does adding audio or video transcripts to your website increase traffic?

To answer that, let's examine an SEO study performed by This American Life.



This American Life (TAL) is a weekly public radio show broadcast on more than 500 stations to about 2.1 million listeners. It is also one of the most popular podcasts, with about one million people downloading each week. The first episode aired on November 17, 1995 and there have been 600 one-hour episodes produced. TAL also maintains a very popular website that provides free streaming of all shows, as well as commentary and ancillary information.

Audio Transcription Goals

In April, 2011 TAL embarked on a project to transcribe their entire audio archive and make transcripts freely available to website visitors. The goals were to:

- ▶ Increase inbound traffic from organic search
- ▶ Increase number of inbound links
- ▶ Engage users and create a better user experience by providing alternate ways to consume the content
- ▶ Make content accessible to people with hearing disabilities
- ▶ Make it easier to pull quotes and reference a section of the audio

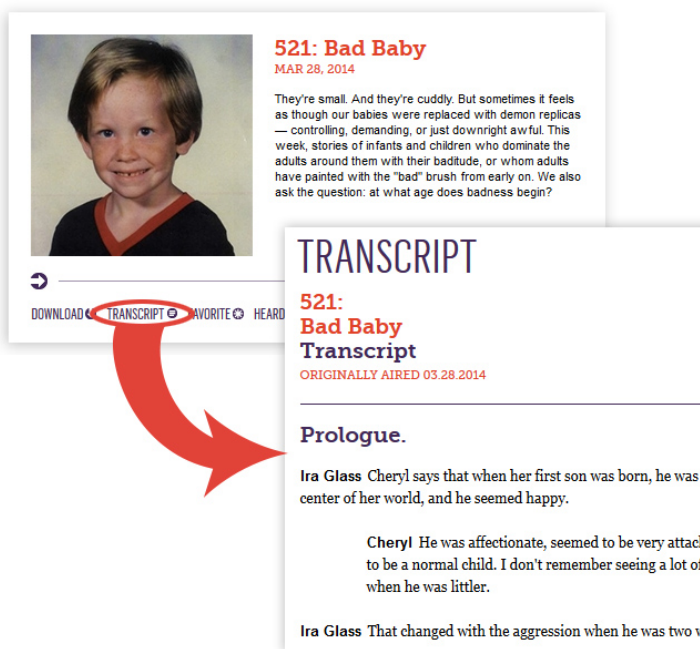
While TAL values the benefits of transcripts, they emphasize that transcripts are not a substitute for audio. As stated on their website, "This American Life is produced for the ear and designed to be heard, not read. We strongly encourage you to listen to the audio, which includes emotion and emphasis that's not on the page."

About This SEO Study

This study aims to evaluate and quantify the SEO benefits of adding audio transcripts to a public website of a radio program.

Website data was collected over a 36-month period from April 2011 to March 2014. However, the results of this report are based on the 27-month period from January 2012 to March 2014 (the first several months were excluded to account for transcription processing and for the SEO effects of transcription to propagate).

During this period, the TAL website had about 16 million unique visitors and 111 million page views. Google Analytics was used to obtain the data.



Website Basics

The TAL website has a Google Page Rank of 8 and an Alexa Rank of 20,000. It gets about 850,000 unique visitors per month and about two-thirds of the visits are by returning visitors.

On average, a visitor stays on the site for about 7 minutes and views 2.5 pages. 97% of visitors know English is their primary language.

How Transcripts Are Published

TAL began transcribing their radio archives in April, 2011 and completed the entire backlog by October, 2011.

Since that time, transcripts have been posted within 24 hours after a program airs. Each transcript is published on a separate web page that is linked to the main episode page.

Increased User Engagement

In order to assess the impact on user engagement we looked at the proportion of unique visitors who viewed a transcript. The result is that 7.23% of all unique visitors viewed at least one transcript.

	All Traffic	Viewed Transcript	% of All
Unique Visitors	15,824,728	1,143,454	7.23%

New Inbound Traffic

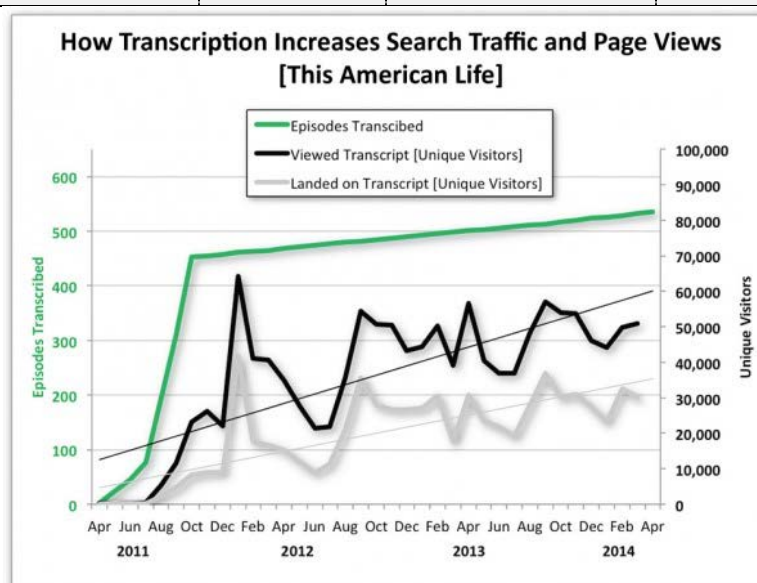
In order to assess the amount of new inbound traffic, we looked at the number of unique visitors who landed on a transcript page (i.e. the first page viewed upon entering the site). The result is that 4.18% of

all unique visitors landed on the site via a transcript page. This represents a 4.36% increase of inbound traffic attributable to transcripts.

	All Traffic	Landed on Transcript	% of All
Unique Visitors	15,824,728	661,664	4.18%

Drilling down on the new inbound traffic, more than half came from search. In fact, 6.26% of all unique visitors who came from search traffic landed on a transcript page. This represents an increase of 6.68% in search traffic attributable to transcripts.

	All Traffic	Landed on Transcript	% of All
Direct Traffic	5,425,304	147,203 (2.71%)	4.18%
Referral Traffic	5,352,829	156,592 (2.93%)	3.01%
Search Traffic	5,793,313	362,751 (6.26%)	6.68%



New Inbound Links

In order to assess new inbound links, we looked at the number of external inbound links that point specifically to transcript pages. There are 405 such links as compared to 10,826 external inbound links to all TAL pages. This represents a 3.89% increase in inbound links attributable to the transcript pages. Why would a site link to a transcript page? There are many reasons to do so. [Here is an example](#) of one of those inbound links that comes from the popular blog Althouse, which used an excerpt from a transcript.

While there is no simple way to compute the impact on authority and Page Rank, this result seems like it should provide a significant boost that helps across all search rankings.

Summary of TAL Study

By transcribing its library of radio shows, TAL increased the number of unique visitors to its website by 4.18%. The number of unique visitors who discovered TAL through organic search results increased by 6.68%, and 7.23% of website visitors engaged with the transcripts.

The results also showed that transcripts provide an effective way to increase authority through additional inbound links. In fact, 405 out of 10,826 external inbound links point to one of the transcript pages. This represents a 3.89% increase in inbound links directly attributable to the transcript pages.

In short: audio transcription does have a positive effect on search engine optimization.

SafeNet Improves Search Engine Rank with Video Transcription

Video captioning and audio transcription are proven to boost SEO. What about adding video transcripts to your website?

A study with SafeNet proves the business value of video transcription.

SafeNet is one of the top three infotech companies in the world, protecting high-value information for 25,000 customers in over 100 countries. Most high-value software, sensitive corporate information, and money transfers are protected through SafeNet.

Note: In 2014, SafeNet was acquired by Gemalto securities. This case study explores SafeNet's video SEO strategy prior to that acquisition.

SafeNet's Strategies for Video SEO

SafeNet houses hundreds of videos in multiple languages. Key functionalities of their video site include:

- A language selector so visitors can filter between 8 different languages
- An advanced search feature that allows visitors to search by topic, product, language, type of video, or keyword
- SEO-friendly video tagging, such that their topics are all core SEO keyword categories

Within this highly optimized video site, SafeNet has developed sophisticated strategies for video SEO:

- They use SEO-friendly categories and video URLs.
- Their video site is a sub-domain of their corporate domain, allowing the value of their established domain name to carry over.
- They add targeted keywords to video titles, descriptions, meta data, and summaries.
- They use transcripts of videos as a shortcut to maximize keyword usage on a video page.
- They use video sitemaps, which allow Google to see and categorize their videos better in search results.
- They strategically place videos on internal and external sites to build inbound linking value.

The SEO Impact of Video Transcription

SafeNet conducted a 3-week test to see how quickly video transcription could make an impact on SEO, and the results were very exciting.

They took one video and transcribed it through 3Play Media. Looking to improve ranking for a specific phrase, they tracked the transcribed video on Bing, Yahoo, and Google.

The targeted phrase searched for was “software licensing in virtual environments,” a core part of SafeNet’s strategy.

SafeNet’s SEO Test Results: April 2013

Keyword: *software licensing in virtual environments*

Video URL: <http://sentinelvideos.safenet-inc.com/Fekfd/virtualization-and-effective-software-licensing-in-virtual-environments/>

	Week of 4/1/13	Week of 4/14/13	Week of 4/22/13
Bing	N/A	#14	#11
Yahoo	N/A	#14	#9
Google	N/A	N/A	N/A

The first week, the video did not rank yet (unsurprisingly), but by the second week, it had jumped to #14 on both Bing and Yahoo. In just three weeks, the video ranked on page 1 of both sites.

Google tends to take a little bit longer to rank new content, so they didn’t see movement in search rank immediately.

SafeNet’s study shows that even in a short amount of time, you can make a dramatic impact on Bing and Yahoo results by incorporating transcription into your video SEO strategy.

But that’s not all.

The Staying Power of Video Transcription SEO

Three years later, we wanted to check to see how that test page ranks. SafeNet’s video library is still live (with redirection to their acquiring company’s domain), along with on-page video transcripts and multiple language options.

We tested that same page again in August, 2016, and here’s what we found:

SafeNet’s SEO Test Results: August 2016

Keyword: *software licensing in virtual environments*

Video URL: <http://sentinelvideos.safenet-inc.com/Fekfd/virtualization-and-effective-software-licensing-in-virtual-environments/>

	April 2013	August 2016
Bing	#11	#2
Yahoo	#9	#4
Google	N/A	#7

The SafeNet video page ranks *even higher than it used to!*

This proves that leveraging on-page video transcripts are a very effective long-term strategy for SEO, too.

ROI Analysis of Closed Captioning

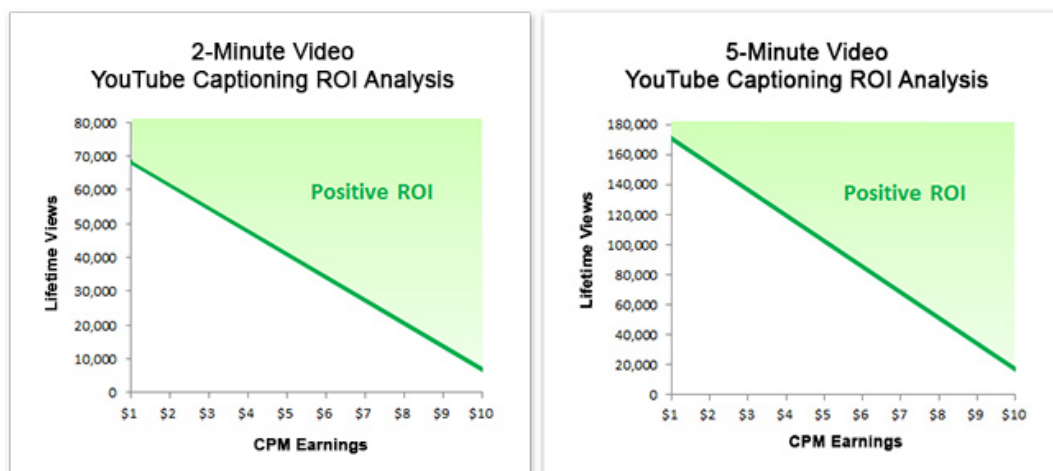
We were curious how many views it would take to make back what you spend on captioning your YouTube videos.

If we extrapolate trends from the DDN YouTube captioning study, we can calculate your projected captioning costs and earnings.

Here is how the economics play out:

The typical range of YouTube CPM earnings is between \$1 and \$10 (between \$0.001 and \$0.01 per view). If you have a 2-minute video, captioning it would cost \$5 through 3Play Media. If your CPM earnings are on the high end, you would only need about 6,800 lifetime views to reach breakeven. If your CPM earnings are on the low end, it would take about 68,000 lifetime views to get positive ROI.

With a 5-minute video, it would take 17,000-170,000 lifetime views to make back the money you spent on captioning, depending on your CPM earnings.



(Keep in mind that this estimate is based only on views, and many other factors play into video monetization, including co-publishing videos on YouTube and your own website, engagement metrics, advertising, and implementing [YouTube SEO best practices](#).)

When Does Captioning Become a Worthwhile Investment on YouTube?

Given this ROI analysis, you can determine from an economics standpoint whether or not it is worth captioning your YouTube channel.

Let's analyze two Discovery Digital Networks channels to portray the potential earnings of adding captions to your YouTube channel. Keep in mind that these are hypothetical estimates, and were not part of the Discovery Digital Networks study.

A channel like DNews, which has around 130 million views, could expect to gain about 10 million views as a result of captioning their videos (given the documented 7.32% increase).

DNews has about 1100 videos, each around 3 minutes long, so it would cost approximately \$8,250 to caption their entire channel. Using the \$1-\$10 CPM range, the 10 million views gained from captions would equate to earnings anywhere between \$10,000 and \$100,000. Subtracting the cost of captions, the ROI would be between \$1,750 and \$91,750.

A channel with around 130 million views	
Views gained from captioning	10 million views
ROI of captioning (\$1 CPM)	\$1,750
ROI of captioning (\$10 CPM)	\$91,750

A smaller Discovery Digital Networks channel, Shots of Awe, has just over 7 million views and could expect to gain over 500,000 views by captioning the whole channel. Shots of Awe has almost 50 videos, each approximately 2.5 minutes long, so captioning the whole channel would cost about \$312.50.

Using our CPM range of \$1-\$10, the 500,000 views gained from captions would equate to earnings between \$500 and \$5,000. Minus the cost of captions, their ROI would be between \$187.50 and \$4,687.50. Again, the cost of captioning would be paid back and more.

A channel with around 7 million views	
Views gained from captioning	500,000 views
ROI of captioning (\$1 CPM)	\$187.50
ROI of captioning (\$10 CPM)	\$4,687.50

Conclusion

The SEO studies conducted by Discovery Digital Networks, This American Life, and SafeNet help quantify the benefits of captioning and transcription. The documented increases in views, search traffic, user engagement, and search rank prove the positive impact of captioning on video SEO.

The Discovery Digital Networks data on percent increase in views allows us to estimate the ROI of captioning YouTube videos, which has been difficult to quantify until now.

Deciding whether or not to caption your video content depends on a number of factors; however, the positive results of these case studies are hard to ignore, and many people find that the benefits of captioning are well worth the investment.

About 3Play Media

3Play Media provides cost-effective, premium quality captioning, transcription, and translation solutions to over 2,000 customers in media and entertainment, higher education, and government. Our mission is to simplify the process by providing a user-friendly account system, flexible APIs, and integrations with a multitude of video players and platforms. 3Play Media is based in Boston, MA and has been operating since 2007.

Contact

Website – www.3playmedia.com

Email – info@3playmedia.com

Phone – (617) 764-5189