



# CONNECT DIRECT

*ENGINEERED by CSD*

MEDIA KIT  
SUMMER 2021





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**LEILA ELTOUNY**

Media Relations Specialist

**(888) 701-0173**

leltouny@csd.org



@THISISCSD

# INTRODUCTION

Promoting your business as diverse, inclusive, and accessible is not the same as being diverse, inclusive, or accessible.

I've seen heartfelt commercials showing a business representative putting a smile on a Deaf person's face by using sign language to serve them. But millions of Deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) Americans know that most companies rarely offer that experience. On the contrary: many of them experience, on average, worse customer service than the average "hearing" individual.

The Deaf and hard of hearing market in the US was recently valued at \$86 billion and growing. Factor in friends, families, and colleagues of the 11.5 million Americans who are D/HH, as well as rapidly growing interest in American Sign Language (ASL), and this is no small chunk of change.

After a positive experience with a business, 77% of all customers would recommend that business to a friend. On the contrary, 51% of all customers state that one negative experience will cause them to never do business with that company again. Poor communication, too much automation, or lack of empathy in customer service frequently result in these negative experiences. In fact, these issues cause significantly more customer friction for your Deaf and hard of hearing customers.

Do you know what kind of experience your D/HH customers are having? We do. And we can support you in becoming a leader for inclusive communication in your industry. I like to tell people that what Connect Direct offers is "Press 3 for ASL," but in reality, that's just scratching the surface. Read on to learn how we help businesses transform customer service for all customers. Start seeing communication differently.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig J. Radford".

Craig J. Radford  
Vice President of Emerging Markets, CSD

# WHAT IS CONNECT DIRECT?

Connect Direct provides innovative call center solutions for communicating directly with Deaf customers in American Sign Language. Offering cutting-edge customer service through Connect Direct decreases customer frustration and opens the door to a new market of loyal clients.

Connect Direct establishes customer service teams of Deaf representatives who are trained experts in a given business' product or service. These representatives use their knowledge of the product or service in tandem with their personal understanding of a Deaf customer's experience using the product or service, all while communicating in the customer's native language. This multi-level expertise provides an invaluable, time-saving solution for a businesses, customers, and representatives alike.

Connect Direct is engineered by Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), the world's largest Deaf-led social impact organization. For four decades, CSD has provided direct services for the community while also helping companies design the kinds of marketing and outreach tools that effectively and specifically reach the Deaf and hard of hearing population.

## OUR MISSION

To help companies eliminate the need for third-party translation. To create a business environment where all spoken and signed languages are equal. To open customer service initiatives to a new sense of equality, empathy, and cultural connection.

## OUR VISION

Imagine a world where any company can reach any customer in any language in a more meaningful, personal, and direct way.

# WHY CONNECT DIRECT?

Connect Direct allows you to benefit from our experience in the Deaf world. You're partnering with a team that knows and understands Deaf culture because we are a Deaf-led organization. When you need the expertise of running a successful call center program using Deaf employees fluent in ASL, hearing organizations or consultants just don't have the acumen of native users.

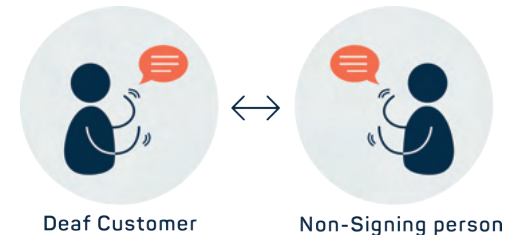
Connect Direct can support your organization's efforts to create a successful call center program in American Sign Language. This benefits your customers – both existing and potential Deaf and hard of hearing customers who use ASL as their preferred communication method and supports internal needs like tech support or HR for organizations with many Deaf employees.

## THIRD PARTY INTERPRETATION



- Randomly selected interpreter, unfamiliar with your brand, your products, and context-specific terms.
- Increased call time for you and your customers.
- Greater risk of decrease in service or product use due to customer friction.
- Often leads to increase in repeated calls and mistakes due to miscommunication.
- Rep themselves may be unfamiliar/inexperienced with third party calls.

## CONNECT DIRECT



- Trained Deaf representative who is familiar with your brand, products, and context-specific terms.
- Call time decreased by an average of 33-42% (Cite: project endeavor, FCC).
- Number of Deaf people utilizing the service increased by 300-533%.
- Decreased need for repeated calls and increased customer satisfaction because of an equitable experience.

## PARTNERS & CLIENTS



NATIONAL DEAF THERAPY

BUS DOOR FILMS



Using Direct Connect has made solving customer issues faster. The average time to resolve issues with Deaf customers has dropped 33%.



- Michele Gifford | Senior Operations Manager | Comcast National Center of Excellence, Spokane, Washington

83% shorter average handle time when compared to phone support. 92.86% customer satisfaction rating (CSAT).



Customer was so confused when they received their bill. The representative was able to explain clearly in ASL what the charges on the bill meant. Customer was angry at the beginning, but now at ease. Customer appreciated the representative who supported them because he could understand them with no problem.



- Connect Direct / ASLNow Representative

## PARTNERS & CLIENTS

I'll be spreading the word about this service! I love the idea of having an ASL customer representative for any major company. I'm understanding things much better than (with) third party relay services.

- Deaf Caller



"I had a phone call with Xfinity/ASLNOW. I can use my voice but chose to use the ASL service because there were so many miscommunications on the voice line. ASLNOW's Xfinity customer service rep was amazing. Helpful, patient, thorough, explained everything.... it even took less time than with voice customer service! I am so impressed. This is a phenomenal service."

- Deaf Caller



After calling Xfinity four times and getting nowhere, I was given ASL Now numbers and I decided to try one more time and I am so glad I did! I was able to convey my issues in ASL and got them resolved quickly! I wish I knew about this earlier!

- Deaf Caller



## KEY INDIVIDUALS



**Craig Radford**

Vice President of Emerging Markets, CSD



**Christy McBee**

Operations Manager



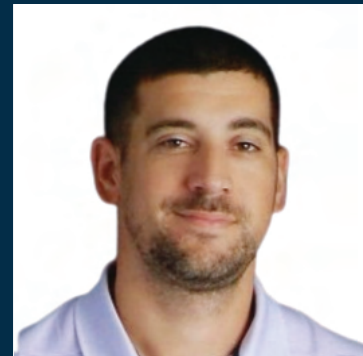
**Vanessa LeBoss**

Director of Connect Direct



**Brandon Dopf**

Quality Assurance and Training Manager



**Ryan Bonheyo**

Business Development Associate



# IN THE NEWS



## FCC

June 11, 2021

[CSD Granted Access to TRS Numbering Directory](#)



## Call Center Times

January 1, 2021

[Four Tips For Improving Call Center Success For Deaf And Hard-of-Hearing Customers](#)



## RAVE AND REVIEW

September 2020

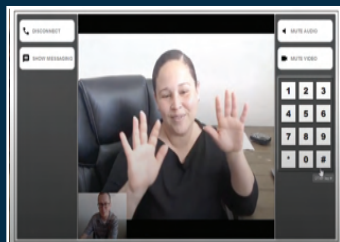
[Comcast's continued commitment to accessibility](#)



## CNN

April 8, 2020

[Coping with disease and disability in the time of coronavirus](#)



## WTOP News

April 8, 2021

[Virginia becomes 1st state to offer ASL video chats for COVID-19 call center](#)

**Expectations of Speech-to-Text Service Usage According to Professionals Worldwide, by Se Type, March 2020**

% of respondents in each group

	Increase	Stay the same
Human transcription	47%	34%
Automated transcription	55%	25%
Captions	59%	25%
Subtitles	32%	26%

Note: in the next 2-3 years; excludes respondents who answer "don't know"  
Source: Rev, "Speech to Text Report for 2020," March 27, 2021  
255394

## Emarketer

December 14, 2020

[Captioning and sign language help brands reach the Deaf community](#)



## Google blog

June 17, 2020

[Lessons learned from building an accessible support team](#)



## Engadget

December 4, 2019

[Google Disability Support is more accessible with sign language specialists](#)



## Connections Magazine

January 29, 2021

[THE FUTURE IS HUMAN: TAPPING VIDEO TECHNOLOGY AS A CALL CENTER SOLUTION](#)



## Spokesman

October 19, 2020

[Comcast improves services for deaf, hard of hearing customers, including direct connection to sign language-fluent agent without interpreter](#)



## Ozy

April 20, 2020

[THE FORGOTTEN VICTIMS OF THE PANDEMIC: THE DEAF COMMUNITY](#)



## Forbes

December 3, 2019

[Comcast Now Offers Customer Service In ASL. A First For The Cable Industry](#)

## How has COVID-19 affected Connect Direct services?

In 2020, as the COVID-19 virus became a full-blown global pandemic, the world was getting health updates on a daily, if not hourly, basis. But most of these updates were not given in American Sign Language (ASL), meaning deaf people were missing out on potentially life-saving information. Connect Direct, and Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), recognized this dangerous problem and created a sustainable solution.

In March, Connect Direct launched the hotline for the deaf community made available through its ASL Now platform. The free COVID-19 ASL Now Hotline has a team of deaf agents who are both fluent in ASL and trained to provide important information about coronavirus and to help curb confusion and misinformation. Callers can connect with representatives via video and ask questions and get clarification on an array of issues and concerns related to COVID-19, all in their native language.

“Equal access to information for our community is a societal imperative each and every day, but especially right now as we all strive to cope with this health pandemic,” said Craig J. Radford, Director of Strategy and Business Development for Connect Direct.

Individuals may contact the ASL Now hotline anytime **Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. CST** either by visiting CSD and **clicking “ASL Now”** or by **dialing 833-682-7630** on any videophone (VP).

The CSD’s COVID-19 ASL Now hotline is not a medical organization, it does not provide medical advice and its agents are not medical professionals.

**For more information**, visit CSD’s [coronavirus hotline website](#), or check out the COVID-19 hotline press release [here](#).



## TIPS: WRITING ABOUT OR INTERVIEWING DEAF & HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

*TERMS LIKE “HEARING IMPAIRED” AND “DEAF MUTE” are outdated. Please don’t use them!*

Deaf people are not “impaired” because their ears don’t work. Barriers occur when the environment and people in it do not adhere to their specific needs. To bring the point home, Deaf people in an all-signing environment will often tease a new learner about being “signing impaired” when they’re unable to keep up with the conversation!

Similarly, referring to Deaf and hard of hearing people “mute” is misleading. Many D/HH individuals can – and do – use their voice, both at home and in the workplace. The generally-accepted term is “Deaf and hard of hearing,” but when in doubt, ask the person you’re speaking to how they identify themselves.

# TIPS: WRITING ABOUT OR INTERVIEWING DEAF & HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

## *THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "DEAF AND "DEAF."*

**Lowercase deaf:** The term "deaf," with a lowercase "d" is used in the medical field, and to describe someone who has hearing loss and who does not actively associate with the Deaf community. Typically, this means a hearing person who became deaf later in life. Lowercase deaf uses the perspective of not being able to hear as an audiological condition or "problem."

**Capital Deaf:** When we use the term "Deaf," with a capital "D," we're referring to people who identify as culturally Deaf. This means people who use ASL as their primary language and are a part of the Deaf community. Identity-first language such as "Deaf people" is used instead of the person-first language that is used for most people with disabilities, i.e.: "person with autism."

## *WANT AN INTERVIEW? MAKE SURE IT'S ACCESSIBLE!*

If you're a journalist that's fluent in ASL, stop by anytime! But if you need some extra support to follow what is being said in ASL, we encourage you to bring a certified ASL interpreter with you. Questions? Contact Connect Direct at [letouny@csd.org](mailto:letouny@csd.org) and we'll walk you through it.



## TIPS: WRITING ABOUT OR INTERVIEWING DEAF & HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

### *THINK VISUALLY.*

Deaf people rely heavily on facial cues, body language, and environmental feedback to communicate. Talking loudly is unlikely to help – save your voice! Communicate visually with ease by writing things down or by using the voice-to-text function on your phone. Not all Deaf people lip-read, so don't assume they can follow along with what you're saying. Face the person you are talking to and keep eye contact. If you need a Deaf person's attention, simply wave.

When in doubt, write it out! If you're having trouble getting your question or message across at first, don't give up. Deaf people want to know what you are saying and sometimes it just takes a bit of teamwork to get on the same page.

### *CUT OUT THE MIDDLEMAN.*

Chatting with a Deaf person through an ASL interpreter? Look at the person you are having a conversation with and ask them your questions. The interpreter will handle the rest. Talk as though you are speaking to the Deaf person themselves: "Tell me about your role at Connect Direct," and not "Ask her about her role at Connect Direct." Be sure to wait until the interpreter is done before taking your turn to speak again. Raise your hand if that helps the flow of conversation.

When you finish your interview or before going to print, give the Deaf person the opportunity to ensure all the information is correct and nothing was lost in translation.

## TIPS: WRITING ABOUT OR INTERVIEWING DEAF & HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

### *DEAFNESS IS NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL.*

While many of us use ASL, some may have grown up using, or still use, one of many other means of communication. Many community members identify as DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Deaf and Queer, Black Deaf, and more. Even if you're not a part of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, we always strive to make everyone feel included and welcome. Ask questions if you're not sure. We are more than happy to share our experience, knowledge, and language!

If you're not sure, ask how the D/deaf person you are interacting with prefers to identify themselves and/or communicate with you.

### *MAKE SURE YOUR STORY IS ACCESSIBLE, TOO!*

When you publish your story, we want to see your hard work come together! If your story is airing on TV, make sure you have accurate closed captioning. If you're on the radio or producing a podcast, we'd love to see the transcript on your web story. If you post an online video, don't rely on auto-captions – use a real captionist!

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## When did Connect Direct start?

Connect Direct was first established in 2017 by Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), an organization run by and for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. For four decades, CSD has provided direct services for the community while also helping companies design the kinds of marketing and outreach tools that effectively and specifically reach this population.

When Connect Direct started, we didn't know how we were going to do it. We just knew it was the right thing to do, and that was all that mattered. Today, as the largest nonprofit organization servicing Deaf and Hard of Hearing people, our mission to remove the barriers to meaningful communication between the Deaf and Hearing communities continues.

Telecommunications relay, video relay, and the world's first online marketplace for sign language interpreting—CSD pioneered all three of these innovative, life-changing projects.

## How many customers or businesses use Connect Direct?

Connect Direct currently partners with eight businesses. We are always working to grow our network and, therefore, increase our impact.

The Deaf and hard of hearing market in the US is valued at \$86 billion and growing. Factor in friends, families, and colleagues of the 11.5 million Americans who are D/HH, as well as rapidly growing interest in American Sign Language (ASL), and you start to understand how important it is to connect with members of the deaf and hard of hearing community.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Why implement an ASL team through Connect Direct if businesses already have text-based chat boxes?

Most contact centers already have chat technology in place, but this is not a viable alternative when serving the deaf and hard of hearing community. A common misconception is that ASL is English on the hands - this is not the case.

Just like spoken languages, ASL developed organically between people over centuries and is a separate language from English. It has its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural context different from, and uninfluenced by, English conventions. In fact, ASL shares more structural similarities with French Sign Language than it does English.

While many deaf people are bilingual in ASL and English, some deaf people struggle with written English proficiency, just as some hearing people who are bilingual struggle with written proficiency in their second language.

For the deaf community, this issue is exacerbated by language deprivation, caused by long-standing discrimination and sub-standard access to educational resources. While English text-based chat boxes may be useful for some deaf clients, for others they remain a frequent source of frustration and miscommunication.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## What is the existing process like for a deaf or hard of hearing person without Connect Direct?

### TTY Call

The TTY, or teletypewriter, is a device that allows the user to send and receive text over a landline phone connection. When using a TTY relay service to contact a hearing person, the deaf user types their portion of the conversation, and a typist transcribes the hearing person's spoken portion and sends it to the deaf person to read. While the TTY was an important step forward in linking the deaf and hearing worlds decades ago, it is an extremely slow process.

Adding to the frustration is that hearing people frequently hang up on users calling via a TTY or any relay service, because they hear the operator announcing themselves first and assume it is a spam or robo-call. Today, most deaf people no longer own a TTY at all. While we can access TTY capabilities via the web, most consider it an obsolete technology, so having a special TTY number does little to provide true access.

### VRS Call

A Video Relay Service (VRS) call operates on a similar premise, except that instead of a typist, the intermediary operator is an ASL interpreter. Using a video phone, a deaf person signs their portion of the conversation, which the interpreter voices, then the interpreter translates the hearing person's spoken message into ASL.

While this process is faster than a TTY, there is still a lag due to the translation process, and we are still often hung up on when hearing people are confused as to why an interpreter's voice doesn't "match" our identity. Further, a VRS call places a lot of responsibility on the intermediary's knowledge-base—if the interpreter isn't familiar with context-specific terminology, the potential for miscommunication is huge, leading to customer confusion, dissatisfaction, and loss.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **When doing ASL with a call center, do latency and other video quality issues negatively affect accurate communication?**

While internet speed quality issues could be a problem if a call center doesn't up their bandwidth to accommodate video, deaf people calling through a relay service are already on a video call, and place video calls daily without issue. Connect Direct simply removes the middleman in the call, thus speeding up the overall process and creating a pleasant, meaningful interaction between customer and business.

## **What is working at Connect Direct like for a deaf employee? How does Connect Direct impact their lives in the workforce?**

For deaf people, working at Connect Direct, and CSD, can often be a more equitable career experience. In an environment fostered by deaf-led organizations, deaf people, and ASL users, have unfettered work and social communication with their colleagues and supervisors. An individual's sense of fulfillment and purpose is rooted in the ability to connect directly to one another, and direct communication is fundamental to that connection.

In a primarily ASL using workplace, deaf people do not have to spend additional time and/or labor attempting to organize interpreters, explaining why they may need certain accommodations, advocating for themselves, or convincing others that they are "worthy" of their place at the company – they can just get to work!

The same goes for any employee in their workplace. Forming meaningful connections with other people is less about being able to hear a spoken language and more about being able to form relationships through personal interaction, whether you're at work or at home. With the many benefits of direct communication in mind, Connect Direct has always strived to find solutions that allow for more in-person interaction for our consumers and employees.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## How does Connect Direct save businesses money? How much “more” does it cost to hire a Deaf employee over a hearing employee?

There is no special equipment necessary for hiring a deaf employee. The only accommodations needed are interpreter(s) for training time and meetings (department, one-on-one meetings, etc.).

In fact, Connect Direct saves money by reducing call errors and miscommunications. These miscommunications lead to repeat calls because the customers’ issues are not being solved on the first call. Connect Direct also allows for a reduction of call volume into English speaking queues that are currently tied up with interpreted phone calls, which eat up time due to the longer communications process of using a third-party interpreter.

There are tax credits available for hiring individuals with a “disability” and the accommodations provided, such as an interpreter when needed. (see [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)). From a cost perspective, all other new Deaf/Hard of Hearing hires are otherwise identical to Hearing hires.

## What does the integration process look like when a business chooses to partner with Connect Direct?

Connect Direct allows businesses to benefit from our experience in the Deaf world. You are partnering with a team that knows and understands Deaf culture because we are a Deaf-led organization. When you need the expertise of running a successful call center program using Deaf employees fluent in ASL, hearing organizations or consultants just don’t have the acumen of native users.

Find the breakdown [here](#)!

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Why does a service like Connect Direct matter to people outside of the deaf community?

In today's fast-paced and ever-diversifying American culture, keeping a business' call center's "best practices" attuned to the needs of all customers can feel overwhelming. There are so many languages, communication modalities, and cultural nuances to consider. Customer service and satisfaction have always been an important part of call center work, but with today's younger generations making purchasing decisions based on whether a brand or business reflects their own inclusive values, being culturally responsive can mean the difference between gaining a loyal customer and losing one forever.

Accessibility is a key part of social equity and inclusion. Everyone deserves to be able to communicate with those around them -- especially with respect to accessing a business or service one pays for. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people can be found across the US and making an impact within the Deaf community has a ripple effect throughout cities and regions everywhere. People, and businesses, who support the Deaf community expand their sphere of influence and, therefore, their market reach.

## How can I get in touch with Connect Direct?

- **Media Inquiries:** Leila Eltouny, [leltouny@csd.org](mailto:leltouny@csd.org)
- **Business Inquiries:** <https://getconnectdirect.com/contact>