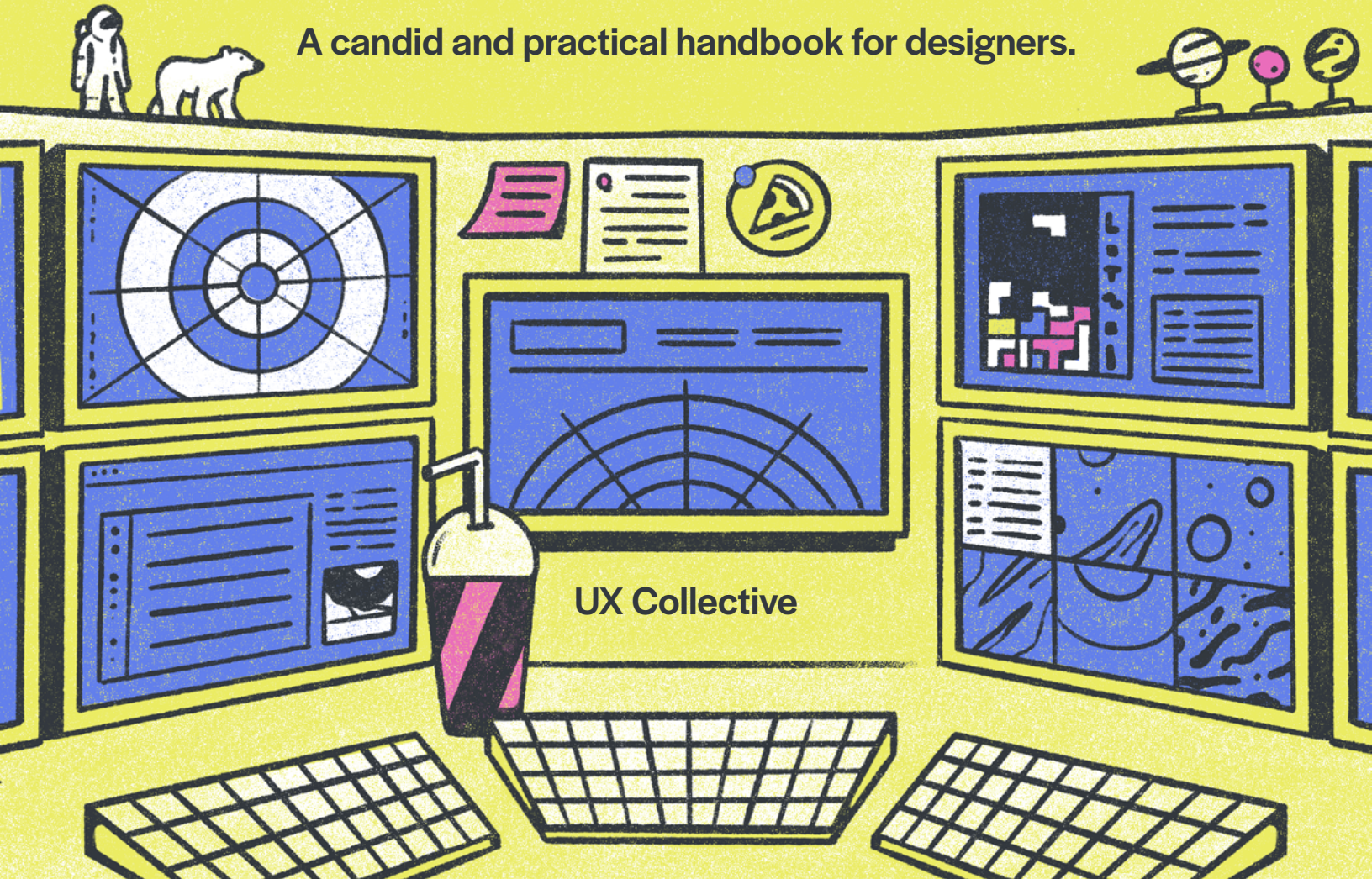
SHERI BYRNE-HABER

GIVING A DAMN ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY

A candid and practical handbook for designers.



UX Collective

Published by: UX Collective (ISSN: 2766-5267)
Written by: Sheri Byrne-Haber
Edited by: Fabricio Teixeira, Caio Braga
Designed and Illustrated by: Passeio
Narrated by: Laura Vandiver (download audio version)

“GOOD ACCESSIBILITY PROFESSIONALS SPEAK AT ACCESSIBILITY EVENTS. GREAT ACCESSIBILITY PROFESSIONALS SPEAK AT DESIGN EVENTS.

Sheri Byrne-Haber, ***CPACC***

Preface

Digital accessibility is the inclusive practice of ensuring that everyone has equal access to information, functionality, and experience on digital platforms. That means no barriers prevent interaction with, or access to, digital products by people with any type of disabilities or traits commonly linked to disabilities. This includes:

1. Physical disabilities, such as hearing loss, vision loss, or mobility issues;

2. Neurodiversity conditions including autism, attention deficit disorder, and dyslexia;

3. Socio-economic discrimination which impacts people with disabilities in the US at a rate 2 ½ times higher than people without disabilities.

The overall definition of disability includes disabilities which are permanent, temporary, and situational. It's been over two decades since the first version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) was launched, in 1999. Since then, a lot of content has been published online around how designers and developers can apply those guidelines to the work they do every day.

Many published accessibility guides are either:

✦ Too prescriptive (making it seem like the items on the

checklist are all you have to care about).

- ✦ Too aspirational (painting a utopian picture that doesn't drive action)

- ✦ Too charity-driven (driving the point that people with disabilities are to be pitied and painting the gaps as too enormous to ever be practically resolved).

- ✦ Biased, published to "help" the public, but in reality the major motivation is to sell accessibility consulting services or tools.

This guide is a little different. To celebrate and contribute to Global Accessibility Awareness Day, we at the UX Collective have partnered with our most prolific accessibility writer, Sheri Byrne-Haber, CPACC, **to bring a more candid take at the topic.**

The reality is: your first attempt at making anything accessible will be awful; you will run into people who might make your life harder; you will learn that accessibility isn't an add-on; and that you cannot stop at good practices, accessibility needs you to be great to provide an equal experience to your users with disabilities..

Inaccessible products are broken products. The first step to fix them is to give a damn.

Thank you for reading,
Fabricio Teixeira + Caio Braga

About the author

Sheri Byrne-Haber is a prominent global subject matter expert in the fields of disability and accessibility in the business and educational settings, and has been publishing articles about Accessibility with the UX Collective for a few years now. She is best known for launching digital accessibility programs at multiple Fortune 200 companies including McDonald's, Albertsons, and VMware, as well as consulting on accessibility in the government and education sectors. Her programs have positively impacted millions of the more than 1 billion global people with disabilities.

Sheri firmly believes that holistic accessibility programs provide people with disabilities the best chance to achieve equality as either customers or employees in an organizational world largely established for the abled. To assess how well an organization is doing with respect to employees and customers with disabilities, Sheri co-authored the Digital Accessibility Maturity Model while a Principle Accessibility Policy Consultant at Level Access, the foremost global consultancy dedicated entirely to accessibility. Her integrated approach links Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) creation, a core component of accessibility programs, to most major departments in an organization including product design, development, testing, marketing, research, human resources, procurement, support, and diversity/inclusion.

Her educational background includes:

- B.Sc. in Management Information Systems (University of San Francisco)
- J.D. (University of San Francisco)
- M.B.A with an emphasis on Health Care from The George Washington University
- Post-MBA entrepreneurship program run by the NSF at the Haas School of Business (University of California).
- One of the first people to complete the new (v5) US Trusted Tester (Section 508) Certification Training.
- In the first group of people certified in Professional Accessibility Core Competencies (IAAP/G3ICT), recently renewed for a second three-year term.
- Certificate in ADA coordination (University of Missouri, Columbia).

Her passion for accessibility initially stemmed from the desire to help her deaf daughter navigate the world, alongside the accessibility issues she personally faced as a lifelong wheelchair user. With degrees in computer science, law, and business, in addition to two accessibility-related professional certifications, Sheri has a complete 360-degree view of issues that impact implementing a high-quality accessibility program.

1

TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T MAKE ACCESSIBILITY HARD.

PEOPLE WHO DON'T GIVE A DAMN DO.

Everything that makes accessibility difficult ties back to one root cause: People not giving a damn about others who are different.

There are a few different categories of people you will run into in corporate settings that will make life difficult for anyone who is aiming to create more accessible products.

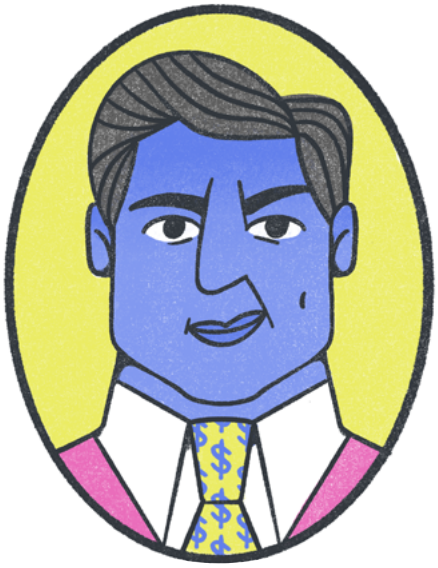
The people who are allergic to change.

It was the inimitable Grace Murray Hopper, US Navy Rear Admiral who contributed to COBOL and invented one of the first compilers, for whom the eponymous Grace Hopper Conference was named who said:

“HUMANS ARE ALLERGIC TO CHANGE. THEY LOVE TO SAY, ‘WE’VE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY.’ I TRY TO FIGHT THAT.”

Fundamentally, the only way to solve for inaccessible software is to… do things differently. Doing things differently, with respect to accessibility starts with designers in the product conception phase. Then that different design needs to be coded accessibly (which is different) tested using assistive technology (again, different) with the final different step being to get feedback specifically from people with disabilities. This is why people who are allergic to change are so poisonous to the disability/accessibility movement. Another business phrase frequently used to identify these types of people is those that suffer from “NIH Syndrome,” — which means they don’t want to do anything that was Not Invented Here. Since W3C developed the WCAG standards, accessibility is clearly PFE — Proudly Found Elsewhere.

The people who want to see “the business case.”



People with disabilities (the ones being discriminated against when things aren’t accessible) shouldn’t be asked to produce a business case to get an organization to do the right thing, especially when the right thing is to stop discriminating:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act and other similar laws outside the US such as the Australian DDA and the Canadian ACA are fundamentally civil rights laws.

- Actively blocking someone’s access to civil rights is unethical.

- Therefore, demanding a business case for accessibility is unethical.

Demanding a business case for accessibility is ableist. Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities. Ableism often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be "fixed," and are not equal to non-disabled individuals.

ABLEISM

noun

able·ism | \ ˈā-bə-li-zəm \

Definition of ableism:
discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities.

The test for whether or not an attitude is ableist is to substitute a different underrepresented group for disability and then ask yourself if the new statement would be acceptable. Asking the question, "Is it OK to make software that People of Color can't use" is enough to get you quickly fired. So yes, it is absolutely ableist to think it is acceptable to make software that people with disabilities can't use. And it doesn't matter if it is a person with a disability making that statement, they can be ableist too.

A subgroup of people who want to see the business case is people who want to wait until the damage is done before committing to a plan of action. If they see a demand letter, a lawsuit, or a lost customer, they will factor these things into an accessibility business case. The savings from the lawsuit not filed or income from the deal not lost has zero value to this subgroup's business case.

The people who want to see detailed proof for every accessibility recommendation.

The people who demand production of an "accessibility business case" rarely jump from that position immediately to full acceptance of the need for accessibility. They generally accept the business case, then proceed to asking for detailed proof that the recommendation you are making is required.

Prove that WCAG applies to the inaccessible product. The first level of proof they generally ask for is evidence that the particular level of WCAG guidelines you recommend be applied to the product is actually required. Unfortunately, that request can get messy.

Almost five years ago, the proposal to make WCAG 2.0 the ADA's official accessibility guideline didn't get finalized before the end of the Obama era. That pending proposal

was one of the first things axed in the Trump era. The Supreme Court then accepted an accessibility case for review where the defendant was Domino's. However, they ended up waffling on the decision, kicking it back down to the lower court without making a finding based on the facts. Combining those two things led to the litigation free-for-all that we are experiencing in the US today with 3550 digital accessibility lawsuits filed in 2020 – a year where most courts were closed for at least 3 months.

W3C has many parallel WCAG updates underway.

- There are new guidelines for VR/XR and cognitive disabilities.
- WCAG 2.2 will be released in Fall 2021.
- WCAG 3.0 (a project sometimes referred to as "Silver") happening no earlier than 2023.

The standards will only get stricter and more detailed as time goes by, and failing to do anything continues to compound the interest on the "accessibility debt" a company is continuing to accrue.

Many courts have stated the lack of a formal American accessibility standard does not eliminate organizational requirements to provide equal access to customers and employees with disabilities. Failing to do so paints a bright "sue me" litigation target on your corporate identity.

Being based outside the US is not enough to protect an organization. If you sell to US customers, and especially if you sell in California, New York or Florida (the three states where the largest number of ADA cases are filed) your organization is at risk even if it is based outside of the US.

Prove that we have to do it the way you want us to do it. Once the WCAG level dispute is resolved, if your recommendations are drastically different from how the product currently works, you may be asked once again to prove that your recommendation must be implemented. The WCAG guidelines will provide some, but not all, of the requested proof.

- Yes, you MUST have a mechanism to stop automatically moving carousels after five seconds.

- No, it doesn't have to be a button. That's just the accepted best practice for how to do it. Alternatively, you can eliminate the motion or use a toggle or any other component that allows the user to stop the movement (personalization, for example).

Because WCAG is not prescriptive, you absolutely can't say, "The ADA requires all automatically moving carousels have pause buttons," for two reasons:

- First, the ADA doesn't demand WCAG (for the reasons discussed above).

- Second, the WCAG guideline that pertains to slide carousels

discusses “mechanisms,” to pause or stop carousel motion, or hide the carousel all together. You only need one, and the mechanism doesn’t have to be a “button”.

That is when you start going down the accessibility best practice rabbit hole. Frequently this is a place where accessibility professionals will be forced to compromise just to get this group of people to agree to do anything at all.

The people who prioritize the creation of inaccessible new features over making old features accessible.

Here are two classic examples of companies who, in the past six months, got their rear ends handed to them because of very public accessibility missteps.

The Twitter audio tweet fiasco. Twitter had an accessibility team that they lost through attrition and didn't replace. Instead, Twitter relied on "volunteers" (i.e., disabled employees or people who cared for other reasons) to influence their accessibility efforts. The "Voice Notes" feature Twitter launched in June of 2020 didn't get run by the volunteers.

Voice Notes had no non-audio equivalent. And every tweet by Twitter developers, then managers, then executives about this misstep rammed that discriminatory "foot in mouth" even more firmly down their throats. Twitter agreed within 48 hours to hire a team and establish a center for accessibility excellence.

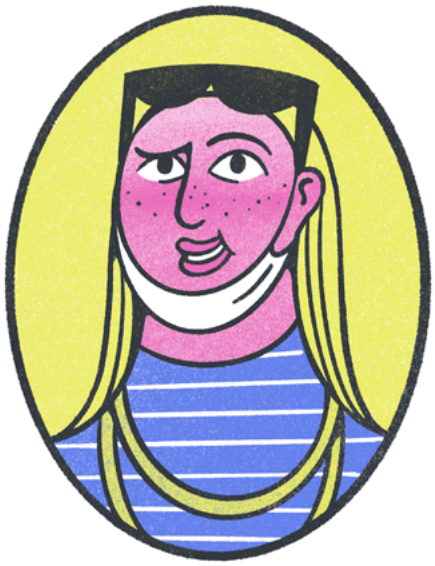
"Dead by Daylight" colorblindness mode. There has been a disabled gamers community for quite a while. However, there have been few true "bright spots" in gaming accessibility until the end of 2018 with the adaptive Xbox controller and in June of 2020 with the very accessible "The Last of Us, Part II," which contains more than 60 accessibility settings.

Dead by Daylight was not an early adopter of the importance of game accessibility, despite players requesting it frequently and repeatedly. What did surprise everyone was one of their employee's public response to a request to be more colorblind-friendly during a live-stream, which was:

“...WE’VE HEARD IT A MILLION TIMES, WE KNOW. CONTINUING TO BADGER US ABOUT IT ISN’T GOING TO CHANGE ANYTHING.”

Let’s unpack this quickly: 8% of the male population is colorblind. The majority of gamers, especially for the gory games like DBD, are male. Can you think of a SINGLE diversity topic where this would be considered an appropriate response? Because I know I sure can’t. Within days, DBD announced an extensive accessibility roadmap, which they claimed was already in progress.

The people who believe “well, it only impacts a small number of users.”



The most classic (and extreme) example of when you will see this type of group of people at their worst involves COVID and herd immunity. “Only a few will die; it’s better for the majority,” some people say. But the few that will die (and their friends and family) have no say in this outcome. The majority of people at risk of dying from COVID are the elderly, who frequently have disabilities.Younger people with disabilities are also experiencing a many times higher COVID death rate than their non-disabled age-matched counterparts.

Making the group of people you are discriminating against seem so tiny that you can think of it as inconsequential is a common ethics violation emotional compensation strategy.

Then you aren't such an evil person for making that decision, right? You can deliver that cool inaccessible feature that will get you that bonus that will pay for your BMW or a trip to Maui with your significant other. All you have to do is ignore a few people's civil rights. In reality, 26 % of the general US population has a disability. Almost 20 % of American college students identify as having a disability. These real numbers aren't tiny by any stretch of the imagination. The decision (whether intentional or through negligence) to remain inaccessible has real consequences.

- People with disabilities struggle in education and jobs where inaccessible tools are used.

- The lack of employment caused by inaccessible tools keeps people with disabilities in poverty.

Most people think it is unethical to steal money out of the pocket of a person with a disability. Supporting an environment where inaccessible tools are generated is the moral equivalent of pickpocketing.

The people who don't believe that disabled people are part of the product's target audience/demographic/customers.

"Disabled people aren't our target audience/demographic/customers," is a circular logical fallacy: how can people who need to use assistive technology to consume software become your customers if the software doesn't support assistive technology use? Res Ipsa Loquitor (as they taught me to say in law school), which is Latin for "the evidence speaks for itself."

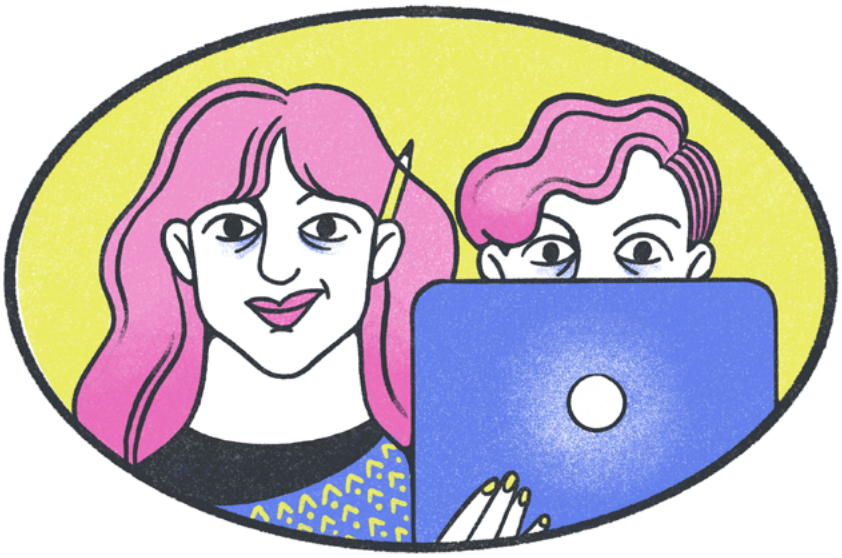
Disability is the largest American minority group, If your organization makes the product work for them, they will become customers. The one way to guarantee they will go to a competitor is to exclude them.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

Assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices for people with disability or the elderly population. Assistive technology can ameliorate the effects of disabilities that limit the ability to perform activities of daily living. Assistive technology promotes greater independence by enabling people to perform tasks they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to, or changing methods of interacting with, the technology needed to accomplish such tasks. For example, screen magnification software allows people to control the size of text and graphs on a webpage by emulating a handheld magnifier over the screen, while alternative input devices, such as motion tracking or single switch entry provide an alternative interaction device for those who cannot use a mouse or keyboard.

Source: Wikipedia

The people who brought you accessibility plugins, overlays, and widgets, plus the people that believe their claims.



They arrived on the market in late 2017 with a "you can't lose" solution — one line of code and a small annual payment, and all your pesky accessibility problems would instantly vanish. Their claims that they could solve everyone's accessibility woes had all the integrity of a Trump press conference. Politifact would rate these claims "pants on fire." Yet so many organizations drank the accessibility plugin Kool-aid that millions of them now rely on these solutions.

The purchasers have only recently discovered the "pants on fire" ratings of the vendors' claims as they become defendants in an ever-increasing number of accessibility lawsuits. Almost simultaneously, they are realizing that their contracts with the vendors probably prevent them from

recouping their litigation losses. Ten percent of accessibility lawsuits filed at the end of 2020 were against companies who had installed plugins, overlays, or widgets, thinking they would make them bulletproof to ADA litigation.

Every person who even thinks momentarily about using one of these solutions should be forced to read this 35-page scathing indictment written by Karl Groves. I do not envy the attorney who has to try and poke holes in Karl's data or arguments.

How do we solve this problem?

Many people think accessibility is difficult. It isn't. The Americans with Disabilities Act did not make stairs illegal. It requires a ramp and an elevator to allow people to get to every point that people using the stairs can. Accessible technology and standards have existed for over two decades. It takes 4 hours to learn enough to start developing things in an accessible manner. In a week, you would probably be competent in several areas. It generally does not take long before developers start asking, "why were we doing it that way before?"

- **Make the investment, and embrace the change.**
- **Reward employees for releasing accessible software, not just making their deadlines with whatever they**

hurl over the fence. Apple just announced a 10% plus or minus bump on bonuses for senior employees based on six elements of diversity, one of which was accessibility.

- **Have more people with disabilities participate in the process.** They will catch this kind of stuff long before it becomes a mad executive scramble to repair the reputational damage. One solid way to go about doing this is to hire more employees with disabilities. Then you will be more likely to have someone in the room who is willing to speak up when inaccessible choices are being considered.

- **Solicit vocal executive support.** What is important to the CEO and other leaders in the organization is important to everyone in the organization. Those that don't think so may find themselves getting managed out.

2

YOUR FIRST ATTEMPT

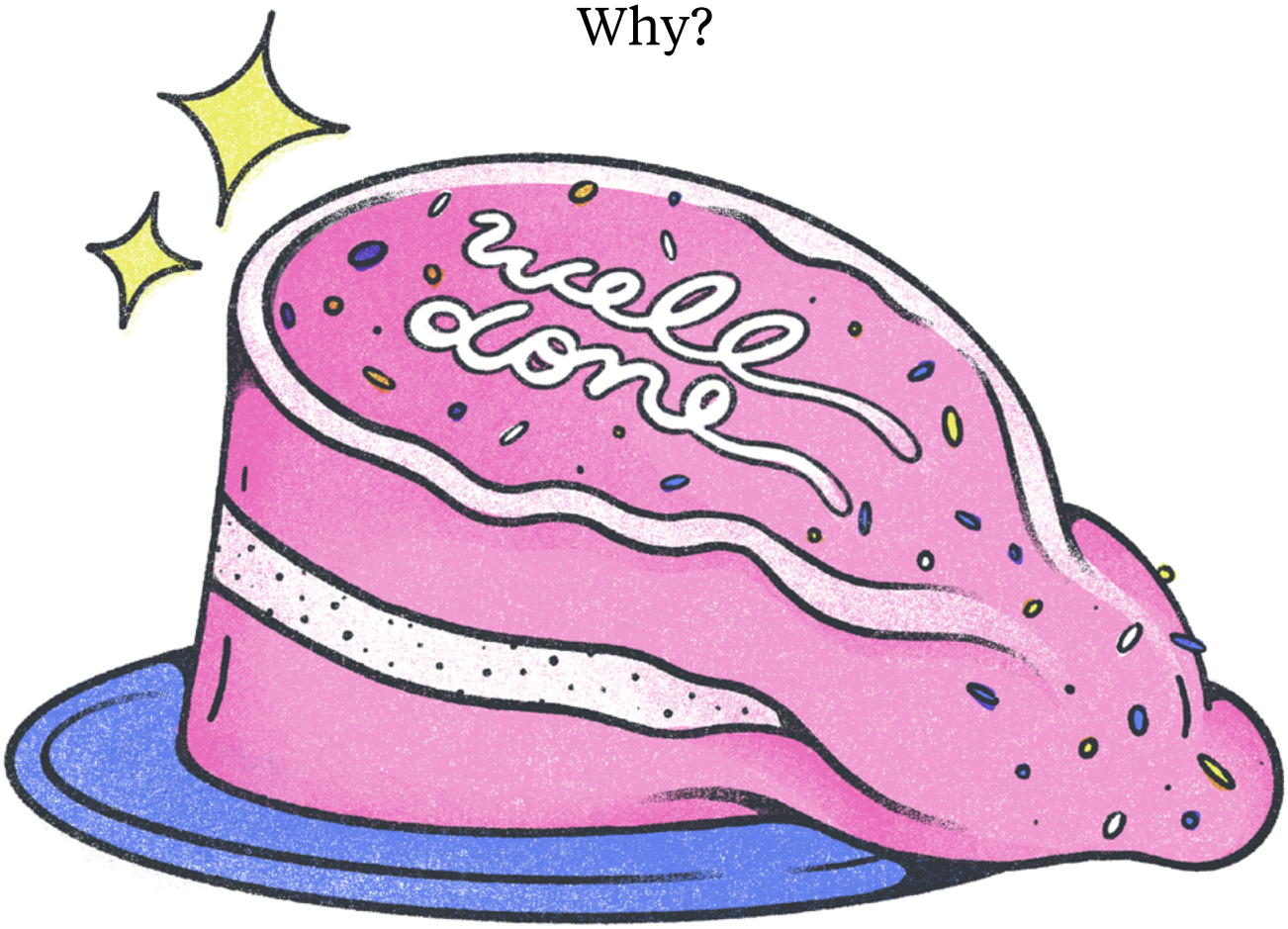
AT MAKING ANYTHING ACCESSIBLE

WILL BE AWFUL.

Don’t use this as an excuse.
Even awful is better than 98%
of what other people are doing.

To avoid the peaks and valleys of the accessibility emotional roller coaster, people just getting started on their accessibility journey need to accept the following statement at face value: Your first effort at accessibility is unlikely to be outstanding.

Why?



1

No one starts a new skill at the expert-level.

Accessibility is like speaking a foreign language or playing the violin. It takes a lot of practice before you are any good.

Fifty guidelines? How hard can it be? Harder than you would think.

- The guidelines are currently written in dense, regulatory-like language and there are several ways each guideline can be satisfied, some better than others, which the guideline does NOT specify.

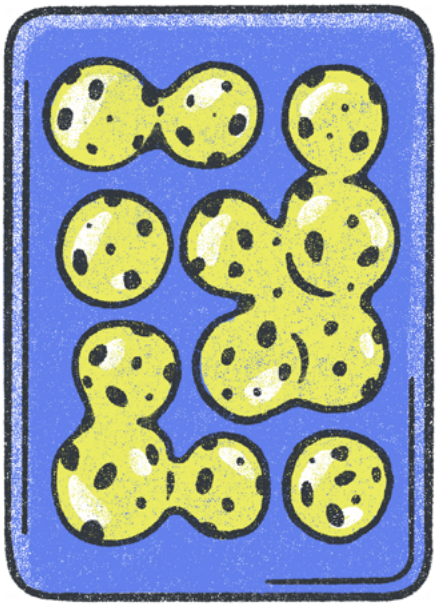
- Understanding how people with disabilities use assistive technology and process data is essential to a good result. Most beginners don't have access to that information or don't even know to seek it.

- Implementing accessibility guidelines is framework- and sometimes assistive-technology-specific. What works for HTML won't work for Angular, React, or SWIFT, for example. What works for NVDA might not work for JAWS. You need a lot of real-world assistive technology experience to understand all these nuances. You aren't going to have that experience for your first effort.

2

Perfectionism is a bad approach to accessibility.

One of the insidious side effects of perfectionism is complacency. The voice inside your head, in an attempt to avoid the crushing effort of being perfect might whisper to you "if I can't be perfect, why even bother?" — and that's where failing to consider the needs of your users with disabilities can creep in.



WCAG is not prescriptive, therefore, it is impossible to be perfect at implementing it. You can only make the best recommendations you can think of that comply with the guidelines.

There is always going to be more work than time. The most successful accessibility testers will decide when something has received enough attention (even though it isn't perfect) and move on to something else that needs more TLC.

Waiting for "perfect" increases the length of time your organization has intentionally or even actively discriminated against potential customers with disabilities, discouraging them from remaining as customers.

3

Even people with disabilities can't represent the needs of *everyone* with *any* disability.

Let's assume you have a strong connection to disability — either you are disabled, or a close friend or family member is. People with disabilities make up just over 29% of the accessibility testing profession. Until you have a lot of experience with many different types of assistive technology and understand how people with disabilities consume data, you will be operating under a lot of assumptions and biases. I'm using the phrase "bias" in its neutral sense here. I don't mean intentionally discriminatory. I mean that having a limited amount of data may flavor the conclusions you draw in your learning, research, or work.

Even if you have a disability, you will be looking through your disability lens and how *you* use assistive technology. Three different people with identical hearing loss levels can have three different communication modalities: one may use sign language, the second may speak and use hearing aids and other types of amplification systems, and the third may prefer to use visual captions. Until you get to that level of expertise and understanding reflected in your product accessibility, you won't be able to represent all people with hearing loss.

You can't improve the situation for people with vision loss by negatively impacting the experience of sighted,

keyboard-only users.

Accessibility is not a zero-sum game.

A rising accessibility tide needs to raise *all* disabled users' boats.

4

To be successful at accessibility requires opening yourself up to criticism.

One of the most difficult challenges for many people new to accessible design and development is learning to deal with criticism from the public and people with disabilities, particularly as they begin to release more accessible products. Opening yourself up to criticism opens yourself up to improve — *if* you do something about the criticism other than deflect.

Handling constructive criticism in a productive manner is critical for any accessibility professional's progress. The key to learning to open yourself up to accept criticism is to keep an open mind without taking criticism too personally; to get so much feedback that you effectively desensitize yourself from criticism.

5

You need to keep that needle moving forward.

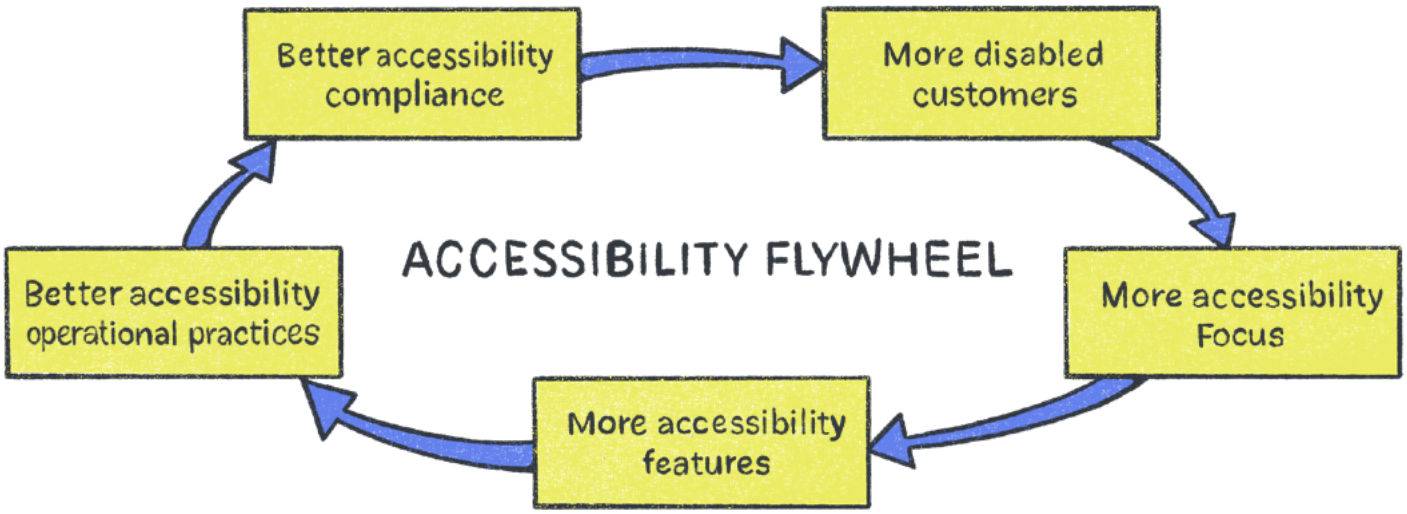
True accessibility is about process improvement.

- Accessibility is not a project.
- Accessibility efforts never come to an end.
- Even when you get accessibility right, you can always do it better.
- Even if you think you have maximized your accessibility growth, there will be a new browser, or operating system,

or piece of assistive technology, or a product feature to test the following week.

The best accessibility is done in a continuous process improvement program loop, being visited and revisited throughout the entire design and development process. This continuous accessibility reassessment will make it easier to determine the low hanging fruit that can benefit from more accessibility love in your organization.

Commitment is the key. Just start.



Lowering your internal expectations for your early accessibility projects means you won't be disappointed.

98% of websites are completely inaccessible. You couldn't possibly do any worse than they are. The starting point is giving a damn. Since you got to the end of this chapter, clearly, there is a significant chance you do.

③

ACCESSIBILITY IS NOT AN ADD-ON SERVICE.

If you are offering accessibility services as just one tiny corner of an entire menu of services, chances are you are not doing it well.

Every week I get a handful of unsolicited Linkedin messages from people/companies I've never heard of, almost always from outside the US. They claim to be the best accessibility testing company out there.

But this message on Linkedin was a new one:

Currently the contact center I'm working with is looking for clients. They offer data and voice services, data management, along with Accessibility services.

Immediately a vision of the Sesame Street puppets Burt and Ernie popped into my head singing the song they were famous for when I was a child, "one of these things is not like the other." Saying that you are a contact center and then throwing accessibility in is like saying you are a gourmet restaurant, but oh, by the way, you also sell Big Macs.

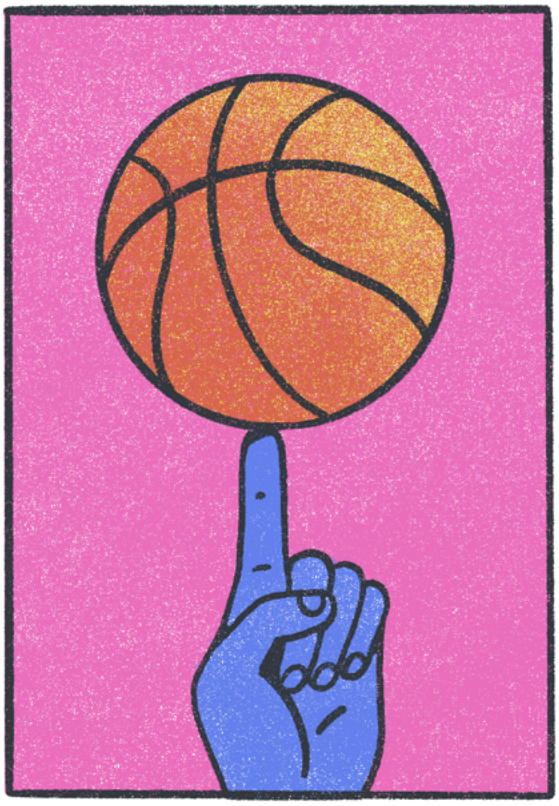
Accessibility consulting is a specialization based on the interpretation of regulations. As such, it is similar to privacy or security consulting. Would you be interested in security consulting offered by a company that also offers brick-laying services? Probably not.

Here are other mistakes that new arrivers to the accessibility market make concerning their accessibility consulting services/pitches:

1

They assume that you can wave a magic wand over people and turn them into accessibility testers.

True, it does not require a college degree to be an accessibility subject matter expert. However, learning enough about accessibility to become certified takes dedication and time. Learning how people with disabilities use technology takes longer. Business co-workers with disabilities frequently don't exist outside North America/Europe because the unemployment rates for people with disabilities is so high. The high unemployment rate, sometimes as high as 90%, is largely due to systemic ableism, inaccessible infrastructure, and educational disadvantages that people with disabilities face.



2

They rarely employ people with disabilities.

Not every disability tester needs to be disabled. But balance is important. I've had first-hand experience with overseas accessibility consulting agencies who outsource testing that requires people with disabilities to charities. Those consulting agencies pay the charities pennies on the dollar that they are collecting from the client, and far less than they pay their employees without disabilities. It is on you, the buyer of the services, to ask these questions and make sure the company you contract with is NOT doing this.

3

They tell people they can do *every* type of accessibility testing on the planet in their initial contact messages.

You can't be the best at everything. When you say you are good at everything, the clear implication is you don't understand what you are good at. If they claim they can do PDF/UA testing and can't tell you what PDF/UA is or even what the acronym stands for, chances are they don't understand accessibility testing at all.

As hot of a market as accessibility testing services were before COVID-19, it is supernova hot now. Organizations that offer general software consulting services are experiencing a reduction of interest. Therefore, they have smart people who understand technology sitting on the bench.

Accessibility is an area that has experienced ZERO reduction in interest. Interest is going to continue to skyrocket over the rest of 2022 and well into 2023 as American organizations who have money to spend either come under the ADA and Section 508, or they have voluntarily adopted those regulations in an attempt to diversify their employee base.

It's a matter of time (and your advocacy) for your employer to start adopting proper accessibility testing as it already does with usability, performance, and other practices that are standard in the software development process. Just make sure you don't end up with an "add-on" service that will just bring more issues down the road by asking the right questions before employing one of these vendors.

4

TURNING GOOD ACCESSIBILITY INTO GREAT ACCESSIBILITY.

It's easy to pick on people who do a crappy job at accessibility. How can we also get people who are good at accessibility to up their game even further?


“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND GREAT IS A CHASM THE SIZE OF THE GRAND CANYON.”
Rob Light, *Creative Artists Agency*

This chapter is the other end of the spectrum from the second chapter about our first attempt at accessibility.

It is easy to find bad web pages to dump on, because only 2% of them are doing either a good job or a great job at accessibility. Here are the elements that differentiate within these 2% the good pages from the great pages.

Good accessibility is about compliance, *great* accessibility is about empathy.

People running great accessibility programs don't stop when the desired WCAG standard is reached. Here are a few examples:

- Does the product stop accessibility improvements when AA is met, or follow AAA guidelines that really should have been AA guidelines, such as touch target size?

- Has color contrast been evaluated exactly as required in WCAG 1.4.3? Or was color contrast made accessible for everyone, and in objects beyond just text? Great accessibility checks color contrast in unimpaired vision and

color blindness modes, as well as checking the contrast of keyboard focus indicators and activatable icons.

- Are the employee-facing websites, docs and apps as accessible as the public facing websites, docs and apps?

- Does the website copy use "premium language" like savor instead of taste, purchase instead of buy, conversation instead of talk?

Great accessibility managers empathize with their end users with disabilities, which means they want to do it right, not just comply with the regulations.

Good accessibility looks at the product, *great* accessibility looks at the entire user experience.

Customers don't buy products, customers buy experiences. How many times have you sworn you would never buy something from a company again because of a bad sales or customer support experience? Accessibility to people with disabilities is generally as important (if not more so) than sales or support. However, if you don't personally need accessibility or know someone who does, you may not realize how important it is. The ex-CEO of VMware once told me that he didn't realize how hard our campus was to get around until he tore his ACL.

Experiences include the reality of the user interacting with the product, as well as anything adjacent to that product use. Core adjacent product services that are essential to the overall user experience include documentation, training, customer support, and surveys. When adjacent product services are at least nominally accessible, chances are the product is too, because adjacent services are typically the last car on the digital accessibility train.

If the company sells tangible products and not just software, physical accessibility counts too. For tangible products, packaging should be an accessibility consideration. Microsoft xBox does this well. Possibly the best out there.

Good products do user research, *great* products incorporate accessibility feedback from people with disabilities.

Ever heard the phrase "Nothing about us, without us, is for us"? That phrase was coined as part of the protests that resulted in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Doing user research with people with disabilities is a sign of great accessibility.

Great accessibility managers never, ever assume they understand the impact of a product decision on individuals with disabilities, even if it is a disability they have first hand experience with. They ask. They ask respectfully. And they

ask several people because not everyone experiences an identical disability in the same way. People with congenital disabilities frequently have a very different perspective on their disability than people who have acquired the exact same disability. Why?

- People with congenital disabilities have had much longer to adapt to the disability.

- People with acquired disabilities frequently look at their disability as an ability they had that was lost. I don't miss skiing or running marathons, these are things that I've never been able to do.

Following the "don't assume anything" mantra, great accessibility includes testers with disabilities. Testing is considered one of the most important software development phases, aiming to verify whether the software meets the requirements and works as expected by the users. Because "users" always include people with disabilities, software testing plans must include accessibility. Using testers with disabilities is essential to determine what is expected. Testers simulating disabilities is never sufficient.

Great accessibility uses accessible design systems.

It is becoming more common for software to be built using a collection of reusable components known as a design system. Using a design system provides a quick start to website or mobile app development.

Think about a design system as the software version of Legos:

- All the pieces fit together;
- With the pieces, you can build anything you want.

VMware's open-source, web-based design system is called Clarity. The Clarity Design System is not only used for VMware products but is also used by a large number of organizations outside of VMware.

When using a design system, it is even more important that it is built using accessibility-friendly options, because design systems provide building blocks that are consumed by other software. One design system accessibility defect will show up in every single component of the implemented website/app. That could be thousands of places.

There are a few other accessible open source design systems besides Clarity: Lightning (Salesforce), Spectrum (Adobe), and Carbon (IBM) come to mind. But there are not that many.

- If you are building your own design system or component library, make sure the components are accessible and expose the ARIA properties that must be set by developers as they are implementing to maintain an accessible end product.

- If you have chosen to use an open source design system that is NOT accessible, do the world a favor and contribute it back after you've made it accessible. Just like Paypal did with Bootstrap. That's what companies with great accessibility do.

Great accessibility is included as a product release gate.

"Release gates" are final checks that are reviewed as part of making a go/no-go release decision for a product. When accessibility is a release gate, it sets the expectation from the beginning that only accessible software will be released. Establishing release gates typically also involves establishing an exceptions process where a large number of people with a fair amount of power will be exposed to bad accessibility decisions if a product team requests a release without closing the accessibility release gate.

Good accessibility managers speak at accessibility events, *great* accessibility managers speak at design events.

I still attend a couple of large, almost obligatory, annual accessibility conferences. However, I find that at those events, I am largely preaching to the choir. If I'm speaking about accessibility at a general UI/UX/design conference, I'm preaching accessibility to non-believers. Which do you think has a larger impact in building a more accessible world? Convincing the non-believers, of course.

Getting from good accessibility to great accessibility takes time and money. Perhaps the hardest part is it requires obtaining commitment and establishing a shared vision with other stakeholders outside of the accessibility team. However, ask someone who uses assistive technology what great accessibility means to them. For the most part, their answer will distill down to "priceless" and can be as meaningful as:

- The difference between being jobless and receiving government benefits and having a decent paying job.

- The difference between partial dependence on others and full independence.

And then ask yourself again whether you are willing to make the leap from good accessibility to great accessibility.

I AM CONVINCED! NOW WHAT?

Read books: Sheri's favorite books on accessibility
Sign up for newsletters: Lainey Feingold, Seyfarth Shaw
Subscribe to blogs: UX Collective, Sheri's articles
Watch Youtube videos: Assistive technology demonstrations
Take courses: Coursera
Attend conferences: CSUN, IAAP, Higher Ground, Regional ADA conferences
Find the right tools: Accessibility tools
Get certified: Trusted Tester, IAAP

For more resources, check out the Accessibility Resource Center compiled and curated by Dee Kaur, Ira Santiago, and Kyle Luck.

Go forth, and move that needle forward!

About the UX Collective

The UX Collective (ISSN: 2766-5267) is an independent design publication built to elevate unheard design voices all over the world. We believe designers are thinkers as much as they are makers. So we dedicate our time creating and curating content we've always wanted to read.

http://uxdesign.cc