

2 Guys Named Joe Podcast

Ep. #42 – Interview w/ Tim Johnston

As Broadcast

2 GUYS NAMED JOE"INTERVIEW w/TIM JOHNSTON"

Tim Johnston: Hello. This is Tim Johnston and I am with "Communication Access Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing." And, it's a non-profit service, actually. It's a big agency. It's a service, I mean, with a list of many different programs for the deaf and hard of hearing. And, it is in Flint, Michigan and one of the programs is called "Video Relay Service." And, my first responsibility I focus on most is the relay service for the support and I also have other duties as well. .development and hand-outs and everything for outreach, and also workshop presentations and the relay service.

Ed: Welcome to the show Tim. Today we wanted to, we heard. I heard about the video relay service for communicating with deaf and hard of hearing people and I thought it was just a fascinating technology, especially since I'm used to communicating with a deaf person over the phone by talking to another hearing person and then when I'm done talking I would say "Go ahead" and then I'd have to wait for her or him to type the response and then, the communication, it just took a long time to really have a fluid conversation. And, now as you can hear, we're talking back and forth without a delay at all or virtually no delay at all. And, I think that's phenomenal. I was wondering if you could tell us about the technology involved in

this video relay service and maybe what it is.

Tim: Okay, yes. Well, video relay service has already become one of the most popular and preferred modes of communication for talking to hearing people 'cause it's very natural and you can see the interpreter, you can see the facial expressions. It makes it a lot more clear for them to talk back and forth for the deaf and hearing. And, so, you know, it's very smooth, very expedient. It's not a waste of time. It's really easy. And, also, for the technology part, really you just need the video equipment and the high-speed internet and that's it. That is all that you need. And, the video equipment, it could be a webcam with a PC or it can be a video-phone and that would be with a TV.

Ed: So...

Tim: So, you just hook it up to the high-speed internet service and you're ready to go and you can communicate back and forth.

Ed: So...

Tim: And, so I can see the interpreter right on my TV screen right now.

Ed: Ah, the deaf person needs the equipment right. Or, can both the hearing and the deaf person have the equipment?

Tim: No, it's just for the deaf person as they're gonna need that equipment to use the video relay service. And, the hearing person

won't need it. They just need the phone, but maybe in the future, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if part of the service would be for the deaf people, they could hear the, see the hearing person and then they would have the equipment as well.

Ed: Well, it'd be...

Tim: So, there'd be like three players, you know, connected to have the deaf person, the interpreter and then a screen also for the hearing person as well. You know, that is possible in the future.

Ed: See, that would help me hone my sign language skills and actually may be a good way of training people and doing training type things, right?

Tim: Mm-hm. Yes. I agree. And, you know, it is possible for hearing people to have, you know, they have some knowledge about sign language for communication and so, to connect that directly from a deaf to hearing person, if they have the equipment, you can do that with a high-speed internet. And then you can call back and forth and communicate in sign language. So, but, you know, maybe, do you have a webcam? Because, then you could call me and we could see each other and try to communicate.

Ed: Oh, I could. Yeah. I do.

Tim: You know, you need to, you know, it helps just to have the interpreter for the communication and for, you know, for that video

interpreter to be there. The interpreter, they're the communicator, communicating assistant. And, so, really it's the video interpreter.

Ed:

Okay. So, well, your name is Tim but I'm talking to a woman right now. Is there a, is it possible to switch. Do you have to, do you just get the interpreter you're look, you, you... I guess, do you get the luck of the draw with the interpreters or how does that work?

Tim:

Okay, well really, what it works is that I'm gonna place the call to a video relay center and it's CAC communication access center. And, I have an IP address. It's CACVRS.tv. And, so I'm gonna dial that IP address and I'm gonna automatically connect to whoever's available at that time. So, maybe there's going to be a line, you know, where they have to get through every one and then it connects me to the next available interpreter. And then, that's a communicator assistant, and then that's when we're connected and then we start the call. And so the assistant, the communicator assistant is going to ask for the hearing person's phone number and I'll give them that number and then the interpreter's going to dial that, then we get connected. And, first time that they've experienced the video phone they'll ask have you done this and, you know, they'll explain what it's about and say, you know, "there's a person using sign language on a computer and just give me a direct communication.

Can we go ahead? And, I'll connect you." And, we start the phone conversation.

Ed: Alright, well that sounds pretty easy. And, is there any cost involved for you to use that service?

Tim: There are actually no costs involved and that's part of the Inter-State's Telecommunication Relay Service. The way they get the money is that all the people that make the phone calls for the, it's a subscription for the phone subscription and they subscribe to it. And, so, the FCC is actually the one that's going to decide the cost that they're going to give everyone for the money for offering that service. 'Cause there is a cost involved.

Ed: Okay, terrific. And, so I called you actually. Can you walk me through the steps that are involved when an outside person makes a call to a deaf person?

Tim: Okay, sure. Yes, I'd be happy to. The hearing person that're going to talk to a deaf person, they are going to need to know two things. And, the first would be the phone number for the voice phone number for the video relay service, VRS, for the communication access center. And, that voice phone number is (866) 500-9662. And, the second thing they need to know is they have to know the IP address and if the deaf person has a video phone. So, they're going to have the IP address for the video phone. They're going to call the 866 number. They're

going to call that and they're going to be connected to the interpreter. And, then they're going to give the interpreter the IP address for the deaf person and then the interpreter connects to the deaf person.

Ed: Ah, so you need - an IP address is kind of like a website address only it's not the, it's not the nice...

Tim: Right.

Ed: ...something, something dot-com.

Tim: It's something different. Right.

Ed: It's whatever the number is that your internet provider give you. Now, does your internet provider...

Tim: Right. It's different than a domain name, right.

Ed: Well, do you have anything else you wanted to tell us about the service at all?

Tim: Oh yes, actually I do have a couple other things. I do have a Spanish relay service and so we do have the Spanish relay as well.

Ed: Oh, okay, so you have interpreters...

Tim: And, it's also for deaf people to communicate to their Spanish speaking family and friends.

Ed: Oh, if somebody knows ASL, American Sign Language, they can receive a call from somebody who's speaking Spanish and the interpreter will do it...

Tim: Yes.

Ed: ...will interpret without question. That's really great.

Tim: Yeah, I mean, there's a lot of different emotions, you know. Just the excitement of it. You know, to be able to express this, you know, you're hearing, you know, from these people that speak Spanish, family and friends. And, you know, were able to use the video relay service. So, it's really exciting and often these are really long conversations just from the excitement of it.

Ed: Wow. And, okay, so let's say you, let's say you call a person and you're towards the end of the interpreters shift. Do you ever have to change interpreters in mid-conversation especially if a really lengthy conversation?

Tim: Yes, yes. Often, everyone averages, it's like twenty to thirty minutes per interpreter and they're gonna switch. And, 'cause it's very professional they'll, it's a professional manner, very smooth. And, so the interpreter just lets the deaf person know. They'll say, "I'm gonna switch." Another interpreter comes and they have a headset on and so, they're gonna unplug from the speaker and the next person will sit down and, I mean, it's very smooth. It's almost transparent, actually.

Ed: Okay, any other topic you wanted to cover?

Tim: Okay, I do have maybe some of the benefits of video relay service because, I mean, there's a lot of benefits. Because, it's a lot quicker for the communication, it's a lot easier to use and it's stress-free. And, then you're able to have the need of conversation in American Sign Language and you don't have to say "go ahead," "your turn" you know, and wait for that which is very extensive. And, the deaf person can't hear, you know, what they're saying. You can see the emotion through the interpreter. So, it's even better to know, okay, what are the inflections of the hearing person. What are they doing? And, also, the interpreter's body. They get the body language in there, you know.

Ed: Oh, I never even thought about that. That is great because then you can have the interpreter let you know whether the voice is full of excitement about something or if they're really sad about something. And that would come across without question as opposed to the old way.

Tim: Oh, you know, then you can see it. It's just like, you know, maybe it's short and sweet or, you know, to the point and so that way you can change the emotions real easily so it's not, you know, this whole typing. That you're reading typed text. It's not enough information and so, you know...

Ed: Right.

Tim: ...often it's just a lot of messages being lost. And so, what were the

hearing, were they happy? Were they sad? Were they angry? Were they frustrated with me? You know, you can't understand that with that approach. But, now you can see it so easily and you can match the person.

Ed: It's the same way back the other way to the hearing person. I can hear the interpreters inflections and whether she's excited or talking snidely about something or talking, you know, excitedly or sad about something. It's really great.

Tim: Yeah, exactly. And, that's the point.

Ed: Terrific.

Tim: And, with the video relay service, I mean, it's just become so popular right now. It's really booming. And, I think the best thing is that all of the deaf people that they have the access to the video relay service now. And, so, even if they don't have video phones they're waiting to get that. I'd say about seventy percent, they don't even have the video phone yet. But, they at least can use the webcam. And, most have some kind of calling center in that area 'cause if you can't afford the high-speed internet like some can't or if they don't have that high-speed internet service in their area. I mean, there's so many different variances. I'm hoping that all of us, just for the better accessibility and for even more of the opportunity, you know, for a better workplace. And, to have

more, better access for that communication for that workplace to us. It makes it a whole lot easier.

Ed: Ok, well I wanted to thank you Tim for being on the podcast with me and sharing with us the benefits of the CAC relay for communicating with the deaf and hard of hearing people. So thank you very much for joining us.

Tim: And thank you for asking me to join you, and I'm happy to that I was able to explain about the video relay service. And for more information you can look at the website www.cacrelay.com

Ed: Alright, cool.

Tim: Thank you.