

Personalize to Prioritize: Strategies to Grow Your Accessibility Program

[00:00:00.23] JACLYN LAZZARI: Thank you, everyone, for joining us today for our session entitled Personalized to Prioritize, Strategies to Grow Your Accessibility Practice and Gain Buy-in. My name is Jaclyn, and I'll be moderating today's session. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm on the marketing team here at 3Play. I'm very excited to welcome today's speaker, Erin Evans. Thank you so much for being here, Erin. I'll pass it off to you for what I'm sure will be a wonderful presentation.

[00:00:31.27] ERIN EVANS: Thank you, Jaclyn. I appreciate it. And thank you to 3Play for hosting this webinar today. And hello to everybody and thank you guys for taking time out of your schedules to join today's conversation. I'm going to share some information on how to change communication and how to get some buy-in from leadership and others within your teams on prioritizing accessibility, which, as those of us who work in accessibility know, sometimes be an uphill battle.

[00:01:00.85] So today we're going to be talking about focusing on the accessibility profession and including that empathy element within conversations to help create a mindset and culture shift and, as I said, how to really think about getting people to think about accessibility differently. Because sometimes when you say, hey, we're here to talk about accessibility and the work that needs to be done for it, people think it's really overwhelming and more work to their already busy schedule and costs a lot of money. And some of that can feel true, but there are ways around those conversations to change the way people think about accessibility.

[00:01:43.49] Today's talk is specifically around digital accessibility. I know accessibility applies to the built environment, to inclusion, and culture, and there's a lot of different ways we can think about it. But I am specifically talking about digital accessibility, digital products. I also want to throw out the disclaimer, I am not here representing any current or past companies or anything else. I'm just here sharing information that I have learned through my work and my networking within the accessibility community, hopefully to have an impact on some of the stuff that you guys are doing.

[00:02:19.49] On the screen here, it's a little introduction slide about myself. I am a accessibility strategist and consultant. I have a certified professional and accessibility core competencies certification through the International Association of Accessibility Professionals. Fun fact-- three years ago, I almost passed the Web Accessibility Specialist exam. I missed it by one question. And no, I have not attempted to take the exam again for multiple reasons.

[00:02:50.07] But I like accessibility. I found this as a profession about seven or eight years ago. I love being here, and this is where I know I am supposed to be. So I love to have these conversations and share information with those of you in the community as well. There's also a link on the slide deck to my LinkedIn if you would like to connect. I'm always open to that.

[00:03:15.50] So before we get started, if you are able and willing, type into the chat what your favorite movie is. I'll give you guys a few seconds to put those answers in. And while you're doing that, the reason that I am asking is because when you think about what your favorite movie is and why, you have a why behind why you love that movie or why you think it's such a great movie. And I see there's a lot of engagement in the chat, so this is awesome-- Toy Story, Forrest Gump, Matrix, Grease, Napoleon Dynamite, Jurassic Park. Perfect! A lot of great answers.

[00:04:03.28] I am not able to read through all of the chat right now, but I'm hoping somebody out there also answered what is undoubtedly the very best movie ever made, which is The Princess Bride. If you haven't seen The Princess Bride, highly recommend you watch it. You might see over my shoulder I actually have a picture that I was gifted for the holidays from my family.

[00:04:27.74] Why is The Princess Bride amazing? Because it has everything, right? It's got princesses. It has sword fights. It has humor. It's got politics, action, adventure, ROUSes, Rodents Of Unusual Size. I live in South Florida. I can confirm that those do actually exist, right? So this movie has a little bit of everything.

[00:04:52.47] And the reason I love it so much is because when I saw it in the movie theater, I ended up running into my best friend in the lobby of the theater, and we were both with our families. And so because we're besties and we were nine years old, I was like, hey, can we sit up in the balcony? So we did. We watched the movie together. Super fun time.

[00:05:13.69] And then as we continued growing up, we would do sleepovers, and we would watch the movie then. So the movie, for me, has this great sense of memories and reasons for loving it and being able to share the funny quotes and the stories and be able to relate the things from it to a lot of conversations. So you may find through this presentation that I might drop a couple of movie quotes in here.

[00:05:39.59] And again, the reason I'm sharing this information is because it gives you a little bit of insight into me, knowing that I some really great 1980s movies, but also giving you that background of why it's important may intrigue you enough if you haven't seen it to say, what's an ROUS? I need to go find out about this thing and want to learn more. And at the end of the day, my goal within talking about accessibility is not to convert everybody to be an accessibility specialist or anything like that, but really just to be interested and really wanting to understand more. When I have these conversations, I really like to connect the conversation to what people are interested in and finding ways to give information that you may not have thought about before.

[00:06:33.10] So today's agenda, we're going to talk about understanding our audience, keeping it simple, making it personal, lead with empathy. And then, as the commentator said at the beginning, we will have time for questions. So as I go through, if you have any questions, please leave them in the Q&A, and the team will make sure that we get through all of those.

[00:06:58.34] So understand your audience. This slide starts off with the head of, "who are you talking to?" And it's really important to understand that different conversations will require

different approaches, right? So what is your goal? How much time do you have? And what does your audience know about accessibility?

[00:07:21.96] A big challenge that we face when you're establishing or growing an accessibility practice is changing the mindset, changing the culture, changing the way people in general approach accessibility. So you want to be considerate of what are the reasons? What is your goal? And how can you share that information? So if you're having a conversation with executive leaders, the way you're going to be sharing that information is probably different than if you're having a conversation with your peers, with departments that might be outside of yours. So let's say if you're in a product development department and you need to be talking to your design department or your engineering department, you're going to tailor those conversations differently.

[00:08:09.76] So if you're thinking about preparing a conversation at the executive level, typically in a business, big things that are important to them are what's your return on investment going to look like, how will improving or changing the work you're doing in accessibility have an impact on your market share, and most importantly, your client satisfaction, right? So how do you connect those business goals and your revenue choices to making it something that is personal to business leaders?

[00:08:43.94] So first things first is to start your conversations with the human connection, right? So we started this meeting with a fun icebreaker of sorts of what's your favorite movie? So pulling from my favorite movie, Inigo Montoya, who is one of the main characters, likes to greet people with, "Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." He was very straightforward of who I am, what I'm doing, here, what are we going to talk about today. Let's get going. I don't necessarily recommend you use those same words in a conversation, but the point is is that you have a way to connect with your people.

[00:09:25.73] Another couple of suggestions that don't have to do with death or killing fathers with swords is talk about something that they may relate to. One thing that is big in the United States is US football. I personally am not a big NFL fan, but I love sports. I love what sports can do for teams.

[00:09:47.08] And if you're talking about football, people have seen huddles on the football field, right? And those huddles actually originated from Gallaudet University, which is university for the deaf. And at Gallaudet, they did the huddle so they could sign their plays without the other team seeing what their play was going to be. And that is something that exists in all of football games now. And most of the football players are probably not deaf. They may have hearing disabilities, but the point is, is that maybe something people see on a daily basis when they're watching football, but they may not have thought about that connection.

[00:10:29.33] Another one is when you're having conversations about what may need to change in a product, don't jump in on standards, but talk about things that exist and how that already helps the people you're talking to. So when we're using keyboard shortcuts in our daily computing lives, such as Command-C or Command-X or Control Copy-Control-Paste, those

shortcuts exist for everybody. Some users rely on them to get their work done, but most people probably use them to get their work done.

[00:11:11.75] Another thing, just like we have today, we have closed captions. And I know that not everybody requires closed captions to stay up with the conversation. But many people prefer them, and they will use them because it helps them in the conversation. And these are some examples of accessibility accommodations that exist in products and are part of the work we are involved in every day that benefit everybody. So when you're starting these conversations, you can lead in with some of these ideas to help connect people, again, who may not understand or really think about accessibility on a day-to-day basis and get them to start thinking about accessibility differently.

[00:12:01.24] Another thing that you might want to talk about is your product itself. So again, focused on digital products, and our products are tailored to banking, right? In our banking products, we want to have all of our users be able to successfully log into their account so that they can get through and do their banking on their mobile device.

[00:12:27.12] What are the blockers that exist in this product, and what can we do to help remove those blockers to help our customers? Because if our customers cannot successfully log in or cannot navigate to their account information, then we're going to lose customers. And in a business, that is not the way that you want things to go.

[00:12:54.43] Oop, sorry. I went the wrong way. So next conversation is keeping it simple. I know in many business conversations and in a lot of our corporate conversations, there is a lot of jargon. There are a lot of acronyms. We used to call it popcorn at one of the companies, where you're like, wait, what does this mean? Everything just keeps popping up, and we don't know what people are saying.

[00:13:20.34] So my advice when it comes to keep it simple is to talk to me like I'm a kid. I sometimes act like a kid. And sometimes it just helps. Talk intentionally, use plain language, keep your graphics clean and clear, attempt an "if, then" approach, and avoid decision fatigue. So I'm going to break these down a little bit.

[00:13:43.86] Talking intentionally is one that I have had to practice myself because I know when I talk about accessibility, I can get super passionate, and I know that the speed at which I talk can increase. And as a side story, my niece was telling me a story about how she had to listen to an audiobook at 1.5 speed because the narrator was so slow, blah, blah, blah. And she was talking so fast. And I had to stop her. And I was like, sweetheart, you are talking at 1.5 speed.

[00:14:15.27] That passion can energize us. And that is a great thing. But you also want to slow down enough that your message can get across clearly. That leads into using plain language.

[00:14:32.36] I know that the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines can be a little technical to read, and you're trying to understand what do they mean. Plain language will help. And how can you break that information down? Going back to Princess Bride, because it's the

best movie ever, Vizzini often uses the word inconceivable. And in the movie, he uses it all the time. It's kind of his catchphrase.

[00:15:00.84] And at one point, Inigo Montoya says, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." And he's right, right? So you want to really tailor your message.

[00:15:13.08] Don't use those big words if they don't make sense, right? Don't go overboard and tell me that you're making a creamed nut butter and seasonal fruit compote spread on an artisan nine-grain bread, when what you really want to say is, I made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, right? Trying to over express yourself could make your message not get through and have a negative impact on what you're saying. So as much as you can, in any of your conversations, regardless of who your audience is, keep your message clean and clear and simple.

[00:15:49.66] Same goes with if you're using graphics. If you are able to keep those as simple and clear as possible, if you are using any sort of bar graph or any sort of chart that has different colors and different meaning, make sure that you label those in a way that has more than one way. You're not just using color to approach those. But also, don't have a bunch of them on the screen. Do one at a time and talk through what you're going through. Share your data in a clean and clear way.

[00:16:21.79] When you're talking about using an "if, then" approach, this goes back to presenting your data clearly. If we don't invest in accessibility, we risk losing this amount of market share or this client. You can also change that of, if we do remove these accessibility barriers, then we can improve the usability of our product this many, by this percentage, or we have the opportunity to gain X amount of market share. You won't be able to have any of these conversations if you haven't done the data and done the research and used all of your information yourself and invested with your team on that time. But your job is, as you're going through, to present this, to be confident in your presentation and have that data ready to go.

[00:17:13.88] And the last element on this slide is avoiding decision fatigue. So in *The Princess Bride*, Prince Humperdinck, who's quote unquote, "the bad guy," he says, "I've got my country's 500th anniversary to plan, my wedding to arrange, my wife to murder, and Guilder to frame for it. I'm swamped." There's a lot going on. All of us, all day, every day have a lot of things to work through, whether it's at work or at a personal life or combination.

[00:17:44.00] So when you're having a conversation, either at an executive level, at a peer level, if you're talking to a team, go in with what your challenges are and have recommendations to overcome those challenges. Lead with the recommendation that you think is the best approach, but understand that what you think is best may not be the decision that is decided upon and know that decisions you might take from A and B to make C, right?

[00:18:14.89] So your conversation piece is presenting your data, saying, this is what we can do, and this is how it will impact us positively or negatively. And you are supporting that data and explaining it in a way that makes people who don't sit in the accessibility profession and sit in accessibility standards day in and day out have an understanding of what this all means.

[00:18:47.79] Oh, sorry, it went the wrong way again. Please apologize. I switched from a PC to a Mac, so my mouse is going the wrong direction.

[00:18:57.35] Make it personal. Start with stories and not statistics. Connect with your business requirements. Use your experience to connect to your user goals. Personalize your data to emphasize its importance.

[00:19:14.72] The final quote on here is from Lainey Feingold, who is a lawyer within the accessibility community, and she's been involved in a lot of things. And her phrase is, "Be a dolphin, not a shark," meaning dolphins typically have a more positive, playful personality associated to them, whereas sharks kind of come in with this, I'm going to bite you, and I'm going to scare you. And that is not how you want to approach your conversations as you're growing your accessibility programs, right?

[00:19:46.89] So to dive into these, when you're thinking about connecting to your business requirements to something personal, do you have client testimonials or client complaints that you can share to demonstrate, to say, this is something in our product that our users are not able to traverse through, and we need to fix this? One example would be, as we were talking earlier, I cannot use my mobile device to log into my product. That's a huge blocker for some people. So you want to make sure your teams are aware of what the blocker is and give suggestions on how to overcome that.

[00:20:29.10] Another great suggestion is showing the issue. And if possible, and if you're comfortable with it, have somebody in the audience that you're speaking to go through the workflow. One example would be, can you use your keyboard to go from the home screen over to the Contact Us page, right?

[00:20:50.83] Not everybody is thinking about a way of navigation other than the way that they do their navigation. Keyboard navigation, in my experience, is one of those places where you can quickly show and start for demonstrating how to get through a workflow. When we say, hey, there's a keyboard navigation blocker, you're able to demonstrate that or have somebody else experience that to really understand what it is that's happening.

[00:21:23.49] When you're going through that exercise or you are talking through that exercise, don't jump in with standards like I just did. I just said 211 and keyboard blocker. That's not going to resonate with people who don't live in accessibility day in and day out.

[00:21:40.92] One great question is just asking them to do the workflow, then asking them, hey, do you know where you are on this page? Can you use that button? Can you type through that button? What happens if you use your spacebar on this menu? Can you navigate down with your arrows, right? Just kind of asking them questions as they're going through that workflow.

[00:22:04.29] The key here is that you're talking about your user experience and what people are experiencing, your real-time product. You're not bombarding your leaders with standards. Because honestly, that's not their focus, nor is it something that, going back to decision fatigue, you need to say, well, we need to focus on this standard and not that standard. Focus on your

user. Focus on what's personal to the company. And the company cares about the way that your clients are using the product.

[00:22:35.91] This is a way that you are using your knowledge and your experience to help share why accessibility is important, right? Once they've completed this task, you can say, you know what? You found out that you couldn't get to that Contact Us page because that button is not working. And our point is, is we need to fix that button so people can call us and tell us how awesome we are, right?

[00:23:00.45] So you're the expert. You're the one who's coming in with this data and this information. And it can be challenging to get others on board when, again, it's not their primary focus.

[00:23:17.56] This third piece here on personalizing data to emphasize its importance, when I worked in the EdTech industry, I supported a lot of different companies doing different products geared to the traditional K-12 or K-20 school systems here in the United States. Fortunately, I live very close to the elementary school where my son used to attend, so we were able to walk him to school every day. It was super fun, by the way, because who doesn't love a bunch of little kindergarten through fifth graders running around in chaos?

[00:23:55.64] There was one student at my son's school that communicated through an iPad that he wore around his neck, and he also had an adult who was his personal aide. And I know that this student relied on accessible communications in order to be able to get through his workday.

[00:24:14.43] So when I was in those EdTech meetings and having conversations around product, I would always think to myself and share with my clients, what is the work that we are doing that benefits that individual? I'm not thinking about just fixing this one piece. I'm thinking about that student who's going to log into the product that's on the laptop or on the iPad and need to be able to get through that work. So when you can personalize the work you're doing and think about how it applies to that experience, that will also help make that connection.

[00:24:57.53] Leading with empathy is probably one of the most challenging things in a communication because everybody has a different lived experience. And we need to acknowledge that and accept that and understand that not everybody's going to be having the same path. Not everybody has the same priority.

[00:25:19.64] So everyone's opinion matters. The quote on the slide says, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand. They listen with the intent to reply." And that's a quote from Stephen Covey. And as I mentioned, accessibility is not everyone's top priority. I know. It's very sad, but it's true. Again, everybody, every person has a lived experience that is unique to them, and everyone has a right to be heard.

[00:25:48.37] So when we're talking about how do we get the accessibility to be a priority, your goal is to figure out what is the common bond that you can share with your leaders or share with your team to understand what they are trying to achieve, show that their feelings matter so that you can make that impact. That is your goal. Your goal is not to make accessibility the top

priority. Because in reality, it won't be the top priority. It's a hugely important thing, but your goal is to be there to share the importance and help make people understand why the need is there to do the investment, to do the work, to do the training, to do all of the things, along with the other priorities that are going to be naturally competing within a business.

[00:26:40.88] Everyone does have a different lived experience, and it is unique to them. But there are common threads across us as humans. One example is that many of us have aging parents. And even when you're talking in a leadership meeting where some of the people may be older than you or they may be younger than you, pretty much everybody has adults in their lives who are older than they are and aren't necessarily as tech savvy. And they may have challenges with the mobile apps that come naturally to many of us.

[00:27:18.15] That's not the first language of people who were born in the early to the early mid-1900s, not the late 1900s. Let's be clear. I know from my personal experience, when my parents were around, they struggled with the apps for grocery shopping, for banking. And what it turned into was they had to go to the grocery store. Almost every time I would hear my mom say, oh, my goodness, we got the wonky cart with the wheel, and it took forever. And the lines were so long, and I wish I could just order my groceries online.

[00:27:56.19] Well, when we're building products, what can we do to help make the experience accessible and easier for our aging parents? What can we do to help people understand how to pick up a mobile app, how to easily find what they're looking for, navigate it in the way that works best for them? Zooming in is a huge one. You guys can see that I wear glasses. I do have some pretty awesome progressive lenses, so I do have some readers built in. And I was joking with my friends a few weeks ago that even with that, I had to increase the font size on my phone.

[00:28:38.59] To my knowledge, I don't have a huge vision impairment. I think it's just general old age, but the ability to have the phone screen larger and not lose content is huge. Think about what happens when you have a product where maybe the mobile app wasn't built that way, and when you do zoom it in, you're going to lose content. You want to avoid that. That's your ultimate end goal within the product. So how do we connect that conversation piece in these meetings with our leaders?

[00:29:13.64] Everyone has a right to be heard. And as I've mentioned a few times, it is a well-known fact that businesses have a bunch of competing priorities. And budget is always top of mind, and does this cost more? What is this going to look like? How do we do this without making it harder?

[00:29:32.81] You will receive pushback. You will get tired and frustrated. You as an individual also have the right to be heard. So when you're going into these meetings, make your case, present your data, be that resource, that expert resource, and accept that you are probably not going to be able to change the world overnight-- also sad. I know. I've been trying, but it doesn't work that way.

[00:29:58.70] It takes a long time to make the changes. And every little step you make will eventually have this huge impact, where one day it's going to be like, oh, my goodness, this thing

that a few months ago, nobody was really thinking about and everybody was saying was so hard, has now become a part of our day to day. And you, having that expertise, that experience to go in and knowledge to go in and say, this is why is going to eventually get to your program to the next level. It's going to grow within your company. It's going to grow you professionally. You're going to grow your network inside your company and out.

[00:30:41.54] And my best advice to you is keep going. Be patient. Understand that it will take time, but keep doing the hard work that you're doing. As you're going through this, keep your conversation simple, make your conversations personal, and lead those conversations with empathy and make sure that you're there to hear what people have to say and to have yourself be heard. And with that, we will turn it back over to you, Jaclyn, if there are questions that had come through that I can answer.

[00:31:21.54] JACLYN LAZZARI: Hi. Just popping back on. Thank you, Erin, for the presentation. Yes, we do have some questions. So let's go ahead and dive right into those. So our first question comes from an attendee. And they asked, what are your strategies for measuring the success of accessibility improvements? And do you have any tidbits on how to start with this kind of thing?

[00:31:45.87] ERIN EVANS: Yeah. So I think one of the best strategies is collecting as much data as you can. And the data can come in a variety of ways. So one company I've worked for, the data was legitimately how many people are working with the title of accessibility in their title, and understanding that those small group of individuals cannot be in charge of accessibility throughout the organization, right? Accessibility belongs to everybody.

[00:32:19.33] So in that instance, you're not measuring by the title, but you're measuring by the number of individuals that have awareness that are being trained. So maybe you're investing in a training program, and you're starting with maybe your UX team or you're starting with your engineering team or your product development team. And there are different ways that you can track that growth by how many people went through a training program.

[00:32:49.30] Another way to measure your data could be through the number of audits that a product or a program has gone through to say, you know what? When we started this audit, we had 300 accessibility bugs. We then spent six months, and we invested the time and learning on how to remediate these bugs. And we had another audit done, and we're down to 100 bugs.

[00:33:12.65] So again, both of those you can see have a time span attached to them, right? Nothing happened overnight. But there are ways, depending on what is important to your company or where you guys are in your accessibility program, different ideas on tracking data. My suggestion is always look, find something that is quantitative, that you can say, this was the number on X date, and now this is the number on Y date.

[00:33:43.15] JACLYN LAZZARI: Great. Thanks, Erin. Another attendee asked, when someone asks the "how many users" question, how do you handle that conversation without shouting, without that initial feeling of frustration and, oh, no, this conversation's getting away?

[00:34:02.39] ERIN EVANS: Yeah, actually, somebody else answered that for me in a meeting a couple of weeks ago. And the answer is accessibility is personal. Statistically, it's one in four users, one in four people have some sort of a disability. So that is a statistic of disability around the world. But that's not necessarily including those that are undisclosed or undiagnosed, and it doesn't really matter if you have a disability.

[00:34:32.65] Accessibility is about the person, right? It's about each individual user being able to get through whatever the product is in the way that works best for them. Going back to the different options that we even have on this webinar, we have a sign language interpreter. We have closed captions. We have just audio presentation. You can sit and watch the video as well.

[00:34:57.69] Different people may have different preferences, and you may not have a disability. But it doesn't matter because you have the choice. So my answer is accessibility is personal, and it belongs to the individual.

[00:35:14.41] JACLYN LAZZARI: Great. Thanks, Erin. Another attendee asks-- and it's a bit of a longer question, but I'll get through it. So they said, I work for a large public university that still, six months later, has not sent any communications about the expectations around the DOJ ruling. So the question is, what advice do you have for getting smaller departments under a huge umbrella to comply and to take action when that request isn't really coming from the top?

[00:35:50.62] ERIN EVANS: That is a great question. And I would say it's sometimes accessibility is a grassroots operation. So if you're in a large university and that message hasn't come from the top down, how can you spread that message from the bottom up? So if you are in - I'm not as familiar with my universities, but let's say you're in the School of Education, and then there's the School of Business, and then there's the School of Science and Engineering.

[00:36:22.76] How can you collaborate with your colleagues in those different schools to say, this is work that we need to do? Maybe again, going into those conversations with, let's talk about making our PowerPoint presentations that you're going to post online on the portal to be accessible. Understand what that need is and how to do that work, and go to your colleagues and say, here's a template, or here's work we need to do. How can we work collaboratively to make sure that we're all doing this?

[00:36:56.43] And I think this, again, goes back to understanding that it's not always going to be easy, and you will receive pushback. But if there are ways without that top-down directive that you can still be talking about accessibility and all of the meetings you attend, share presentations that are already accessible, do the work to show that it maybe doesn't take that long to add alt text or tag headings, and be able to say, it took me five extra minutes to do this, or hey, I just revamped everything to this online template. I'm going to share it out to these other schools to help foster an accessibility culture.

[00:37:42.10] And the more that you can have those conversations, you're going to find another colleague in another department who's going to agree with you and be like, yes, finally somebody else is talking about this too. And as you're fostering that network and community,

there will be a natural progression of that work happening. I've seen it before, and I think you guys have an opportunity there. That's my opinion.

[00:38:09.58] JACLYN LAZZARI: And kind of a follow-up question, because they mentioned the DOJ ruling, when organizations think of accessibility as a cost rather than an opportunity, what are some ways you can work to shift their mindset without having to solely rely on legal obligations and public pressure?

[00:38:33.37] ERIN EVANS: That's a really good question also. So I'm not a lawyer. Nothing I say is legal advice. Unfortunately, a lot of people will not put any focus on accessibility until you say, we could get sued, or there is a lawsuit, right? In the education world, with the change in the DOJ ruling in Title II, the requirements that are there, as a public institution, you are required to do these things now. So I don't know what the sanctions are if you don't comply. I'm sorry. I'm not as up on my Title II some of my colleagues now that I'm out of the EdTech world.

[00:39:16.23] But your requirement is now a legal requirement. It's always been a legal requirement for the past 30-plus years to be ADA compliant. And it's still a push, right? So I'm not a proponent of we're going to threaten legal action. But I think sometimes having that conversation of, this is legal, these are the sanctions that we will come to, but then again, going back to it's the right thing to do, and this is one place where we can start, right?

[00:39:49.62] Maybe when you're having that conversation, think about what is-- I'm going to use the "easy win," quote unquote, right? Is it maybe adding alt text to the images in your presentation? Is it tagging your PDFs correctly? Is it using HTML websites instead of Word documents for sharing presentations? There's got to be something out there that can be a quick way that you can shift, and that small shift will eventually turn into a larger shift.

[00:40:23.57] JACLYN LAZZARI: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for that, Erin. And then I noticed someone in the chat a little earlier had said something like, they've been pushing for changes for almost a decade. And finally, a couple of years ago, that change started to manifest at their university. So from that came a question, how do you navigate the challenge of sustaining accessibility momentum in your organization, after all that hard work and passion that you talked about, that leads to that initial buy-in? Yeah, how do you keep that going?

[00:41:07.01] ERIN EVANS: First of all, congratulations. That is always a win, right? That right there is a win to share. And what I would say from how do you keep that momentum going is accessibility is an ongoing journey, right? It's not a hey, I did my testing. I built this first version of this software to be compliant, and boom, I'm done. The standards change, right?

[00:41:33.87] Just a year ago, the WCAG 2.2 became the standard in the industry. And places are starting to start to adopt 2.2 and ask about 2.2. The EAA comes into play in June of 2025, right? So it's now a law over in Europe to have accessible materials and accessible technologies. And it's always evolving.

[00:41:59.83] So what I would say is as you have seen that shift and that growth, and it's now a process, a sustainable process, what's the next step that you can take? Because there's always

something that can be done better. Is it maybe taking the processes that you've done and taking a look at those and seeing if there's efficiencies that can be driven from the work you've already put into play? Gather feedback from the people who have now made accessibility a part of their day-to-day work and ask them, what were your biggest challenges, or what would you like to see different?

[00:42:41.34] And just continue to iterate on the work you're doing and continue to innovate on the work you're doing and thinking about ways to make that next version of your software even better. Or what is it when you're going to go to your next class? And how can you take the learnings that you've done and just continue to share conversations and bring it from a place of strictly complying with the legal to bringing it more into the personal. And how has the work that you have changed had a positive impact on your school, on your campus, on your customers, on your client, on your own employees?

[00:43:22.06] There's so much more than just being legally compliant. And I think a lot of people start at that legal compliance. So now you have an opportunity to grow the internal operations and to grow, how is it impacting your users, and get more user feedback. And because you've gotten to a place where you've been able to make this a consistent thing, now go and see where else can you improve or what else can you take those learnings and move them to another area.

[00:43:54.43] JACLYN LAZZARI: Great. Thanks, Erin. And I want to offer maybe a scenario. Let's say someone is working for a growing organization that has expanded to doing work outside of the US. So in scaling their accessibility program, do you have any tips for managing the complexity of the Global Accessibility needs across various regions? Where would they begin when it's on an even wider scale than just, say, the US?

[00:44:30.43] ERIN EVANS: Yeah. So I typically start with some of those trusted accessibility websites. So W3C, which is the standards, always has a lot of great information. WebAIM always has a lot of great information. And honestly, when I first started coming into the community, I used LinkedIn a lot. There are so many amazing resources, individuals and companies, on LinkedIn that have that information and can point you in the right direction.

[00:45:04.01] There's no one-stop shop for, this is all of the stuff in the whole wide world on accessibility. But as one person cannot do everything and cannot stay up on top of everything, also think of ways to delegate some of that information. Maybe you could work with somebody in your marketing department or work with somebody in the sales department to say, hey, can you keep an eye on this and see if you're hearing any of these changes there, right?

[00:45:30.28] So especially when you're in a smaller space, you need to use your resources differently. But when you're looking for what is the best, right resource, I would recommend starting with any government-- US has a Section 508 website for the US government. Look on international websites. Obviously in Europe, there are different governments. But I know UK.gov has information. And stay connected within the accessibility, social media community. Because, again, the resources and companies are sharing that information a lot.

[00:46:12.23] JACLYN LAZZARI: Great. Thank you for that, Erin. And then we have another, an anonymous attendee question. And they are thinking about the responsibility and who the responsibility of accessibility should fall under. And so they ask, do you have any thoughts on whether accessibility should fall under DEI initiatives in an organization?

[00:46:38.27] ERIN EVANS: So I think it depends on your organization and what your organization goals are and how your organization is structured. At the end of the day, I'm a huge proponent of accessibility being a part of a DEI initiative. I know that that's not always how different corporations or universities are set up.

[00:47:00.47] The work of accessibility belongs to everybody, but it has to be coordinated somewhere. In my opinion, it has to be coordinated somewhere. I have seen it coordinated through like a digital platform team, the team that is responsible for that base platform that all of your content or products are going to live on. I've seen it in a product or a marketing place because you want to be able to share that information in an accessible manner.

[00:47:32.82] What I have found to be the most successful is if you have individuals who are running a program, regardless of where they sit, that understand the standards from both a technical and a nontechnical perspective, have project management skills, or project managers-- not one person, absolutely not one person. And as being one person in the past, it is extremely hard to be one person and do it all-- so again, managing your resources and working whatever way makes the most sense for your organization.

[00:48:06.45] And if it does, if you are able to try to get it as a part of a DEI initiative, I hugely applaud that because there is no inclusion without accessibility. But I also know that there are separations on DEI versus accessibility versus usability. So my recommendation is whatever works best for your organization, but really think about the skill sets of the individuals and what you need within your program that fits best for the work you're trying to do.

[00:48:45.10] JACLYN LAZZARI: Absolutely. And it's great that you mentioned the challenges and your firsthand experience of being a team of one. An attendee asked, do you have any tips on building the business case for scaling an accessibility team of one to more?

[00:49:04.99] ERIN EVANS: Aside from burnout and saying, I can't do this anymore, which that's a little bit of a joke. There was a great-- sorry, side note. There was a great axe-con talk, I think a year and a half ago by Shell Little that was talking about burnout in accessibility profession. But what I would say is, going back to what we were talking about earlier about building up with data, sometimes you do have to start as that team of one because you have to start somewhere, right?

[00:49:32.03] And that individual is collecting information on standards, collecting what is the status of our products, and where are the big accessibility gaps. What is a common accessibility gap across all of the stuff that we're working on in our business? So you're going to start by collecting that data. And then what you can do is say you know what? I need somebody on this team to help manage this data in a data management system like a Jira or Confluence or

something like that so that I can then continue to go out and make sure that we've collected all of the products that are in use and focusing there.

[00:50:19.83] It might be that you need support, an executive sponsor, who's somebody that can be that supporter for you to understand one person's not doing this, and then again, explaining where the gaps in what you have assessed so far, what resources can either be brought in, or where can we pull from resources that already exist to help fill some of these gaps? And inevitably, as you get there, you're going to find more gaps, right?

[00:50:50.79] So it's a lot like peeling the onion one layer at a time, right? You're going to just get started, and then you're going to get to a point where, OK, I need help because this is not sustainable. And I think, in my experiences, businesses see that. And especially now that there have been advances in some of the laws and some of the things that are coming to take place, accessibility has gained a lot of traction and a lot of conversations in the last few years. So I think you're at a place now where a lot of companies or institutions are willing to listen to those conversations more than they may have been a few years ago.

[00:51:28.13] JACLYN LAZZARI: Yeah, absolutely. And you mentioned being a one-person team, there can be burnout, of course, and kind of struggle with the sustainability of seeing the long-term plan and keeping things in motion versus what do we need to do today? What are the priorities today? So what have you done, in your experience? How do you balance that immediate need for accessibility versus keeping your eye on the prize for that long-term growth and scalability for the team and for the culture?

[00:52:08.33] ERIN EVANS: So I definitely have a very sarcastic sense of humor, and I say that to say that I think a sense of humor is really important, as is a sense of balance. And it can be really hard to find that. And I'm not just talking work-life balance. I mean, work-work balance, right? So you just made a good point, Jaclyn, the immediate "what's on fire today" versus "I need to do this work so that in three months not everything is on fire."

[00:52:35.91] What I have found for me is I try to keep one day a week-- typically it's Fridays-- with very light to no meetings. And I use that time to catch up on either the fires that couldn't be put out. But typically I'm able to use some of that time to look forward and see, OK, this is the plan for what we need to have done by the end of this calendar year. So what steps need to be put into place to have those conversations now?

[00:53:07.08] Some days are better than others. I think we can all agree with that. There's a lot of blood, sweat, and tears that goes into the work of accessibility. And I am definitely one that might have shed more tears than sweat or blood. But for me, I also think about the big picture, understanding that one individual is not going to change the entire corporation or a large university, right? You know you're going to need help.

[00:53:35.16] Continue to advocate for yourself when it gets overwhelming and say, listen, I am at a breaking point because of X, Y, Z. I need to have-- what meetings can I not attend, so I can focus on my work? And lean into the support of your manager and your peers. Because I think as much as we all want to be that person that's going to go in and change everything in one day, it is

impossible to do by yourself. So I also have found having a community, whether it's within the company I'm at or also within the social network and my friends and family, that kind of a balance.

[00:54:13.07] Keep yourself in check and understand that it's going to take time. And when you reach that point of burnout, take a break. Take a deep breath. Walk away from your computer. Take a day off, whatever you need to do to reset so that when you come back, you're ready to keep going.

[00:54:32.41] JACLYN LAZZARI: Absolutely love that, take time to reset. And we are coming up on time here. But in closing and thinking about people who leave this webinar and who maybe want to continue learning more, are there any resources in person or virtual accessibility conferences that you love that you think are great for the attendee today who may want to take some time in the coming months or year to learn more and seek the community for networking and things like that?

[00:55:11.24] ERIN EVANS: Yeah, absolutely. So none of this is sponsored, but I will personally say what I have found as some great resources in conferences. CSUN, which is kind of the premier global conference, that happens in March. And that's out in Anaheim. I'm not sure if they'll do a virtual path this year, but that one is phenomenal.

[00:55:33.89] The company Deque, they host axe-con. I believe that axe-con is in February. That is a free, virtual conference. It's a two- or three-day conference. WebAIM does a free conference. I think it was in September, but they might have recordings. I don't know. AccessU, which is sponsored by Knowbility, which is a nonprofit accessibility organization, they have a conference in May, and it's in Texas. But I know that it has had a virtual path in the past.

[00:56:06.02] And we just finished it, and I have not yet been able to attend, but the IAAP sponsors M-Enabling. That was, I think, last week or two weeks ago, and that was in Washington, DC. I know that one did have a virtual path. Those are some of the great conferences. I've been to some other conferences as well. Accessing Higher Ground is a great one for those of you in the higher education space. That happens in Denver in November, and they do have a virtual path.

[00:56:33.98] All of that to say-- I just rattled off a bunch, and I'm sorry I talked really fast, Jaclyn. I was trying not to. A lot of those particular conferences may have recordings that you can catch from previous presentations. Those websites as main websites will have some really good information to help you find other places to go. And then like I said, as you're connecting in the accessibility community, you will find some top voices in the accessibility community that always share amazing resources.

[00:57:09.45] JACLYN LAZZARI: Absolutely. Well, thank you, Erin. And thank you for the presentation and for bearing with us with all those wonderful questions. Thank you to our attendees for those. So we are out of time for today. With that said, I will say goodbye. And thanks again, everyone, for joining today. Thank you again, Erin.