The need to provide interpreting services is a pressing one in many countries. As technology evolves, the number of methods available for accessing interpreters is expanding as well. Video interpreting services have long been used for sign language interpreters to communicate with individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. On the spoken language side, the adoption of video interpreting for the mainstream remains somewhat slow, but is growing steadily.

How it Works
For most video interpreting settings, the interpreter is located in a remote location, while the two parties wishing to communicate are in the same room. A two-way videoconferencing enables the interpreter to see the individuals and vice versa. Figure 1 on page 20 shows the basic setup.

While it is possible to deliver video interpreting using a simple computer and a webcam, other equipment, such as videophones and televisions, can also be used. Video interpreting equipment can be purchased from manufacturers such as Polycom, Tandberg, and Sony. For spoken languages, the quality of the video image is less important than the quality of the audio, but for sign language, clear visual images are an absolute must.

Several equipment options exist:

- **Computer workstation with a webcam**: Using videoconferencing software, interpreters can use any computer (including a laptop) with a webcam (either internal or external) and a microphone or headset. This is one of the most cost-effective options. However, quality may vary significantly depending on the combination of computer, peripherals, and software employed.

- **Videoconferencing equipment**: These products come in a variety of options, such as PC-based, portable, mobile (roll-about), or installed systems, and a network can use an array of the different systems. In general, installed systems are meant for large groups or audiences, while the other types of systems are used for smaller groups, or for individuals. A single unit can cost thousands of dollars.

- **Videophones**: A videophone (also sometimes called a “picturephone”) is essentially a phone with a video screen. Videophones are meant for use by individuals, not by groups. These devices usually cost around $100-$200. One major
disadvantage to videophones is that the screen size is quite small.

In addition to the equipment, video interpreting requires a high-quality connection to ensure that the video and audio data can be transferred in real time with minimal interference or interruption. A poor connection can ruin an interpreter’s ability to hear or see properly, and can have a detrimental effect on quality. For this reason, the majority of video interpreters actually work, not from home, but from specific sites where the connections have been fully tested and the quality can be guaranteed. Many interpreters already use free or low-cost videoconferencing services for personal use, such as Skype. However, these services are not usually adequate to perform video interpreting, since the connection requirements are stringent to provide the necessary quality.

**Video Interpreting Protocols**

For the most part, video interpreters can follow many of the same standards of practice they use when performing on-site or telephone interpreting, but there are a few differences related to the equipment. For example, some videoconferencing tools enable the interpreter to control the camera in order to zoom in or out and move the camera to keep individuals in the line of sight. Other types of equipment do not allow this, so interpreters using video-based communication must be prepared to rely on additional skills in order to focus on other elements when individuals disappear from view (e.g., auditory cues in the case of spoken languages).

Sign language interpreters often take great care to ensure that their background—what others will see behind them—is free of distractions and visual clutter, so as not to detract from the signing. Spoken language interpreters, on the other hand, rely somewhat less on visual information, and therefore do not necessarily need to take the same precautions. For example, spoken language video medical interpreters at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center place items such as flags, cultural objects, maps, or photos of countries where the languages are spoken in the background. This is done to make the patient feel that he or she is in a more familiar cultural environment. (See Figure 2 on page 21.)

Video interpreters also need to master their equipment in order to allow for proper positioning, both on-screen to ensure a clear view for those viewing the monitor, and to facilitate the interpreter’s work. If an interpreter wishes to take notes without distracting the other parties, he or she will need to ensure that the camera is set up in such a way that any hand

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**In addition to the equipment, video interpreting requires a high-quality connection to ensure that the video and audio data can be transferred in real time with minimal interference or interruption.**

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**Figure 1:** To see court interpreters performing video interpreting at a district court in Florida, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cant8yRwOBg.
movements will not be visible and that there is enough distance from the microphone so that the noise of scribbling will not be heard.

**Where to Find Work**

Work opportunities abound for prospective video interpreters of sign language. A large number of interpreting agencies bring sign language interpreters in-house to interpret via video for clients, especially hospitals, courts, and educational institutions.

On the spoken language side, those interpreters who work in high-demand languages, such as Spanish in the U.S., can also obtain work through some agencies offering video-based services. Some courts and hospitals have full-time in-house video interpreting positions. Interpreters of languages for which there is not a large demand are unlikely to find work as video interpreters, because the number of requests for less commonly spoken languages is usually small and does not warrant staffing an interpreter in front of a computer. However, several initiatives are rapidly changing this reality. One company, Paras and Associates, is paving the way for organizations in diverse locations by setting up networks to enable public hospitals to share their interpreting resources. These initiatives—including the Health Care Interpreter Network in California and the All Language Video Interpreter Network in Illinois—enable one hospital to request an interpreter from another hospital that might have more interpreters on staff for that particular language.

Some traditional telephonic providers are also getting into the act. Companies like CyraCom, Language Line Services, and Language Services Associates are now making video interpreting available to their customers. However, many companies actually provide video interpreting indirectly through partnerships with smaller firms that specialize in video interpreting. (See Figure 3 for a partial list of on-demand interpreting suppliers.)

**A New Opportunity**

To get started with video interpreting, talk with your existing base of interpreting clients to see if they already use video-based services. If they provide them in-house, inquire as to whether or not you can receive

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**Figure 2:** To see medical interpreters in action as they render video-based interpreting, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1RwB25-ehk.

**Figure 3: Partial List of On-Demand Video Interpreting Suppliers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorenson</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sorenson.com">www.sorenson.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Communications</td>
<td><a href="http://www.purple.us">www.purple.us</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WeInterpretLinked</td>
<td><a href="http://www.weinterpretlinked.com">www.weinterpretlinked.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InDemand Interpreting</td>
<td><a href="http://www.systematechinc.com">www.systematechinc.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language, Spanish, Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT Interpreting</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dtiinterpreting.com">www.dtiinterpreting.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Line</td>
<td><a href="http://www.languageline.com">www.languageline.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language, Mexican Sign Language, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LifeLinks</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lifelinks.net">www.lifelinks.net</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language, plus 25 spoken languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SignOn ASL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.signonasl.com">www.signonasl.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Access Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.languageaccessnetwork.com">www.languageaccessnetwork.com</a></td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
training in this modality to work as a video interpreter. If they purchase video interpreting services from an agency, ask for the name and see if you can work directly with the agency. If none of your clients use video services, you may need to do some additional research. Call agencies in your area to see if they offer video interpreting services, and ask if you can be considered as a potential contractor.

Freelance interpreters in all industry settings should become familiar with video interpreting equipment in order to understand how it works, and would be well-served by gaining experience with this emerging market segment. As the need for interpreting services continues to grow while the pool of available interpreters is slow to increase in size, technology will continue to play an important role in ensuring language access for all. Video interpreting for community interpreting is here to stay, and will no doubt have an even more prominent place in the future.

Related Links

- **All Language Video Interpreter Network**
  WebCode=ivin_m-p&Site=mchc

- **American Sign Language Interpreter Network**
  www.aslnetwork.com

- **Polycom**
  www.polycom.com

- **Tandberg**
  www.tandberg.com

- **Video Interpreters Connect Patients and Doctors**
  www.cisco.com/web/strategy/docs/
  healthcare/HCN.pdf

Video interpreting for community interpreting is here to stay.