

Creating a Sustainable Digital Accessibility Plan - Event Transcript

Opening

Lori

Hi everyone! Thank you for being here today. Welcome to Accessibility.com's October event Creating a Sustainable Digital Accessibility Plan. My name is Lori. I'm the Director of Conferences here at Accessibility.com and we are super excited to have you here with us today to hear from our amazing panelists of speakers. We did record this event yesterday in order to accommodate everyone's schedules, so you be watching a replay of it today or the first time it's been aired live.

So that means that some of the panelists may actually be here on the call so or on the webinar. So if you want to go ahead and maybe type into comments any questions that you have. If they're available, they'll answer those questions. If you have specific questions for a specific panelist, please use the Q&A section and type in the name of the person that you wish to have your question directed to.

And I'll be happy to get that question over to them. And when they get an answer, get it back to you. So that will be the game rules for today. Our panelists today are, wow, So amazing. They are. Scott Ready, Johnathan Thurston, Greg Pollock, and Joe Devon. Our event today is sponsored by the Bureau of Internet Accessibility, Verbit, Clusiv, and AccessibilityWorks. Without our very generous sponsors, we would not be able to put these events on complimentary for you. As I mentioned, the event was recorded, so it will be available for viewing much quicker than normal today. As soon as I get everything all set and done at the end of today's presentation, I'll go ahead and email you out the replay so that you can watch that again.

Some of the panelists maybe on today's event. So go ahead and type some questions that you might have into the chat. And if they're around, they'll be happy to answer those. If you have a specific question for a specific panelist, if you could put that into the Q&A section, that would be greatly appreciated. I will get those off to them and I will get the answer back to you as soon as I have it.

Again, we appreciate your time and we really, really hope you enjoy today's very informative presentation on Creating a Sustainable Digital Accessibility Plan. Thank you.

Introductions

Scott Ready

Hi, everybody, and welcome to Creating a Sustainable Digital Accessibility Plan. We have a great panel this morning and I'm really excited to share with you the insights, the wisdom, the experience of this panel to build accessibility plans, being able to grow accessibility within their organizations that they have been a part of. My name is Scott Reddy. I'm the Founder and CEO of Elevate Access.

Elevate Access is a company that works with organizations in driving accessibility within their organization and other initiatives. So let's take just a couple of minutes and go around the virtual room and do some introductions. So I'm going to start with Greg. Would you start us off?

Greg Pollock via Interpreter Sharon Ploeger

Sure. Thank you, Scott. It's great to be here with all of you. For those of you who don't know who I am, my name is Greg Pollock. I've spent most of my career in corporate America. I was seven years in the chemical industry. And then about five years in the banking industry. And now I work for Communication Services for the Deaf.

Throughout my career, I was responsible for building diversity and inclusion strategies for Dow Chemical Company. I was responsible for building an enterprise wide enterprise-wide accessibility officer for PNC Bank, and now I am Vice President of Business Development with Communication Services for the Deaf. And I am responsible for trying to help companies, government agencies make their customer experience more seamless for deaf and hard of hearing people throughout the country.

Scott Ready

Thank you, Greg. Jonathan?

Jonathan Thurston

Hi everyone. My name is Johnathan Thurston. I help companies become accessible. That's what I've been focusing on for the last part of my career. I also have ADHD. Formerly, I was head of accessibility at Pearson, then Atlassian. Now I'm the Director of Digital Accessibility for Walmart's Accessibility Center of Excellence. All of these companies are so different. And so the approach is different as well.

But there are certain themes that carry through. Certain philosophies, certain approaches. And I'm looking forward to talking about those today.

Scott Ready

Fantastic. Thank you, Jonathan. And Joe?

Joe Devon

Thanks, Scott. I'm Joe Devon. I am Co-Founder of Global Accessibility Awareness Day, which is also known as GAAD or G-A-A-D. People tell me I need to explain those initials. And I am now Chair of the GAAD Foundation. And in the past I was a programmer. That's how I started, just as an engineer and I built the consultancy to about 100 people over a period of a decade.

So I've got to see things from different perspectives. And one of the cool things is that GAAD has gone pretty viral every year. So now I'm guessing it's probably been in about 50% of all Fortune 500 companies. So I often get invited to speak with the heads of accessibility for different organizations and sort of see it from from a different perspective.

As CEO, basically the way that I built these programs out was hire somebody great to do the work and provide that that backing that that is needed. So I'm really curious to see how the other panelists approach this and sort of respond to it from a different perspective.

Scott Ready

Fantastic. Thank you so much, Joe. Jonathan, let's get started with you and everybody jump in as we're discussing here. What's the first step? When you step foot into a company and you are charged with the responsibility of building a sustainable accessibility plan, where do you start?

Jonathan Thurston

That is such a great question. And that question comes up all the time because it's very difficult to determine where do you start. So first of all, as I mentioned before, every company is different, right? Every company functions different. The culture is different. The people are working. The ways of working are different. So you can't just take a template and overlay it on top of a company and expect to be successful.

I would advocate that the first thing you should do is listen and observe and practice design thinking, which is very similar to inclusive design. Look for the bright spots because inevitably you will uncover bright spots. There are people there that often that are passionate about accessibility and doing the extra work and going against the grain, sometimes, to promote accessibility.

Look for those bright spots because you already have a team to start working with right there. If you can organize them, bring them together. But listen, observe. There's so many things. When I first went corporate, because before I went corporate, I used to be a college professor for ten years. So very, very, very different. Right? When I first went corporate, the first thing I learned was that if I assume something, I was wrong.

It's a very basic lesson, but it's something that's really important for all of us never to forget. Right? There's different ways to frame that. Right? But I'm very careful to not try to make assumptions, to listen, to understand the lay of the land, what's been done so far, and that can help open up areas of new opportunities to explore as well.

But the first thing is to listen, and that helps you to know that plan plan towards generating executive support, which is essential for your success.

Greg Pollock via Intrepreter Sharon Ploeger

So this is Greg. I'd like to expand a little bit on what Jonathan was talking about. You know, his point about listening is so crucial and, you know, listening can happen in multiple ways. Everyone needs to have a baseline for themselves. What is your company's baseline? What if you are, let's say, Netflix? Your baseline is going to be completely different from National Geographic because you have different expertise, you have different people involved.

You have different types of priorities involved in your organization. So when you look at the digital accessibility strategies, you need to really figure out where are you underperforming? Where are you doing really well? Where are those bright spots? So secondly, you need to pull in the right people to help you build that. And I think that's where having focus groups are essential to ensure that you have a panel of different types of people with disabilities, people who can... you can see how they're interacting with the web or on a web, on a digital device or a mobile device or an iPad.

Also, to ensure the time that's spent in resources at, you know, is really helping with those digital resources. Having that expertise that's coming in, looking through everything and giving you a report out of where some of the challenges have been and allows you to make the case and justification for including an organization like you, yours to have more resources, to repair and fill some of those gaps that are there.

Again, I think setting the baseline is actually the crucial first step and... first start and map out what your game plan is. That is where you get started, I think.

Scott Ready

I love those comments. And yeah, the design thinking, you know, setting your baseline, you know, listening, making sure that you identify those bright spots that are already existent there. Those are just, you know, that those are gold nuggets right there to to start with. Joe, I want to ask you, as a CEO... Oftentimes the start begins before you have a person or a team in place.

Why? Why would you be interested as a CEO to pursue pursue being more accessible?

Joe Devon

You're essentially asking the business case here. And the business case is actually a slam dunk, but it's taken me years to find this out. And the reason it's a slam dunk or the reason it's hard, I'd say, to get people to see it is because when people think of accessibility, they just associate it with disability and then in their mind they go right to somebody is blind or someone is deaf or maybe in a wheelchair and they don't have the holistic picture, they don't include the hidden disability. And recently I did a little bit of research into the demographics and at least in the United States, but this is very similar numbers elsewhere, you're looking at millennials, the oldest millennials is 42 now. And so as the millennials turn to their forties in your forties, you absolutely are going to need affordances.

You're going to need accessibility. You're going to want the fonts to be larger. You're going to want to have a good color contrast. You're much more likely to turn on the closed captions if you're watching some kind of video or movie. And everybody has been focused on the millennial and on Gen Z and half of the US population is above 40 and in particular you've got the 40 to 65 year old demographic.

There's a quarter of the population and they have more money and spend more money than any other cohort. So right there, if you're not focused on that group and you are not if your products are not accessible and if you're internal, the internal apps that you use and procedures you use internally in your company, you are missing a huge part of the population.

So that's where I start in terms of discussing the the business case. But I want to add a little bit to what Jonathan and Greg said, because, yes, I approached it perhaps as CEO, but I also tried to get other organizations to to begin. And the place, it really depends where they are. The reason that Jonathan and Greg talked so much about listening is you have to assess where you are.

And I think that a lot of the conversation around in Accessibility maturity model has to begin with an analysis of where are you? And so what does that mean? Where are you? That means how are you engaging with your employees? Do you have any employee resource groups? How are your digital products? How are how is your website? When you're hiring people, do you have an accessible hiring process?

Because if you don't, you're not going to be able to hire people with disabilities and then you're going to really be nowhere because you need to have that diverse group of people coming into your organization. So that that's really where I begin.

Scott Ready

Such good wisdom. You know, all three of you have mentioned that this is a cross company initiative. It's not just one department that you can focus on, but it covers throughout the entire company. So so my next question here is how do you gain the the C-level support? How do you go to your Cs and say this is what needs to happen? From, you know, have it be Operations to Chief Revenue Officer, to Chief Human Officer to whatever?

How do you gain their support and in that, what happens if there's a change in the C-level? How do you regain that and support? And I'm just going to throw that out for whoever wants to jump in.

Greg Pollock via Interpreter Sharon Ploeger

This is Greg speaking. I guess I'll start I'm going to simplify this for you. Show me 500 CEOs that will say diversity is important to them and then I'll give you 499 that will say yes. But being able to say what's important is not the same as being able to actually do the action. You need them to say yes and yeah, they're going to say, sure, we want our company to be accessible and they will.

So start with that question and asking them and then say, what does that look like? Get them to say, Yes, this is important. Okay, great. It's important. Well, then you have to go into the how and you're going to have to point to some of their internal resources that say, you know, you are responsible for making sure this is accessible and you're meeting the standards and go to each one of these and doing the gap assessment.

So that's a simple way of doing it. Now, of course, anybody who works in corporate America knows that there's a lot of red tape and there's a lot of politics and there's a lot of arm twisting that goes on. So while the people in the C-suite may say, yes, they have to become your leaders and your champions and they have to be willing to go back into the rooms of their departments and say accessibility is important for this company.

And here's why I want this and here's why I want this to be part of this scope of work. And then the next step is to go to your senior leaders and get their buy in as well. It's simple. You just say, okay, look, this person said, we need to make this whatever accessible. So what are you doing in your part to make your part accessible for this project?

I will tell you, nobody wants to look like they are underperforming to their peers. So that's where that comes in and that's where the data comes in. And it's so important. The measurement of that internal assessment that we've just talked about where, you know, you throw it out on the table, you put out the gantlet and say, look, here are our gaps, fill them.

And if it's under their particular purview and area, they'll be a little more motivated to try and fill those gaps. So I really think that buy in comes down to two things. Demonstrating visually to the public that they want to be the company of choice. Because if you're not going to do it, your competitors will. So the economy results are going to prove that you should be there.

Now, the second part of this is all of us as employees want to leave our mark somewhere on our companies that we work with. And I've noticed in my own journey, when people realized the impact of accessibility, the innovation potential of accessibility, and how accessibility is truly a game changer, you know, for what's an area that's already saturated with multiple companies doing the same thing, they got very excited about that. Seeing the possibilities that accessibility could make them stand out and therefore they can help them leave their mark.

So basically it's that crowd mentality where people all want to get together and help and create change that really mediates some of what I've seen. Read between the lines. But it doesn't always happen unless you have the C-suites buy in and it doesn't happen unless you have a top down commitment to accessibility. So if you can't get the C-levels to buy in, it's going to make your challenge much more difficult.

And I can tell you from my experience with my two previous corporate companies, the answer is almost never no. They don't say no, I don't want to be accessible. You know, accessibility is always something that people are interested. They always say, yes, but the man but the mental bandwidth to consider. Okay, I've said yes. Now what does that really mean?

It's not natural. You have to bring it up again and again. You have to make it a topic, a topic of interest. You have to have that leaders that want to jump in and be like, okay, how do we remedy this? What you know, where are those gaps so that we can become proactive in creating the best practices and built in best practices for our organization.

Jonathan Thurston

Well-said. Greg, this is Jonathan really resonating with what you said. Greg In my experience, accessibility programs need three main things to be successful. They need the work to be prioritized, which goes to the C-suite buy in, the teams need bandwidth to actually work on it. You can't just prioritize it and not give them space to be successful and work on it.

And then the third thing is embedding subject matter expertise with those various different teams. You need these three components to be successful. It needs to be prioritized. You have time to work on it and you need subject matter experts. Well, how do you get all those? The way you get out those is for the business case, like Greg was talking about.

How do you get buy in? How do you build a successful business case with different C-suite personalities? Right? Because that's important. Just like we're all diverse on this panel, all C-suite members are also very different as well. Our job is to recruit them. To recruit them into the cause. And how do you recruit somebody? You basically understand where they're coming from and try to position the message to something, to frame it to something that they care about.

If that executive's concerned about revenue and opportunity, you can frame a business case that way. And not for nothing, but the accessibility market is a \$13 trillion market. As Joe was inferring before. It's not just people with disabilities, but it's their family members as well. And this is a global market. That's a massive, massive opportunity. And risk if you don't embrace that.

Right? So once you get that prioritization, once you get that buy in from the business case, then you can start to set the priority. And it's really important to reset the accessibility priority. Accessibility should be treated equally as a quality metric to things like security and performance and privacy. And it's often not. Right? Often security is front and center.

We all get why we need security. But by the way, accessibility is security for folks with disabilities. Just saying. That aside, to build a successful business case allows us to reposition accessibility as a top quality metric and I would say not more, not less, but equal to the all the other top priorities. To do that, to set that priority, you need a business case. To build a successful business case, you need to see where they're coming from, get to know them, understand what they... what their top priorities are themselves, and build that business case that can easily recruit them into the cause.

Now we say easy, that this is not easy. As Greg said, everyone, for the most part, of course, we want to do this. Right? But putting our money where our mouth is is something different. That's more than just money. It's resources, it's prioritization, it's culture, it's budget. We can get into more of that as well.

Joe Devon

This is Joe I love the way Jonathan brought up the connection to security, because one of the things I did in the past was I did a sort of a blog series where I interviewed different heads of accessibility at different organizations to learn what they did, what were their secrets.

And one secret that I really love that was at one org was that they sort of partnered with the security team and took some of their best practices. So, for example, if you're a large organization, how do you keep track that a new initiative gets that accessibility or that security audit and make sure that it is accessible? And so all of that is in the procurement process.

You have to make sure that you have a good procurement process. And this one organization, they required that anything new that came in to the org, it had to have a subdomain underneath the parent domain. And in order to do that, you had to have somebody turn on that sub domain and therefore they had to go through a process where it was checked to make sure that it was accessible, that it was that the security and all of that was done. So any place where you've got a choke point is a really good avenue for you to ensure that your initiatives are being carried out. And then in terms of getting buy in, it's this is pretty interesting because it's a political game is the reality and every organization is different. It might be super important to get the CEOs buying in some organizations and in other organizations, the CEOs disconnected and it's really hard for an organization for a CEO to really decide this is the direction I want to take. Some CEOs are better at it than others.

And very often you're going to have different power centers, depending how old the organization is. Is it a new one? Is it a legacy organization? You might have a new CEO come in. Does that CEO really have more power than somebody that the COO or somebody that's built this business from a small org to a large org. They've got all of their political friends all over the organization.

You have to find your champions throughout the organization. And so I'll end with one thing, you've got to have people with disabilities in the organization and you need to have them engaged because that when you get that request from somebody that that needs it or that cares about the user in that way, it's a lot harder for people to say no then if it's theoretical, if that makes sense.

Scott Ready

It does. Very much so. This is Scott. What what's been interesting to watch in my experience has been that when companies understand this and they grasp this, they can be very successful. When they don't, they tend to revert back to a project mentality and they they address this by projects rather than truly a sustainable plan and approach to accessibility. And you know what what we've all been saying here, it does take a person that has multiple skill sets in order to lead this type of initiative. You've got to be a leader to begin with. You've got to have your expertise in accessibility. You've also got to have expertise in change management. You you've got to be a change agent yourself in bringing this about.

And like Jonathan said, you know, being able to see the value for the the person or the team that you're you're presenting this to, to get that buy in, you also have to be an internal trusted advisor. They have to trust that what you're bringing is value. And it's truly going to be for the benefit of all. And so talking about taking this from the initial what do you do in the beginning of buying, getting buy in, setting up the the starting points here.

People get excited at the beginning. I call it the honeymoon phase. But if it's going to be sustainable, how are we going to keep that momentum going? How are we going to keep it so that we're starting to build on those milestones and that it doesn't revert to just a project, but it's really more of a journey? And so how do you keep that momentum going?

Jonathan Thurston

This is Jonathan. It is a journey. Accessibility is a journey, and it's also progress over perfection. Because one thing I learned a long time ago, studying design at university is nothing is perfect. I mean, you can't you can't achieve perfection. It doesn't quite exist right? So when we spend when we spend a lot of time, three years trying to develop something perfect, by the time we're ready to roll it out, it's going to the environment is going to be different.

Everything will have changed, right? So how do we maintain that momentum? That's the important thing. Progress is the key. We want to continue to create progress. Right? And measure progress. How do you measure progress with the program? So, Scott, I would say two parts are the answer to your question. One is an executive leadership council. C-suite Council of executives that are accountable for accessibility.

They are your executive champions, right? And part of that role, once they become a member of this, steer co, whatever you want to call it, committee, is to help champion accessibility within

their specific areas. And I would recommend a holistic steer co. We want people from marketing, from design, from engineering, from people from all over the company to represent their various areas.

Right? Which are going to have different considerations around accessibility. The program then can set up a recording mechanism to regularly report their progress to this executive team. Right? You can also escalate the roadblocks as well. If you need help getting around or moving a roadblock, this is the team to go to, right? And if they're accountable for accessibility, they'll take it personally as part of their job as well.

So this combination of a solid program, a holistic program, that's not just about, oh, we're going to fix all the bugs on an application. That's part of a program. It's part of a part of a program. But setting up a program that tracks progress, that helps measure and set baselines, that allows you to report that progress or lack thereof to your executive team keeps the momentum going.

Right. And another quick strategy, too, is to get teams to be competitive. You can build dashboards to track the progress of all these different products and experiences and put them all side by side and right next to each other. This is healthy competition. It's often generated from such a scenario where every team wants to be the top team, right?

That's a fun way to get engagement and healthy, friendly competition that works very synergistically to the program and the executive C-suite scenario.

Joe Devon

This is Joe. That was great. Oh, did you want to go? Greg? You can go if you want.

Greg Pollock via Intrepreter Sharon Ploeger

I was just going to add briefly the story of when I first started as the accessibility officer. One of the first conversations I had was a person who was blind and she was telling me that... we're a bank and you'd have to imagine security is obviously very serious and all of our IT People watched the... the movie Mission Impossible.

Right? All of them are looking at that. And they see the, you know, USB in the laptop scenarios where he's stealing millions of dollars worth of stuff. So I will tell you, it can't happen in real life, just FYI. Okay. Anyway so because of security protocols at PNC Bank, every time someone would bring in an accommodation to a company to plug something in to try to get it to work, they would have to go through IT to get them to fix the device, to allow it to be compatible and make it work with our systems.

Well, the fix only lasts until the next update of the software. So when there's another security update, which as we know, happens often, the device now no longer works and it's broken. And the person now has to go and reach out to IT to get access. And this happens repeatedly. And it's not sustainable. And it's not an enjoyable experience for this particular employee.

Greg Pollock via Intrepreter Sharon Ploeger

So I came into IT and I talked with the leadership team and I brought up how accessibility is a constant dance with security. And sometimes they don't always go hand in hand, security and accessibility. And that's part of the challenge that we have to resolve. So the first person to stand up and say, no, no, we want to be a part of this and make this work was the Chief Security Officer who actually went on to become the executive sponsor for the disability ERG at PNC Bank.

And honestly, it was a beautiful thing. Because we had an executive person who had a direct relationship and a direct ability to work with what the problem was and understood the urgency for the community. To have, yes, okay. We are security focused, we're a bank, but we need to make it accessible. And so from that point on, we started looking for ways to flag different types of technologies that had to be updated in parallel with the security updates that were happening.

So all of the updates happened simultaneously. So it was a collaboration and it became a beautiful partnership. When prior to that they were the problem child of accessibility was the IT. And I'm sharing this story because as a human, as people, you know, we have the best intentions. We create things and we create experiences with the best of intentions.

But often you need to pull in the right people to have them in the room to be able to problem solve and make sure that all of those people are there together so that everybody has input in the conversation of what are the challenges that we are in facing and how do you mitigate that? And I loved what Jonathan, what Jonathan had said, you know, having a disability in a workplace and, you know, my disability well, okay, not being accommodated.

If I'm not being accommodated, then I don't feel secure. The information, my personal private data is at risk just as much as my identity is when I'm not getting the needs met that I need to do my job. So really, I just want to emphasize that any time we try to build and create a business case, it's important not just to identify who the allies are, but also looking for some of our pain points for them to be involved in the conversation so that they can help navigate the red tape that we all know is there.

Scott Ready

Joe, you were going to add something?

Joe Devon

Yeah. In order to break through in this space, the ideal world is that you have everybody bought in. The C-suite, the middle layer, bottom up, top down, everybody in the organization. The reality is it's never like that. And the only way to really make sure that you have some headway no matter what, is the mission of the GAAD Foundation.

We purposely did this. We we decided that the mission should be to change the culture of digital product development to include accessibility as a core value. And by doing that, it doesn't really matter in a way because you can sit here and not get the C-suite to to back it up. But if you have the front end developer, if you are the designer or creative design system that builds in accessibility, if the coders have that as part of their culture, they will dictate what they're going to do.

Nobody's going to tell them, don't. Nobody's going to say, Oh, don't, don't put accessibility into the products you're building. It's just part of their process. And that that I think is is the place where, you know, if you can you should put some focus in your organization and gather the champions that you have around you in order to instill that in the culture, in your processes and then just just force people to stop you if they have a problem with it.

Scott Ready

So that that is so much the the sustainability. I call it infusing accessibility into the culture. And when you infuse that in then individuals start owning it. And there's nothing more rewarding than to hear people say, Oh, but wait a minute, is that accessible? And they're the ones that are starting to push it, and it's starting to be a cultural shift that takes place within the organization.

That's when you know this is working. Because it's not just us or our team or our executive sponsor that's saying it. It's the people throughout the organization that are starting to say, woah, wait a minute, yeah, we're going down this. Have we looked at accessibility yet in this component? I love that.

Jonathan Thurston

Yeah.

This is Jonathan again. True sign of progress is when other people are advocating the message. It's not just it's not just your immediate team. It's starting to spread and that's how you scale with impact. In fact, that is truly one of the best ways to scale across an organization is that's the signal that you're being successful is when other folks start to evangelize and recruit themselves for accessibility.

It's a beautiful thing. It takes some work to get there sometimes.

Scott Ready

Guys, I could I could literally sit here all day and talk about this with you guys with the experience and the expertise that you have. But as we are looking at wrapping this up, could each of you share just one success story that you saw that from the beginning and you saw the results of this? And it was one of those things that you went, yes, finally. You know, I've seen this actually come to fruition and could you just share one story? I know you've got a list up.

Joe Devon

This is Joe. Sure, I'll start. I'd say that now we're definitely seeing a lot more of the C-suite officially take a position. The Valuable 500 Caroline Casey or Carsey. I'm not sure I pronounce her last name, but she really did an amazing job getting these CEOs take a pledge for the Valuable 500. But back in the day there was very little support from the C-suite.

And there was one client that sort of came in from a compliance angle and had to do a lot of compliance work. And right from the get go, I came in and I said, Look, you can sit here and you can do this from a compliance perspective, but you're going to get into trouble over and over again if you don't approach this the right way.

And first. All right, sure. Let's solve the problem, the immediate problems you have. Let's fix the compliance issues. But then you need you really need to build this into your organization. And over a period of a couple of years, we got to the point where the the COO of the organization gathered the entire company and it was a large one.

And then we did a training for them. But he said, I want everybody to know that I am behind this because then they're going to take it a lot more seriously. So I'm announcing it personally. I'm sending an email to the entire organization and I'm going to kick off the training personally and let people know this is a mission that we care about and we are going to change and bring accessibility into the forefront.

And that's what happened in the organization. So that was a big win for my perspective.

Scott Ready

Fantastic.

Jonathan Thurston

That's awesome.

I can share. There's so many different types of wins, so many different wins in the space. I'm going to share a quick story around a procurement win. Procurement is part of the holistic approach to accessibility. And what I mean by procurement is baking accessibility requirements into your procurement process.

If you are onboard new experiences or technology, you should be considering accessibility as well. And the story will sort of share well. So I used to work at Pearson, the largest publisher in the world. Most of their production is increasingly done offshore by different a group of what they call core vendors, right? Working on all the production for all the higher ed coursework. These core vendors, maybe about five of them, would produce all the content and materials to be embedded into these courses and deliver them as inaccessible.

So then we would have to take those and send them to another company to remediate and fix everything. It's a little bit silly, right? We're paying double to get the content delivered to our teams. And so as a business decision, and I pointed this to leadership to help them inform this decision, we decided to update our procurement language to require accessibility for all the deliverables from these vendors.

We set up a QA team to test everything that was delivered and we would send it back and wouldn't pay for it until it was aligned with our standards, The Pearson Guidelines for Accessibility. Of course there was pushback at the beginning, but we helped support those vendors as well, assigning them or inviting them with different companies that can help them become accessibility leaders. To help them understand accessibility, help them scale accessibility across their own organizations.

Right? And gave them feedback with all those QA steps. So we had to come in and we wouldn't just reject it. We would say we're rejecting it because of this. You didn't put alt descriptions in or whatever. Right? It was a little rough at the beginning. But after a while, these vendors, five vendors, became very proficient in accessibility. It saved us a ton of money and effort.

But guess what? And this is the moral of the story. Not only did it help Pearson become a leader in accessibility. Guess what? The same vendors work for all the other publishers too. All the other publishers, their competition, their colleagues in the market. So as a by product, a value add to our efforts to enforce and encourage accessibility with our core vendors, all the other publishers benefited as well.

And this is how accessibility can truly scale globally, right? So I encourage any company to consider procurement and accessibility to be one and the same, and that's a good reason why.

Scott Ready

That's so true. You know, a rising tide lifts all ships.

Jonathan Thurston

That's right.

Scott Ready

Exactly it.

Jonathan Thurston

Yeah.

Greg Pollock via Intrepreter Sharon Ploeger

So this is Greg speaking, and I echo exactly what both Joe and Jonathan have already stated. Because we are on the topic of digital accessibility, the one thing that I will share is if a technology, if a technical project is done right, it starts with the requirement stage and there and then you list out all of the requirements for any technologies that need to be developed by the IT team web development, any IT. based type project. You always start with that. The goal should be to get the question of accessibility in each requirement stage of the project. Have the team ask is this accessible? That's it. And if they can't answer that question, then they need to figure out how to meet to make that answer a yes.

Oftentimes, in my own experience, what I would do is have our design thinking team or our innovation team prepared to address some of those challenges if they were to occur. So if somebody had a project and they couldn't figure out how to make this project accessible, then we would have the design thinking approach to the project help to remedy that using a simple term kind of, you know, like John mentioned, listen. That's what you have to do. Pull in people with disabilities into a room regarding this project and asking them, how could we make this accessible?

What do we need to solve? What is the product? What is the solution? And have those people with disability walk through all of the pain points of the project talking about their experience and their interaction with it. And more often than not, people leave these meetings feeling more motivated, more energized, ready to address some of the challenges. But that can only happen if everybody is willing to be a committed whole to accessibility and the requirements of accessibility.

It's not something that happens in a vacuum. It doesn't just apply to digital things. It applies to everything. Engineering, travel, digital, etc. You know, it needs to be a new incentive in thinking about disability. How do you in your organization, build the accessibility in the early stages of every project that you do? It is something for every organization to explore. For PNC, they had the change management organization. That is who set the precedent for their for their PMs across the board and how your organization chooses to do it may be different, but I would emphasize and figure out how best to build it in in the early stages.

Scott Ready

Excellent.

Excellent. Well, everybody, unfortunately, we do have to come to an end. But there's been so much good information, so many good, I call them gold nuggets, that you walk away from what's been shared today. If I were to summarize and bring this into a next step for any organization that's watching this, this webinar right now, it would be that find an individual, find a person that is experienced in being able to do this for your organization that is going to be able to take your organization and the uniqueness of your organization, be able to listen, be able to identify the best strategy and the best approach that's going to work for your organization.

It, we've talked about a lot of things. It might sound very, very complicated and very a lot to take into consideration, which there is. But with the right person, they can go through and identify exactly what needs to happen for your organization. So with that, Greg, Jonathan, Joe, thank you for sharing your wisdom and insight and experiences. Sharon, thank you for being a part of the team and providing excellent interpreting.

Scott Ready

And until we meet again, Happy Roads ahead. Thank you.

Jonathan Thurston

Onward and upward.

Closing

Lori

Thank you, Scott, Jonathan, Greg and Joe for such a great informative discussion amongst all of you on how to Create a Sustainable Digital Accessibility Plan. I'd also like to take a moment to thank Sharon for being here to be an ASL interpreter.

The time was very much appreciated and I cannot thank you enough, as you know, for being here to do that today. So again, thank you to today's sponsors, Bureau of Internet Accessibility, Verbit, Clusiv and AccessibilityWorks. We are in the final stages of putting together next year's event lineup, and as soon as we have that ready, you'll be able to find that on our website under [Accessibility.com/events](https://www.accessibility.com/events).

You'll receive an email from me shortly and how to access the recording replay of today's presentation to watch at your convenience. And you can also always find our past event at [Accessibility.com/events](https://www.accessibility.com/events). Scroll down to past events and you can watch at your convenience any of the previous events that we've held over the past few years.

Thank you guys all so much for being here. We appreciate you and we hope to see you again soon.