Design for Accessibility

Opening

Lori Litz

Hi everyone! And welcome to day one of Accessibility.com's Design, Develop, and Deploy for Accessibility series. We are so excited to have you here today. We've had an overwhelming response to this series, so we're really, really looking forward to your thoughts and feedback and what you think about what we've got going on for the next three days. My name is Lori.

I'm the Director of Conferences at Accessibility.com. If you have any questions or technical difficulties during any of this, please don't hesitate to email me at Lori L-O-R-I at accessibility.com. During the next three days as we prevent- ah- present, these panel discussions on design, develop, and deploy for accessibility, feel free to use the chat to have conversations amongst yourselves and you know, obviously keep them respectful.

And we've had a lot of good comments and engaging conversations on our last few events in the chat, and I look forward to that again today and tomorrow and Thursday. If you have any questions for the panelists, you can go ahead and type those into the Q&A. If they do not get your question answered today, I will forward to them all of the questions and we'll see if we can get those answered and back out to you. Today's event is recorded and will be available on demand some time this evening. You will receive an email from me with instructions on how to access the recording and the transcript and you'll be able to take it from there. Each day of this week, our entire series is hosted by our friend Mike Paciello over at WEBAble.

So you will see his smiling face every day during these events. Today's panel for Design includes Reginé Gilbert, Kate Kalcevich, and David Sloan. These are some really big experts in the field who've been doing this for quite a while and have some great experience on all of accessibility, but specifically how to design for accessibility. So, without further ado, I'm going to pass it off to Mike, Reginé, Kate, and David.

Panel Discussion

Mike Paciello

Well, welcome, everyone, to the first part of what is sure to be a very engaging session about design, development, and deployment, where accessibility is concerned. And actually today is the first part in our three part series of design, development and deployment for Accessibility.com. We have some distinguished guests with us. And why don't we get to know them first of all?

So, Kate, why don't you introduce yourself and give us a little bit of your background.

Kate Kalcevich

Thanks, Mike. My name is Kate Kalcevich. I am the Head of Accessibility Innovation at Fable. And Fable is a company that believes in involving people with disability, inaccessibility, whether that's through user research or as part of our training. My background in accessibility goes back over two decades. I worked for a government, the Ontario government, and they had legislation around accessibility and that's where I first learned about it.

But on top of that, I also live with a disability. So I wear hearing aids in both of my ears. So I bring, you know, my long background in accessibility and my own personal experiences and then all the work that Fable does with different communities of assistive technology users to any conversation that I have about accessibility.

Mike Paciello

Awesome. And we're really glad to have you today. You've already touched on a couple of key attributes, key pieces to what I think will be an engaging discussion this afternoon. Next to Kate is David Sloan from TPGi. David want to give us a little bit of background? No, no plugs for our relationship and our friendship.

David Sloan

Thanks, Mike. Yes, my name is David Slaon. I'm UX Practice Manager at TPGi, a digital accessibility consultancy. I've been with the company ten years. Mike hired me on May 1st, 2013 and just had my 10th anniversary days ago. So as part of my role at TPGi, I manage a whole range of services spreading across a quite of a continuum of, of, of activities that focus on user experience, everything from user research, usability evaluation, through to JAWS scripting, the kind of ultimate 1 to 1 support method for helping JAWS users overcome their user experience issues with software they're using.

Previous to TPGi, I worked for about 14 years, Dundee University in Scotland and did a range of activities all focused on accessibility. I was a researcher at PhD focusing on web accessibility evaluation methods. I set up the university's first internal consultancy providing support on accessibility, and we also did some external consultancy for a range of organizations, and I did a bit of teaching as well, trying to inject accessibility throughout the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum.

I offer computing science degrees as well as doing some teaching for staff development, professional development activities. So prior to that, like a lot of people came into accessibility, I started off doing something completely different. I used to work for a publishing company as a cartographer, so my kind of childhood passion was drawing maps and that kind of jumped from that into accessibility just quite unexpectedly.

But I'm very glad it did.

Mike Paciello

Awesome. Thanks, David. Good to see you again.

I'm really looking forward to it. Reginè, welcome to our our special show here. Can you give us a little bit of of of your background and your passion for usability and accessibility?

Reginè Gilbert
Yeah. Thank you. So my name's Reginè Gilbert. I am James Weldon Johnson Professor at New York University and the Tandon School of Engineering and the Integrated Design and Media Program. I am part of the Ability Project, the Ability Project bridges technology and disability, and I am happy to say that I get to teach assistive tech classes. I co-teach.

So I co-teach a class called Looking Forward with Gus Chalkias. And we teach students about the assistive tech that blind and low vision folks use. Gus is blind. So we talk oftentimes about designing with and not designing for. Our students always work with or typically work with a real life client. This past semester, they were working with the a school for students with disabilities.

Last year we worked with Twitter, our IP Twitter accessibility team. So we we do that. I also teach user experience design, and for the past few years, my students have been working on a project called NASA Soundscapes, which is looking to make Eclipse accessible to blind and low vision folks. So they've been contributing to UI/UX for that.

Mike Paciello
Excellent. Very good. Well, again, thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here with us this afternoon. So as you as you probably have have looked a little bit at the script and some of the questions that we're putting out here, the the notion of design for accessibility from my perspective starts literally right out of the box.

It's something that needs to be thought about in terms of team, in terms of of persona development, in terms of, as Reginè talked about, involving users with disabilities. But from your perspective, where does it start for you? Where where does design actually start? Does it start with the team? Does it start with the plan? Reginè, do you mind starting us off?

Reginè Gilbert
Yeah, I mean, so I worked in industry for a lot of years, but I've also been teaching now for the last four years here at NYU, and I the very first day of class, I start talking about accessibility... from the very beginning. And I think oftentimes when people join teams and I know this from my past experience, we don't talk about it.

We don't talk about it until it's too late. So I think having that entry point of we're starting this project. How are we making this project accessible needs to be a question that we start to ask as designers, because we don't oftentimes and I've seen it repeatedly.

Mike Paciello

Yeah. Excellent. Kate, with Fable, there's maybe a slightly different take on on the approach here, but can you expand a little bit more about your work there, how Fable integrates users with disabilities in the design process?

Kate Kalcevich
Yeah, so Fable gives people access to assistive technology users, whether that's for a prototype review, for a user interview, or any number of engagement you might have. So obviously that's a great starting point.

So as Reginè said, I really do think it's important to introduce the idea of accessibility very early on. And at Fable, we help enable that by giving people access to assistive technology users so that they can engage in the user research process, whether it's during generative research or usability testing and also talking to folks throughout the design and development process, which I think is really important.

But I do think a starting point, a good starting point, is executive support. Because whenever you're pursuing accessibility, if you don't have the budget, it's hard to get, you know, a vendor like Fable into your team. It's hard to get the visibility into the projects. It's hard to get inserted early enough in the projects to make a difference.

So I do think for many organizations, starting with finding that executive champion and getting them on board is a good place to start.

Mike Paciello
Excellent. Very good. And then I'm going to circle back to that very point, too. But David, how about from from your perspective? You know, obviously you've you have a team there at TPGi. How does this work for you and your team? How do you pull this... Where do you get started?

David Sloan
Yeah, it's a great question. I mean, I think the really important thing is to try and get to a point where accessibility is defined as a as a requirement for a project. You know, that's not it's something that's expected, whether it's from the sponsor, from the leadership support, that's that's that supporting development. This project is, as Kate said. That making sure that everyone knows that this is something that has to be delivered as part of the project, that the product that we're designing and building.

And in terms of where where design starts and where thinking about accessibility starts, for me, it's kind of almost a [inaudible]. You talked about the box, Mike,, and I thought I wondered if before the box has even been opened, you know, trying to think about what do we know about a problem space from the perspective of people with disabilities?

We're building this thing to solve some problem. Or be it a business school. What do we know about the current state from the perspective of people with disabilities? What problems do they encounter trying to complete tasks that this thing we're building is supposed to make easier? To

make possible? What can we what can we understand to help orient us in the right direction and to make sure that we have that perspective, that understanding that any assumptions we had about what we're trying to build and how we might make it accessible have been challenged from the real world perspective of people with disabilities.

So when we get involved in providing design support, it's often after something has been that we know what we're going to build and let's can you help us make it accessible? Well, let's take a step back ideally and see, can we can you define what you want to build with input from people with disabilities so that we we head off in the right direction right from the get go?

Mike Paciello
Yeah. You know, it's interesting, David, that my very first usability UX exercise when I was at Digital Equipment Corporation. a long, long, long time ago in the universe far away. The first thing we had to do is we were given a literal box. A literal cardboard box that was used for packing computers inside it. And the problem was it doesn't work.

It's too hard. And people are complaining about, you know, how to get things out and and all the complications associated with that. So what I think it's funny how we think about out of the box in that terminology phraseology, but literally that's how you get started. There's the problem. Right? And we get it. We get feedback from customers.

They're saying I can't get the computer out of the box. It's too difficult. How do we simplify that problem, that process? But now that also helps me to think about something that all of you kind of mentioned. And that is the notion of stakeholders, right? So who are your stakeholders? Who works with your teams? Who pushes the requirements? You know, to your to your point, David, to you kind of establish what this thing is that we're tackling and tackling in in how we're going to make it both usable and accessible to people with disabilities.

Reginè, can I start with you? Because you're in a large organization. NYU is no small university, right? So the environment there, I'm sure you've got a lot of stakeholders that are involved.

Reginè Gilbert
Yeah, I mean, it depends right on what I'm doing. So if if I am working with students and the students are working with clients, which is what I'm thinking of, oftentimes we will go to, for example, with this project where the students are working with the school. We went to the school so students can see the different types of assistive technologies that the students were using.

They have an apartment in the school where the students can learn how to navigate apartment, right? And how... and learn all these things. So my students are working on things they think will help the students or help the teachers, right? So it's good to know the context of the situation before you address the accessibility needs because it's going to be different each and every time.

If you're doing a presentation, for example, are you presenting something that is accessible? So many people do presentations and say that thing on the screen. Not everybody can see that thing on the screen. Can you describe it? You know, so I think looking at the context of the situation and then how can you apply the accessibility lens to the context of that situation is one way to approach it.

Mike Paciello
Excellent. Excellent. David, your thoughts?

David Sloan
Yeah, I guess when we're thinking about stakeholders, we often kind of focus on members of the product team, whether it's UX designers and researchers, developers. QA testers. But, you know, as we've already sort of agreed on in this conversation, the executive sponsorship comparison is ultimately funding the initiative to build this thing. We need to make sure they they are expecting accessibility as part of the product quality.

Then we need to include business analysts, people who are bringing those business requirements in and making sure again that accessibility is it's part of that. And the product manager, a project manager, the person that's kind of responsibility responsible for making sure that everyone on the project team knows their responsibilities and has what they need to meet those responsibilities.

When the product or project manager understands accessibility as something that is expected and something that needs to be delivered, then they can take that on board as something that they can then provide support to to other members of the of the product or project team, including the conversations with vendors and third parties who are also supporting the product development.

So, you know, I think sort of looking beyond the people that are traditionally tasked with accessibility to all those additional stakeholders is really critical.

Mike Paciello
Thank you. Kate, again from your perspective and again, Fable has a slightly different lens on on in the on, on the approach here, but you have stakeholders. So how are they involved? Who are they? And then how do you get them engaged in this, this process, the project?

Kate Kalcevich
Well, and actually we're more interested is the stakeholders of our customers. So as David said, there are expectations for accessibility and who's setting the expectation? So we work with companies that are sometimes research-led, sometimes design-led, sometimes product-led, sometimes engineering-led. And so the types of expectations that come from the different groups are going to be different.

Some will be focused on definition of done. Some will be focused on acceptance criteria. Some will be focused on usability. And some will be focused more on the research and understanding the needs and the pain points. And I think it's really important that accessibility is considered throughout all of those. But where it starts, I think, frames the conversation differently.

And it's important for groups who are leading accessibility to remember there are other stakeholders and you can't just look at accessibility with a single lens of, you know, product or engineering or design or research and... Never forgetting that your ultimate stakeholders are the users with disabilities. Right? And that's the part that I think many conversations don't include.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, I think that's such a great point, Kate. It kind of leads me to where where I was going with this conversation. So you've got a number of different stakeholders that come from various disciplines or as has been mentioned, upper level management, investors, marketing, sales, things along those lines. But often what I find is that out of the box getting to to think accessibility out of the box.

How do how have you been successful in getting you to really think about accessibility and to try to build that into the culture, the lifeblood of the organizations or your stakeholders that you're that you're working with? And again, Reginè, I want to just start with you because I, I know where NYU is, having worked with them for almost 25 years and in the past over a number of different projects, you've got an enormous institution there with with all kinds of things at stake.

How do you build that mindset in your stakeholders?

Reginè Gilbert
Well, I don't. [chuckles] That's not that's not my job. You know, my job is to teach my students about accessibility. So I can't speak for all of this particular institution. However, I think that there there is... We have a really good set of teams because we are huge. I mean, NYU is huge. But I would say within my department where we have the Ability project, we have a focus on technology and disability.

So we we do a lot of different programs throughout the year. We have workshops throughout the year that students can learn from. And we also encourage people to be more aware of designing with and not designing for. That is something that we practice and we preach it. Right? We don't just say, hey, do this thing because we bring people to the classroom.

We have professors who have disabilities. We bring in all kinds of people. So I think that it's really important to model, you know, what needs to be really out there a lot more. We need a lot more people with disabilities employed and and working.

Mike Paciello

Yeah, excellent. And and I'm going to argue back with you because I think some of the the things that you're doing, even from an instructive standpoint, are helping to build an institutionalized culture around accessibility and disabilities. Right? People are more empathic in their approach by the very work that that you're that you're doing and your team is doing.

So kudos to there. Kate, again, just to get following back. You, you mentioned right out of the box we need we involve our users. Our stakeholders are our users. But again, how do you how do you institutionalize? How do you build that culture with your clients and your stakeholders?

Kate Kalcevich
Well, I want to pull back to something that I've done throughout my career and that Reginè mentioned, which is employing people with disabilities. That actually has like the biggest impact on culture that I've seen. So whenever I'm building a team, whether I was, you know, in the past, building a user experience team to work on design and research, making sure I'm conscious of having a hiring process that really prioritized having diversity on that team, including people with disabilities. Same with Fable.

We employ a lot of people with disabilities on my team, on other teams. So it really shifts culture in a way that talking about culture can't, because to me, culture is the practices. It's what you do. And when you have people with disabilities, they bring an awareness of those practices to an organization. That said, when we're talking to other organizations, customers, it's really important to understand the ways that people work already.

I think a lot of accessibility specialists come in and they're like, this is the way it need to be done, without really understanding how a company works or a team is already doing things. And I think when you try to fit accessibility into existing practices, your chances of success, rather than trying to swim against against the current or to change the culture entirely, try to align, unless it's a really damaging culture in a company.

Of course, you know, there's not much you can do with that. But generally there are practices that are already happening and you want to adopt accessibility to fit into those practices.

Mike Paciello
David, I saw you shaking your head quite a bit there with with what Kate's says. So I imagine a lot of this is is really resonating with you.

David Sloan
Yeah. Yeah. And I think that the idea of incremental improvement rather than treating accessibility as something that requires a fundamental change. I think that's when I was thinking about how might I answer this question and how do we build a mindset? One thing that we can do is emphasize that accessibility achievements can be effective, can be successful.

Sure, examples of accessible products show examples of people with disabilities using tech to do stuff. And often accessibility is talked about in terms of failures of the Web Content

Accessibility Guidelines or nonconformance with the Americans with Disabilities Act or some other legal issue. It's all about the negative. You know, it's talked about in negative terms that we're failing where we're non-compliant.

We have all this work to do. It's hard. We've got to change. If we can show examples of where where accessibility interventions have been successful, then we show people who might be skeptical or might see this as a as a burden or something that's just too much to to think about. So we can be successful here. So even if it's just a small achievement, an incremental change, that we've we've worked with our design and development teams to ensure that keyboard accessibility is managed in an effective way.

That focus, visible focus indication is provided any time an active element receives keyboard focus. There's one thing that we can do and it's visible and demonstrable as improvement. So trying to focus on achievements and wins as opposed to only talking about how much work we've got to do, might help people move on from it. It's too hard. We're not going to do anything to, yeah, we got this and we're going to go a step further and keep on going. And improving.

Mike Paciello
I'm sure all of you probably know Sharon Rush. Sharon and I had this very lengthy dinnertime conversation with an entire team of folks down in Austin for the Web for All conference. But this was the very point that was made. So I'm glad you you you all keyed in on it. We have been so focused and maybe driven through the evolution of accessibility and disability and compliance, that everything seems this these days to be it's that. It's a cost of doing business. It's compliance. And someone's going to, you know, it's litigation. And when you start to layer all those things on top of one another, you sort of say, well... You could understand being a stakeholder or business where I don't want to do this. It's just going to cost me too much. It's, you know, the press is bad, the marketing around it is is all negative.

And we said it's time to flip that. It's literally time to flip that model to what you were saying, David. And that is let's start talking about the rewards. Even if they're small, incremental steps, the rewards of and the benefits of of creating whatever it is that we're creating or whatever we're teaching, so that more users and we're particularly focused on users with disabilities can be engaged, can be interactive, can be successful, could be progress, you can make progress in their own lives.

Focus on the progress. Focus on the rewards and the successes as opposed to the negative. So I, I really appreciate those those points. So let's let's step back a little bit more. I'm going to top to bottom instead of bottom, but bottom up, and focus a little bit on what I think the three of you are clearly experts in, and that is UX.

Now, David knows, Sarah, his wife, and I coined the phrase at TPG that was called Accessible UX, right? AUX. We used to talk about AUX all the time. But what is user experience? And in people with disabilities, what does that mean to you and how do you ensure that it becomes part of

the educational process for Reginè, for the development process for David, and for and for Kate, integral to it.

So Reginè, can you start us off in your... at your level?

Reginè Gilbert
Sure. As David was talking, I was listening in a a question I started to ask students is, when you hear the word disability, what do you think about? And what I want them to understand is their bias. Right? Their bias that they have with disability. Because I think the best designers I know know themselves very well, right? You have to have an understanding of yourself in order to to design for others and with others.

And so having that understanding where you come from before you start working with someone is is a good perspective to have, in my opinion. I think that design is a conversation and oftentimes people don't know how to have that conversation, especially with people with disabilities. I find it all the time. And so having that understanding of what do you think about disability in the first place and then how are you going to go about addressing it. Right?

How are you going to go about engaging the community? How are you going to talk to people? Do you know disability etiquette? Which people don't in general know these things, right? So I find that having that as a base to start is a good place to get an understanding of where you are and then get to understand the community because there's there's just a huge education gap, I find, with designers of just not even knowing where to start.

Yes, you can learn about color contrast. You can learn all these other things, but if you don't learn how to interact and if you don't yourself have a good understanding of where you stand with it, then I think you could, you know, fall into trouble and end up doing really bad design.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, that's really powerful, Reginè. And I really appreciate that. Kate? How about from you, from your perspective? And as an individual with a disability yourself?

Kate Kalcevich
Yeah, it's complicated because my disability is one of those invisible disabilities. So unless I disclose, even my hearing aids are so tiny that most people never notice them. I had so much speech therapy. So I live in this in-between world of people who have a visible disability and people who don't, and then people who don't identify. So but I want to get back to something that Reginè said about how important it is to break down those biases and have those conversations.

Because something I hear so often is people are afraid. People are afraid to talk to somebody with a disability. They're afraid to say the wrong thing. I know there are definitely, you know, differences of opinion as to what etiquette is or isn't. Do you say disabled person or person with a disability? I don't think any of that matters.

I think what matters is being willing to learn and being open to learning and getting past your fear. Because we're never really going to have accessibility without having those conversations. I don't think you can have accessibility without usability, which means you can't have it without UX and design. That focus on compliance is never going to get you all those things you want. Especially like companies think about accessibility. As David said, you know, something that's hard but challenging. But really it's an opportunity. It's an opportunity for this entire untapped market, this huge market share. And you don't get there without doing accessibility in the design phase.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, very fine. David

David Sloan
Yeah, I just want to echo everything that's gone before in terms of, you know, sort of addressing and defining what do we mean by user experience for, for people with disabilities. And ultimately it's the same as everyone else. I want to be able to do stuff with minimal effort. I want to be successful, whether it's play this game for hours on end or book this doctor appointment as quickly as I can and then move on to do something else. So one key thing to to encourage product teams are students Reginé know and other educators work with, is to understand that people are people, and people have needs, wants, opinions, preferences. Past experiences. Some people use assistive technology or have specific accessibility requirements on top of that, but ultimately people are people.

And the more we're aware of of those diverse perspectives, the more we can start to focus on goals and helping people be successful. And I also want to kind of try and re record something that we constantly use when we do training on encouraging our clients to to partner with people with disabilities throughout the design and development process.

And it's something that Wendy Chisholm said. Wendy used to work at W3C and Microsoft, and it was along the lines of I encourage you to feel when interacting with people with disabilities, because you will learn a bunch, you will learn what matters and what doesn't matter to people. You'll learn what barriers exist in the world that you need to design to, to, to remove or reduce.

And you'll learn about the barriers inside yourself and the things that that that you thought mattered that don't matter. So that was a real encouragement to for teams. Recognizing that there is that kind of sometimes apprehension about saying the wrong things in this case. But overwhelmingly it's going to be a positive experience and it also is an experience that you can capture and share with others and learn from that as well, as well as building those partnerships.

So I just love to hear stories of educational activities where students are working directly with with people with with from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, because it empowers

people, empowers designers of the future, to look more broadly beyond themselves and their role with their teammates.

Kate Kalcevich
If I could just add one point to that, if you don't mind? I would say that nothing worse from my perspective of living with a disability than being ignored. Right? No matter what you might say wrong or what you know you might be worried about, there's nothing worse than not having a conversation or being left alone and not being included. So if that helps anyone with their fear, I hope it does.

Mike Paciello
Yeah.

Reginè Gilbert
Yeah. And I'm just going to chime in. That is something that I say. I ask, you know, have you ever wanted to go somewhere and you couldn't get in? Have you ever wanted to do something and you couldn't do that thing? And then how did that make you feel? Because at the end of the day, these products that we make, these experiences that we make, leave us with a feeling. Either it's a good feeling or it's not.

It might be neutral. But, you know, at the end of the day, whatever it is that you create, you don't want to leave anybody out of that. So I second Kate on that.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, but, but Reginé, I wanted to touch on something David said. Do you find especially because as a, as a teacher that is promoting inclusion. right? Through, through, through your studies and through your instruction, do you find that individuals without disabilities have moments of awkwardness or or uneasiness when it comes to interacting with users with disabilities?

Reginè Gilbert
100%. So I'll give an example. So this past semester, my my research is on inclusion and accessibility in the extended reality space. So looking at augmented reality and virtual reality. So this semester, I tried to, I'm doing a proof of concept where I have small teams working with the co-designer with disabilities. So they're creating a concept around VR or AR.

And so I did a lesson on ableism, disability etiquette. I thought I did the proper prep, you know, for for the team. And then when they met with the person with disabilities, they were so didn't, like Kate was saying, they didn't want to say the wrong thing. So they ended up saying nothing. So it just ended up being this very awkward exchange.

I was watching it over Zoom going, oh no, and I didn't want to bust in because I wanted them to, you know, I wanted to see what they would do. And it just wasn't good. It wasn't good.

However, however, when they met in person, this was a few weeks ago, it went so great. And it maybe it was the like it might have been the online interaction, I'm not sure.

But when they met in person, the interaction was completely comfortable. In part because I think they had built a relationship since that first meeting. Right? So it does take that. It sometimes takes that. So it did improve. So that's my example of even though I provided what I thought was a good training, it ended up kind of being not great, but a good learning experience for me.

And ultimately I understand like it helps to build a relationship, especially in this co-design type of activity that we're doing.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, that's wonderful. That's a great, great experience because I'm sure that all of us have seen or been a part of the very scenario that that you watched and probably somewhat squirmishly. Right? You just would want to look at I want to jump in and help out and do something. But kind of falls into that, what we discussed about earlier, I think I can't remember it was a Kate or if it was Reginé, that said designing with not for. Right?

So it's the old, also the notion of, you know, people with disabilities say themselves will say nothing for us without us. It's just is that same this, that same same notion. But but what can we do now as professionals who in theory are supposed to understand users better? Right? Because of our background and our history and our professional background, how can we help these folks engage?

And when I say these folks, I mean, how do we help individuals with disabilities engage and become more relational with individuals... I forgot where I am. With or without, right? So with or without. Both of them, by the way, from my my experience, it's awkward on both sides. Talking on both sides, people are a little bit fearful.

People are afraid to say, I don't understand you. I don't understand why this is, you know, and they're afraid at that level. So what what can we do again, as designers, user research, user experience, and empathy being a key attribute of what we what we show, what we teach, what we learn. How do we how do we about doing that?

That's open. That's an open question. Go ahead. Don't be scared.

Kate Kalcevich
I can jump in here because I feel like this is the entire business model at Fable is making it easier for people to engage with people with disabilities, which traditionally has been a challenging thing. Especially if you're thinking about recruitment. Like how do I find people with disabilities? How do I, you know, pay them for their time, which we felt was really important because you're learning from somebody and so they should be compensated for that time.

So that idea of being able to do that and to have any one person on a design team just set up a meeting with a person with a disability over Zoom and be able to have a conversation and just like open that conversation the way you would with any conversation. You know, you can ask about the weather, you can ask where they're located.

You don't have to start off right away. Like this is what user researchers do. You do some icebreaking at the beginning. It is pretty much the same. You might want to ask them a bit about their assistive technology or their accessibility needs. I don't recommend that you ask about their disability specifically, but really the important part of it is how?

What are their needs because of their disability? And that's the part that, you know, you need to drill down into. And that's what helps unlock all this innovation and all of these wonderful things that come out of designing with accessibility in mind.

Mike Paciello
And thank you. David? Reginé?

David Sloan
Yeah, I would add to that and talk about how, how can we make the design or research activity more inclusive as well. You know, I've been thinking a bit about accessible prototyping. You know, we've talked about exploratory user research, which generally, you know, show me how you do things at the minute. Or let's just talk about this activity that we're going to design a product around.

Generally that's a conversation and obviously making sure that you converse, getting participants prepared. Communication channels will help ensure that that conversation goes well. But then when we get to prototyping, we often we often find that where we've got this visual mockup of a design, Oh, how can we get feedback from a screen reader user on this visual design?

Well, you can't that why? What are you what are you trying to find out? Then we can think about, well, how about let's try and gather feedback on a prototype that is accessible to a screen reader user. And I feel like we're starting to think more creatively about accessible prototyping formats that help us get feedback from disabled users early in the process. Like appropriate feedback for the design concepts that the prototype is demonstrating.

So I was looking at, it was back five years ago an article on A List Apart dot com, priority guides. It's a textual alternative to the wireframe. So it's effectively a whole load of structured text that allowed you to communicate the priority of text on a web page or other user interface screen. And obviously with text you can get feedback from screen reader user in terms of the order in which this text is presented appropriate? Would you rearrange things?

What should come first? What's the flow? There's an example of something that wasn't necessarily designed as an accessible prototype, but is something that you can get feedback

from, from from from screen reader users. Whereas if you use wireframes and kind of certain sketches of boxes of content, then trying to get feedback from people who are blind or low vision would have been much more challenging.

So I'm really encouraged to see an increase in sort of focus on accessible prototyping that allows us to gain valuable feedback and involve people with disabilities in the prototyping phase of the work. And when we've got accessible prototype methods, then the co-design process becomes easier as well because because people with disabilities can create those prototypes as well as evaluate them created by somebody else.

Kate Kalcevich
If I could expand on that before we jump on. Just because we're talking about prototyping methods. So in addition to doing like a textual prototype for screen reader users, we've done a process called Wizard of Oz. And you can look that up there, talks about it. So if you're working with somebody who uses alternative navigation and they can't click through or the prototype not clickable, that's another way to expand that prototype review to other groups of technology users.

Mike Paciello
Thank you. Reginé?

Reginè Gilbert
Now, and I'll add to that, because I think everything that David and Kate said I second, but another way I think of of testing is providing a scenario and having someone give you their feedback on that scenario. So in addition to like the text-based things, because I've had students in the past say I've built this thing in Figma and Sketch - and I can't actually put it, you know, give it to somebody who uses a screen reader because they're not screen reader friendly.

And I say, well, how would you describe that scenario? How would you walk them through? Could you ask them questions about that instead as an alternative? So there are other ways to make it work.

Mike Paciello
Excellent.

Reginè Gilbert
Because that's what we do in accessibility. We make it work.

Mike Paciello
That's right. That's right. Excellent. Well, I really appreciate the feedback from all three of you. I can't believe how fast time is gone by. But I did want to try and get one more statement from all three of you. So I guess the best way, if you have a single piece of advice to give your organization or to a client as it relates to accessibility and design, user experience, what's the message that you want to deliver?

So I'll start with Reginé first.

Reginè Gilbert
I would say please continue ongoing training around accessibility. It should be something that people are learning on a monthly basis. I actually know of an organization. They bring in a different guest speaker every month to talk about a different topic. And I think that is such an awesome plan because I think one of the things that I tell my students is never stop learning.

I, I know nothing. I know nothing. I'm continually learning and I have been doing this for a while. But I think that's so important to have that ongoing training for people within organizations.

Mike Paciello
Excellent. Very good. Thank you. Took a page out of Michelangelo's book. I'm still learning. Right? Kate, please.

Kate Kalcevich
I would say it's understanding what success looks like for you when it comes to accessibility. And that can be different depending on the organization's priorities. But I think deciding what, you know, the outcome of an accessibility program will be and then being able to work backwards from that, you know, you don't have to get to that outcome right away.

But if you don't know where you're actually going and how you're going to measure your progress, it can be hard to like justify this as an ongoing thing. So I do think folks need to think about metrics and thinking about, you know, how are we going to share this? Even if you're just doing one project, one feature. How do you share that with the rest of the organization and and how do you measure that progress?

I worked in an organization for 18 years where I wasn't thinking that way. And the amount of progress I made in 18 months in a different organization when I started thinking about what are my, you know, key progress indicators for accessibility? And how do I communicate that? And who do I communicate that to? And I made so much more progress.

But, you know, when I look back at that 18 years, I just think, oh, if I'd only known, you know? If I'd only known then what I know now. So that's what I'm trying to share with folks.

Mike Paciello
So thank you very much, Kate. Really appreciate it. David, How about yourself? One message.

David Sloan
One message. Wow. There are so many to choose from, but the one I'm going to choose is the importance of managing accessibility in the transition from one project phase to another. So we don't want accessibility to drop through a crack in the floor. Or accessibility efforts to be ignored or forgotten about. Or just there just to be a disconnect in communication.

So making sure that their accessibility is included in sign off phases in any kind of handover. And a specific example given that we're talking talking about accessibility and design today, is the power of annotations. If you're a visual or a UX designer and you're handing your designs to development, you need to give them information to help development implement those designs in an accessible way.

Don't leave them to guess what the alternative text is for that graphic you put there. Don't leave them to guess what the role or name of a button or control is that you've labeled with an icon. Give them information. Make sure that people have what they need to take on what you've what you've provided. We don't want accessibility to to to drop through those cracks.

We want it to be a continuous process. And that also means partnerships and working together rather than just kind of stopping and letting somebody take over.

Mike Paciello
Yeah, nicely stated, David. I think that's a very important point in in kind of what would Reginé and Kate have been talking about... it's the teaching. It's the training. It's it's getting people to really understand, you know, the entire lifecycle and accessibility usability is it fits in in every area.

David Sloan
Partnership and conversation.

Mike Paciello
Absolutely. Absolutely. 100%. Well Reginé, David, and Kate, thanks so much for being with us today. Again, for those in our audience, this is the first part of a three part series on design, development and deployment for accessibility. EDIT And we're sure that you're going to enjoy all of our guests, including our three distinguished guests today.

So thanks very much. It's Mike Paciello for Accessibility.com.

Closing

Lori Litz

Wow. David, I couldn't have asked for a better transition to tomorrow's event, Develop. But before we get to that, thank you. Mike, Reginé, Kate, and David for all of your wisdom you shared today and experiences. I know I learned a lot and I'm sure the audience did as well. Tonight, in the next few hours, you'll receive an email from me with instructions on how to access today's event on demand and the transcript so you can repeat some of the content that was shared today.

Share it with your colleagues, with friends, anyone that you think that this would be applicable to Tomorrow's event is Develop for Accessibility, where we bring Mike back and Gerard Cohen and Joe Dolson. So that'll be a great session. If you haven't registered, make sure to head out to accessibility.com/events and find the Develop for Accessibility session and register there.

I'll also include instructions in tonight's email on how to do that as well. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me Lori L-O-R-I at accessibility.com and I'll do my best if I can answer the question to get it answered. All of our events this week are leading up to GAAD, which is Global Accessibility Awareness Day, which is next Thursday, May 18th.

It's always the third Thursday of the month of May. So we're doing this in celebration of bringing accessibility awareness globally so that companies can think about how to design, develop, and deploy accessibility across their organization and to their customers. Join us again tomorrow. Same time. Probably a different link, but you should already have that. And if you don't, reach on out to me and I'll make sure that you get it.

We'll see you tomorrow and look for that email from me tonight with instructions on how to access the content from today's event on demand. Have a great rest of your day. We'll see you tomorrow.