

What is **AccessAmerica** Video Remote Interpreting?

AccessAmerica-VRI enables deaf and hearing individuals who are in the same location to easily conduct conversations through a remote interpreter, video conferencing technology, and a high-speed Internet connection. **AccessAmerica-VRI** can take the place of scheduling an interpreter to be physically present on-site at your location (Dynamic). Whether it is a simple conversation between two individuals (i.e. an employee and supervisor) or a lengthy conference call with many details to work through (i.e. an in-service training), an **AccessAmerica-VRI** interpreter is invaluable when it comes to communicating your meaning clearly, quickly and cost effectively. **AccessAmerica-VRI** can provide this service to customers all over the globe. Video Remote Interpreting can be used in situations such as staff meetings, doctor visits, conferences, or training sessions. Instead of having an interpreter physically present with the deaf and hearing parties, the interpreter is located at **AccessAmerica's** offices and facilitates communication remotely, saving the cost of mileage, travel time, and fee minimums. Many businesses can utilize the teleconferencing equipment they already have on site or one of many other video conferencing solutions available. VRI interpretation may be arranged in advance, or, with a registered "User Profile", requested on-demand. **AccessAmerica-VRI** offers several fee options which will meet your specific needs.

Here is another way to put it...

Video-conferencing equipment is set up in the room where the deaf and hearing persons are located (a hospital emergency room, for example). An interpreter is located at the **AccessAmerica** facility and uses the audio function contained in the video conferencing device to hear what the hearing person says. The interpreter, who uses a Polycom videoconferencing camera and a TV will sign everything that the hearing person speaks and voice everything the deaf individual signs. In this manner, the deaf and hearing person can converse back and forth, just as if the interpreter was physically present in the same room. Upon completion of the conversation between the deaf and hearing parties, the interpreter disconnects and the company is billed according to their prearranged payment plan for the number of interpreted minutes, NOT hours. **AccessAmerica-VRI is extremely cost effective.** To summarize, **AccessAmerica-VRI** replaces the need to bring an interpreter on site by putting the interpreter on a TV screen.

A Mandate for Accessible Communication

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires that all companies providing services to the public, governmental agencies, and employers over a certain size be accessible to people with disabilities. Access to communication is one of the fundamental rights ensured by the ADA, which can be accomplished for people who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing by providing a qualified sign language interpreter. Because interpreters are in short supply, and scheduling an interpreter at your convenience creates inefficiency in time management, many requests for services have typically been unfilled. The advent of video remote interpreting allows the variable of distance to be removed from the equation, allowing interpreters to utilize their time more efficiently and to be available to customers on demand.

Technical information

Video conferencing is now a common tool used in businesses internationally, as well as, across the United States. Many companies use video conferencing to communicate between remote participants and have some type of conferencing equipment on site. Many of the systems used for video conferencing (or teleconferencing, as it is sometimes called) can also be used for VRI situations.

There are 5 basic components to a video conferencing system. You will need a camera, a display screen, a microphone and speaker of some sort, software, and access to a high speed internet connection. **AccessAmerica** uses extremely high quality [Polycom™](#) equipment to conduct VRI sessions. Often the video conferencing system used by a business, school, court system, etc. is one of the following or a combination of:

- A computer system, with a small camera mounted on the monitor (the display screen), a microphone and speakers attached to the computer, and a high-speed internet connection (DSL or cable).
- There are also cameras with built-in video conferencing software that can be attached to a phone line and a television, along with a microphone; the television speakers provide the sound output.
- You may also purchase a videophone that includes all the necessary components: a built-in screen, camera, microphone and speakers, transmission software, and a connection through phone lines (these videophones can also be used for normal phone conversations, without video).
- Available for downloading, there is software available which allows you to use your desktop or laptop PC to conduct video conferencing sessions ([Polycom PVX Software](#)). For information regarding the use of this product refer to the **AccessAmerica** document entitled "I can do it myself: Giving us a try."
- Of course **AccessAmerica** also has Polycom units it can provide at no charge to the "End User". Contact your **AccessAmerica** representative for additional information.

One basic decision to make is how you want to access the telecommunications system. The two choices at this time are via:

- the internet (IP based systems, or H.323 systems), or
- phone lines (ISDN based systems, or H.320 systems).

There are a number of products developed to connect utilizing regular phone lines. However, the speed of transmission is not really sufficient to allow for interpretation unless you are using ISDN lines. ISDN is a fast (128 kbps) digital phone service that is widely available. For adequate quality, it is recommended to have three ISDN lines bundled, which allows 384 kbps transmission rates. ISDN has proven to be less cost-effective and therefore less popular among service providers, and may eventually be supplanted by Internet-based systems, which are growing in usage.

IP based video conferencing is quickly becoming the preferred modality for video conferencing. For adequate video quality, a minimum of 384 kbps is recommended for DSL or cable modem connections. It is also important to have symmetric bandwidth, so that information is uploaded and downloaded at equally fast rates. T-1 lines provide the fastest bandwidth and highest quality connections. IP based systems allow video conferencing with remote sites without incurring long distance charges.

While you have several manufacturers of equipment available to you, we strongly recommend [Polycom™](#). They are the industry leader and can provide you with several solutions for your unique situation and budget. More importantly, they have a very strong technical support division. You can not purchase equipment directly from Polycom. Instead, you must use a Polycom "reseller" or dealer. We recommend VSGi. Michael Bernard, with VSGi, is an excellent contact regarding the acquisition of video conferencing equipment. He can be contacted at (972) 359-8707 or by email at mbernard@vsgi.com. Regardless of the equipment provider (**AccessAmerica**, etc.) the video conferencing

system you purchase **AccessAmerica** is committed to assisting you in finding a solution which best meets your needs and the needs of your Deaf or hard of hearing constituent.

Security

Security is an understandable concern for users of any IP based systems. Most firewalls do not allow video conferencing without a special configuration. Some firewalls are "video friendly," and can be set up easily to allow outgoing video calls by having the firewall inspect packets of video information to verify that they comply with corporate policies. Additional security can be provided by adding a gateway that strips addressing information from packets before transmitting them across the Internet. The most secure method of providing IP based video conferencing is to install a dedicated Internet connection to your facility which is separate from the corporate LAN (Local Area Network). This connection should be used exclusively for video conferencing. This solution, particularly when in conjunction with a third-party video conferencing manager, requires the least management from on-site IT personnel.

Best Practices

Video Remote Interpretation is a new modality in a young profession. Sign language interpreting has been a recognized profession for only forty years, but in that time has developed a strong code of ethics and professional standards. Video interpretation has only been available for the past couple of years, and there is still much research happening into issues surrounding best practices and standards. In our experience, there are some situations in which in-person (also known as "Dynamic") interpreting services better suit special communication needs other than video remote interpreting. Some of those are:

- situations which are highly emotionally charged,
- situations with many participants,
- situations with deaf-blind consumers,
- situations with clients who are unsophisticated users of interpreting services,
- situations with consumers who are children or extremely immature, and
- situations with mentally ill consumers.

VRI vs. VRS

Video Relay Services, or VRS, provide telephone access to Deaf and hard of hearing individuals via video instead of TTY or TDD (Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf) equipment. This is similar to the Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) which allows the TTY users to communicate, via an operator, with hearing people who do not have the equipment with which to communicate directly.

Video Relay Services are free of charge to all telephone users, Deaf or hearing, as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates VRS services and provides the services under contract with a number of agencies or private businesses. FCC regulations specifically forbid VRS to be used as a substitute for in-person interpreting services where both deaf and hearing consumers are in the same location; VRS may only be used when consumers are connecting with one another through a telephone connection and at different locations.

Using VRI with **AccessAmerica**

Once your equipment is set up and compatibility with **AccessAmerica**'s system is tested, using VRI is very simple. **AccessAmerica** is the only VRI agency that is truly 24 hours a day 7 days a week and "ON DEMAND" for those with a registered "User Profile". While it is possible for you to connect with **AccessAmerica** without notice (ON DEMAND), it is recommended that you call or email initially with basic information about your needs,

including the times you might need an interpreter, the projected length of time that the interpreter will be needed, and some general information about the situation. We would also want to determine the best billing method for your situation. **AccessAmerica** accepts VISA, MasterCard, American Express and Discover. We also provide direct billing should you desire. As stated earlier, a registered "User Profile" will make your VRI experience even more time effective and convenient. You will find the **AccessAmerica** fee schedule to be highly competitive, extremely flexible and sure to meet your specific and unique needs. If you want an **AccessAmerica** interpreter to contact you, you will need to provide your IP address. Alternately, you can contact **AccessAmerica** through our IP address, which is 72.156.150.199. After obtaining some basic billing information, an interpreter will provide VRI services as if they were present at your site, without the necessity of traveling.

In some unique situations, VRI conversations may be a little slower than having an interpreter present and in person. This is due to the occasional technical glitches which come with the nature of IP or Internet Protocol. **AccessAmerica** has gone to great lengths and expense to reduce or eliminate these glitches. Also, reading sign language on a two dimensional screen is more difficult than watching a live person, so signs many need to be slower and more clear, necessitating a slightly slower pace. A test call prior to using **AccessAmerica-VRI** services is highly recommended so that technical issues can be addressed prior to a VRI session.

We also offer Video Conferencing Services

Should you have a need for Video Conferencing services (i.e. workshop, meetings, etc.) please contact the Center. Our equipment is available at very reasonable rates.

We hope that this answers some of your questions about how Video Remote Interpreting can be useful to your organization or business. Please feel free to contact **AccessAmerica** with any additional questions at (866) 629-1815 or by email (vicomm@centurytel.net).

