

Vidyo Platform Enables mobitoki's Videoconferencing-Based Sign Language Interpretation Service in Poland



Challenge

Help Poland comply with EU legal requirements to make public services available to deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens in their national sign language, given a scarcity of sign language interpreters.

mobitoki

ABOUT ORGANIZATION

MOBITOKI is the biggest and fastest growing Collaboration Provider in Poland with customers worldwide. Their portfolio includes video chats, mobile tools and customer engagement solutions.

FOUNDED: 2010

HEADQUARTERS: Warszawa, Poland

When the European Union issued an official declaration to ensure access to public services by deaf and hard-of-hearing people, the EU called upon its Member States to enact certain measures to reduce communication barriers. Poland was among the first countries to take action on this declaration. Its parliament passed a law mandating that Polish government offices, medical facilities and other public services provide access to people in their national sign language.

Passing a law, however, is not the same as putting it into practice. At the time, Poland estimated that approximately 40,000 sites could benefit from sign language services, but the entire country had only 150 official sign language interpreters. With no budget to train and support thousands more interpreters, and no way to predict where the sign language interpreters would need to be at any given time, Poland had to find a way to make those few interpreters available more widely and flexibly.

Vidyo Technology Powers toktutok Sign Language Service

Przemyslaw Wyszynski, CEO of leading Polish communication service provider, mobitoki, came up with an idea to help the Polish government meet its mandate. He proposed implementing a videoconferencing-based sign language interpretation service, built on Vidyo.io, Vidyo's platform application programming interface (API).

“The video platform for our sign language interpretation service had to meet several challenges,” said Wyszynski. “It had to work on virtually every available Internet connection, including in remote offices, small town hospitals and municipal bureaus. It had to be cost-effective and easy to use by people who had no technical skills or computer literacy. And it had to have sufficient video quality to capture the nuances of sign language’s fast-moving hand and finger movements. After reviewing a variety of options, we determined that the only solution that met all our requirements was the Vidyo platform.”

Mobitoki’s resulting Vidyo-based toktutok service uses a call center in which several sign language interpreters are always available. Any public service in Poland can use an endpoint — typically a desktop PC or laptop computer equipped with a webcam — to establish on-demand links to the call center via VidyoConferencing. This way, sign language interpreters can virtually join conversations between deaf citizens and their medical providers, municipal officials or other public service providers.

“Poor Internet quality still affects parts of Poland, but the Vidyo platform’s low latency and high resistance to transmission errors enables us to easily implement the toktutok service even under the prevailing conditions in our country,” said Wyszynski.

Transforming Communication for Deaf Polish Citizens

Many deaf citizens are not literate in Polish, so they cannot communicate in writing. Prior to using the Vidyo-based system, without a sign language interpreter present, communication barriers led to interactions that ranged from frustrating to life-threatening — as when a patient was admitted to a hospital and could not interact with medical staff.

“The Vidyo-based toktutok service allows me to function as if I am communicating in the same room with deaf citizens,” said Katarzyna Glozak, a sign language interpreter in Poland who is part of the toktutok service. “The video quality is perfect, enabling us to have very natural interactions.”

Toktutok-equipped kiosks and offices are clearly marked throughout Poland. To use the service, a deaf person touches a screen or hits a key on a connected computer, and a videoconferencing link is automatically established with the toktutok call center. A sign language interpreter appears on the screen and is also able to view the deaf person and see his or her

surroundings. The deaf person is able to see the toktutok sign language expert, and with their assistance, can now easily converse with medical personnel or other public officials.

As one deaf user of the system commented: “It used to be a problem communicating with my doctor. I could never understand what he was saying. He tried to communicate in writing, but it was useless because I don’t know Polish. The first time I saw the toktutok interpreter, I was so happy. I just touched the screen and there she was. I sign, the interpreter speaks for me and then she signs back what the doctor says. It is just superb! Marvelous!”

The toktutok service currently is available using PCs, but mobitoki plans to expand access to tablets and smartphones in the future, using Vidyo’s mobile app.

“This communication system eliminates misunderstanding, removes stress and enables us to offer more efficient services to our deaf patients,” said Iwona Sledz, Assistant Director of Wolomin Hospital, located about 30 km northeast of Warsaw. “Thanks to the toktutok service, and the high quality of the Vidyo platform it runs on, deaf patients now have access to the same level of care as our hearing patients.”

Results

The toktutok service overcomes communication barriers, removes stress and minimizes misunderstanding for deaf medical patients and users of other government services throughout Poland. A potential 40,000 public sites in Poland can efficiently and cost-effectively use Poland’s 150 sign language interpreters via high-quality video. The Vidyo-based service works via commodity PCs and even in areas with poor Internet services, with sufficient quality to capture nuances of fast-moving finger and hand movements.



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