Presentation Transcript: Creating an Accessible E-Commerce Experience

Presentation Title: 4 Keys to an Accessible Online Checkout Experience

Presentation Speaker: Samuel Proulx – Fable

Hello, everyone.

Great to be here at AccessibilityPlus today to talk to you all about the four keys to an accessible online checkout experience. But before we dive into that, who am I?

And why am I talking to you about this today? I'm Sam Proulx.

I am the accessibility evangelist here at Fable. And as part of that role, I get to talk not only about accessibility and about the importance of making products that are accessible, I also get to talk about the ways to do that and the importance of shifting accessibility left and of involving the voices of people with disabilities who use assistive technology into all of the parts of your product life cycle, from early prototyping and ideation, right through the research and development and testing stages, all the way through to deployment and UAT and QA and all of that stuff. And that's something that we do at Fable. We have our Fable Engage product that can help you involve the voices of people with disabilities into the products that you create and the digital experiences that you develop.

And we also have our Fable Upskill product that really helps you get customized training that involves the voices of people with disabilities because it's so important to do that.

And to make sure that diversity is involved in everything that you do in the digital experience and in product creation.

But that said, that is not quite what I'm here to talk about today, although if you are interested in that or after this presentation you're interested in hearing more, absolutely check out makeitfable.com to find out more about Fable and about what we do and about the things that I write about and talk about and think about on a daily basis.

When I'm not thinking about and talking about accessibility, I'm moderating our /r/blind, the subreddit where a whole lot of blind and visually impaired folks hang out on Reddit.

Great place to check out if you are interested in the kind of thoughts and feelings and general vibe of the online visually impaired community.

I myself am a lifetime screen reader user. I've been using assistive technology for as long as I can remember. Got a computer when I was very young and the advantages of being online and of using a computer and having a screen reader were so immediately apparent even as a very young child that I've been using the computer all day, every day for basically my entire life.

And so that sort of given me some thoughts and some insights, and from that side of things, as well as from my work here at Fable with other folks who are people with disabilities. And I'm gonna be sharing those today in this talk, which is around those four keys to an accessible online checkout experience.

Slightly confusingly, all four of the keys start with C not K, but they do all start with the same letter. So we can call them the four C's, if we would like.

And those four C's that we're gonna be covering are consistency, convenience, confidence, and customizability.

And one of the things that you might notice about the four keys or the four C's is that not only are they really critically important to creating an accessible online checkout experience that is easy and useful and joyful and pleasurable for those of us who are people with disabilities and who use assistive technology due to visual or other sensory or cognitive or physical challenges, but really integrating these four keys into your digital checkout experience will make your products better and more useful to everyone, whether they are a person with a disability or not.

Because one of the things about accessibility is that building more accessible and inclusive products means that not only are your products open to people with disabilities, but that they are better for everyone because building a more accessible and inclusive world means building not just a world that includes people with disabilities but it means building a world that is better for everyone no matter who you are or what your abilities are.

That said, let's jump into these keys and talk about the nuts and bolts and some of the practical aspects of why these four things are so critical when you're thinking about an online checkout experience, especially focused around accessibility to people with disabilities.

So let's start out with consistency.

Consistency is super important to people with disabilities. Myself, I've been using JAWS and NVDA, the two Windows screen readers, for many, many years now.

I have custom configurations set up, not only for the screen reader overall but I'll have it change configuration based on what app or website that I'm on so that I can have the quickest, easiest, most efficient experience.

And not only that, but once you use websites enough, it becomes muscle memory.

Knowing that to search, you have to press E twice and then Enter, and then you're in the search box because those are how the screen reader hotkeys work, all of that stuff. You very quickly develop muscle memory. And so instead of thinking about how to use the website and how to navigate the screen reader and how to kind of work around accessibility issues, I'm really thinking about what I want to buy and kind of the products and those things, which is what you want someone to be thinking about when they're using your checkout experience. Because when you have a consistent experience, you've reduced the cognitive load not just for people with disabilities, you've reduced the cognitive load for everyone.

And when somebody knows that that experience is consistent and is easy to use and is repeatable, it builds return visits, and it builds brand loyalty. And without that consistency, it's impossible to create the other keys to an accessible online checkout experience.

You know, the interesting thing about consistency is that so many of the major brands today that do great accessibility work and are very accessible and popular in the community of people with disabilities are still not perfect, because accessibility is a journey of constant iteration and improvement.

However, one of the keys to consistency is that when they are not perfect and I need to use a workaround, perhaps I need to do something a little bit different, perhaps something's not quite working the way I expect, when I go to any of these leading online retailers, I know that at least it's going to work the same way all the time.

So once I've figured it out, once I've figured out the best way for me to do it, once I've worked around a potential issue that may get fixed later on, at least I only have to do it once.

And it's the same over and over again at some of these major brands.

Whether I'm buying cat food or MP3 players or construction tools, I get to have that same checkout experience over and over and over again.

And that really builds into the next critical key around online accessibility, that being convenience.

There's multiple factors to be considered when it comes to convenience.

First of all, that consistency is a key factor in convenience because you're lowering cognitive load. You're creating an experience where if somebody does have to learn something unique, they only have to learn it a single time and it will work across everything you do.

But there are other important things to consider when you're building convenience.

One of the keys that creates a great accessible online experience, for me and for other people like me with disabilities, is making sure that you're accepting multiple online payment providers.

This is something that people don't think about as an accessibility benefit or an accessibility feature but it really, really is.

For me, as someone who can't see, I of course don't want to write down my credit card information on the computer because, you know, that's a risk.

I don't wanna have my credit card stolen because I decided to make a Word document called Sam's credit card dot doc.

That's not great.

But I obviously can't see my card. So reading the credit card number and the expiration date, every time I have to do that can become a real hassle.

However, if you accept multiple payment providers, odds are that I have either PayPal or Apple

or Amazon or Google checkout or one of them.

And so instead of now having to fumble and get my credit card and figure out how to enter it into your form and get the number once again, because it's not secure to write it down, I can just use a payment provider that I already have.

And that can remove a lot more than you would expect. That can make a checkout experience go from a 10-minute to 15-minute experience to a three-minute experience.

Also, saving time that is otherwise needed to fill out forms. A lot of that can be done by using a payment provider because they already have the address, they already have the postal code, they already have the phone number and they can provide you all of that information.

But if you can't accept that data for some reason, it's really important to make it easy to save the time spent filling up those forms.

And there's a few key ways that you can do that.

You could of course create some kind of account system so that your details can be remembered on login but even better is to make sure that people's browser autofill works.

You don't think about autofill as an accessibility feature. People tend to think of autofill as just a convenience feature where you can click and have all of your information filled in.

But if you are using voice control or switch or you have any other physical challenge that might make that a little bit difficult for you to control your keyboard, autofill is really critical because it can save so much time to just click autofill and have the browser fill in the information for you. And you then know the confidence that I've picked my browser, I've picked my auto autofill solution. I am confident and happy that it is storing my information in a private secure way that I'm happy with. And I don't now have to lose that control and make an account on every single website that I wanna check out with.

And as part of that, convenience also is avoiding strictly timed interactions. Sometimes these are unavoidable when you're buying tickets because you don't wanna let someone hold a ticket forever and ever, but the longer you can make timeouts, the better. Screen reader users often need to explore pages and familiarize ourselves with pages because we can't take the minute to glance.

And those with physical challenges or voice control can be a little bit slower operating a website.

And those with cognitive challenges can often just see a timer slowly ticking down and the sand running out of the hourglass and it can be a really stressful experience.

And so as much as you can, make sure that you can avoid those timed interactions or that you can make them as long as possible or at the very least, that you allow someone to click a button that says I'm still here, please don't expire, please reset the timer for me, I'm still working on it.

And that when they do click that button, all of the information that's been entered up to this point is saved. So when they get to 30 seconds left, they can click no, continue, I'm still here. I want another 10 minutes. Rather than having to restart the experience over again and be even more stressed the second time around as they frantically race against the clock.

And when you have consistency and you have convenience, you're building the next online checkout key, being confidence. When I'm on a social network website or a newspaper website or I'm playing a game, if I don't know what a button does or I don't know what might happen as the result of some interaction or an experience is not quite accessible and I'm not entirely sure what to expect, I'll risk it.

What's the worst that can happen on a social network? Maybe I make a post that I didn't intend to make. What's the worst that can happen in a game? Maybe I lose the match because something happened that I wasn't expecting.

But what's the worst that can happen in an online checkout experience?

I can lose money.

It can cost me.

I can get a product that I didn't expect.

I can get a product that I didn't want.

I can ship something to the wrong address and maybe it'll get lost.

And now I have to, hopefully, there's accessible support that is available, and I have to call and I have to cancel an order and I have to process a refund. And I'm just not gonna risk it.

If I'm not confident of what's going to happen during the online checkout experience, unlike any other website, I'm not going to experiment. I'm gonna give up because it's easier to find and to go to an accessible competitor in many, many cases than it is to experiment or to risk or to ask for help. And of course, if the checkout process is inaccessible, you also begin to lose confidence in the product itself.

Of course, often it is the case that when you're purchasing something, the checkout experience is running a different code base or developed by a different team than the actual product.

However, people with disabilities don't think that way.

If I'm having an inaccessible difficult checkout experience, I start to wonder, when I get this product when I get this service, is the product or service gonna be inaccessible, difficult to use?

If I purchase this product and I need support or I need help while I'm having a lot of difficulties with the checkout experience. So I bet the support process and the process to get help is gonna be difficult to use.

If I want to return the product, well, gee, I'm having trouble with checkout. So I bet the return process is also gonna be inaccessible and difficult for me to use.

And so instead of working hard to find workarounds and to get through and to power through a checkout experience that might not be ideal, when I'm spending real actual money, I'm gonna say, "No, this is inaccessible. I give up, I'm done."

The next key that really is a layer over all of those things that help create this convenience and this confidence is customizability.

Because everyone's needs are not the same, multiple modes of interaction are critical.

For some folks, a mobile screen is better because of those affordances that mobile offers. You can hold the screen and pull it close to you, or you can move it further away, or you can use it with just the swipe of a finger and not having to use a full keyboard and mouse, or the screen is smaller.

So that slightly less screen real estate means that the experience is full of fewer distractions.

And yet for some folks like me, I find it much easier to use a desktop keyboard and it's faster for me to use a keyboard.

And so I prefer to shop on desktop.

And for folks who have physical challenges, a voice assistant experience might be better, might be easier, might be more convenient. Even for some folks with cognitive challenges, voice experiences can be more convenient because instead of having to think, "Oh, I'm gonna need this, I better make note to go buy it later." With a voice experience, it's integrated, it's available right where you are and you can do it now while you're thinking about it, as opposed to having to remember to do it later.

Websites, apps, multiple payment providers, variable ways to access support. You know, all of these things create experiences that are better for everyone, and that meet people where they are now and can get them the things they want and need at the moment, as opposed to requiring them to go somewhere else and be somewhere else and do something different.

And so not only are you creating an experience that is now possible for people with varying levels of ability who need to react with varying modalities to use, you are creating a product that is better and more flexible and more seamless and more joyful for everyone.

And these are some of the things that I really wanted you to take away and to think about and to understand from this talk that I've just been given here.

The first one is that these keys are really difficult to test with automated solutions.

You can run an automated accessibility checker over your checkout experience, and it can tell

you there are 53 errors in your code or this image is missing alt text.

But what it can't tell you is how convenient was this experience?

How seamless was it?

How easy was it?

How customizable was it?

How confident did a person using assistive technology feel as they went through?

The only way that you can find that out is by actually in involving people with disabilities in the research, in the development, in the ideation, in the testing, in the QA.

And when you do that, when you're actually involving people with disabilities, you'll find that the automated testing and the automated requirements will tend to take care of themselves organically because you're actually hearing from people with disabilities and you're making sure that our needs are being met and that our experiences are being taken into account.

And when you do that, you'll also unlock new innovative ways of thinking about creating customizable, excellent experiences.

And what that will do is it will make a checkout experience that is a seamless, easy, excellent, joyful flow for everyone, whether they're a person with a disability or not.

It's been great to talk to you all. And I hope that you've found some new ways of thinking about accessibility in the checkout experience and that some of these keys have been useful for you as you continue around your accessibility journey in creating a better checkout experience for everyone.

[UsableNet Commercial]

UsableNet is a digital accessibility pioneer and industry leader. We created some of the first tools and platforms to make websites accessible and usable for all people. Starting out, we worked with government agencies as well as universities and corporations. Today, digital accessibility has become important to almost all companies. We provide accessibility solutions to Fortune 1000 companies, small and medium enterprises, government and education organizations across industries including retail, travel, hospitality, food services, automotive, financial services and health care.

Our focus at UsableNet is to make the digital world more accessible and usable. We aim to make websites, apps and other digital platforms more accessible, inclusive and user-friendly for everyone. Through technology, deep expertise, constant innovation and collaboration with the disability community, we help businesses improve their digital content for customers with disabilities.

Hi, my name is Jason Taylor and we are honored to accept this award from Helen Keller

Services.
My name is 200 years of partnerships here at UsableNet. I am on this team and work really closely with everybody from top to bottom, from the VP of Sales down to our front-line sales development representatives. I am totally blind. Use a screen reader, but I'm also using all the technologies and tools that our team is using Salesforce, joining Zoom meetings, Microsoft teams, and even closing out contracts and in negotiating.

It's been outstanding. Just really becoming integrated into the sales team.

Great to hear how integrated you are within the use of Onex success and how comfortable you feel part of the team. I hope this helps other companies embrace the ability to expand their teams and increase their focus on inclusive hiring again. Thanks to Helen Keller Services for this honor and the work they are doing in this space.

At Usable Net. We promote teamwork, support, excellence and growth for the benefit of our employees. And clients are proven processes and methodologies scale to the demands of the biggest companies in the world. We are continually innovating, inventing and solving problems for the benefit of our clients and the disability community.

[Clusiv Commercial]

Hi! My name Luke Simianer and I am the CEO and Co-Founder of Clusiv.io. We are the world's first e-learning platform built for and by people who are blind and low vision. We're really happy to sponsor the Accessibility.com show today. We're consistent sponsor there and love the work that they do. Today's show is talking about accessibility in retail and that's something that we're very passionate about.

We also like to say that the best way to ensure your site's accessibility is to actually hire people who are blind to the vision to test for you. At Clusiv have a number of graduates who are coming out of the vocational rehab system across the country who would love to test your website and tell you your descriptions and your captions are accurate.

You don't want people to be thinking that they're buying a green shirt when really it's a green suede shirt or a green suede shirt with patterns, right? Or checkered patterns or diamond patterns. You want to have the detail there that provides an equitable and equal shopping experience for everybody that's involved, no matter how they're differently abled. So thank you for your time.