You First Podcast Episode 45: Digital Accessibility

Maddie Crowley: You're listening to You First -- The Disability Rights Florida" podcast. On this episode, we'll be talking about digital accessibility best practices.

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Keith Casebonne: Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the You First podcast. I'm Keith.

Maddie: I'm Maddie. Today Keith and I will be talking about all things digital accessibility. We co-authored a blog on our website on this topic back in November of 2022. We think this information is really important to share everywhere because, unfortunately, online accessibility is still such a huge issue.

Keith: Definitely. Part of our jobs is helping folks make their content and websites more accessible, and so we wanted to share that information with our listeners.

Even though you may not think you're putting out digital content all that much, if you post on social media, if you write a blog, if you do anything where you post your thoughts online, you're creating content. Why not make it more accessible? This way, you can better implement accessibility in all your online spaces.

Maddie: Definitely. I think the main takeaway is that we all have a responsibility to be more conscientious, considerate, and inclusive online. We want to do our best to help you be better equipped to do so.

We'll be covering about 15 or so accessibility topics, but we also want to note that this isn't an exhaustive list. There's plenty of things that we might not touch on today that are still important.

It's definitely something to take note of and consider when you are thinking about the accessibility needs of those in your community, friends, coworkers, whoever it is who could be benefiting from your accessibility practices, what that audience may need.

We wanted to lay the foundation about accessibility online so that you're able to take that first step and make that first move to be more accessible.

We wanted to start with what is a common one that people may have heard of before, which is called alt text, or alternative text. You may be familiar with this. This is something that has come up more so on social media in the past couple years, where you may be prompted to add alt text to an image that you're sharing.

Essentially what this does is provide people who are blind or people who are low vision and anybody that can benefit from more context of a photo to access that online the visual content.

Just to put perspective on this and emphasize the need for more awareness of digital accessibility, things like alt text, etc., a study done back in 2022 in May for Global Accessibility

Awareness Day, Twitter's accessibility Twitter account tweeted that only 0.6 percent of all of the images on Twitter are accessible.

Which when you think about how much content is on Twitter and how many...Not even one percent. It's 0.06 percent.

Keith: That's astounding.

Maddie: That is basically nothing. To put that in perspective how much visual content is completely inaccessible to blind and low-vision users, whether that's a funny GIF to add context to cultural conversation, but also businesses or influencers, whoever it is, are maybe posting graphics of upcoming events or services available.

It's so important to add alt text. If you're not including in the tweet what the contents of that image are, you have to add alt text or that person's not going to get any information from that image whatsoever.

Keith: Just for the context, someone who is blind or low-vision might use something called the screen reader that reads the content to them. If they come across an image that doesn't have this alt text, they just get told there's an image. They don't know if that means it's decorative or if there's content, words in it, something like that that they need to know.

The alt text is really important. It's usually really simple to put that text in the tweet or the post of the platform it is.

Maddie: When writing alt text, the most important thing is to just start doing it. While you're starting to do alt text, make sure you're not putting too much information that is not overly descriptive because that can also be a hindrance to users who may just need a brief overview of what's included in that image or graphic to ensure that they get that information that they need.

If it's too simplistic or too expensive, the screen reader will read that content maybe for like [laughs] a minute straight and then have it not be relevant information at all. Make sure that what you're including is relevant. If there's text on that image that's really important, make sure that's in the alt text.

If you there is individuals, if their identities are relevant to the message of the image, make sure that's in there. If there's a famous person in that photo, make sure their name maybe is listed, things like that.

Keith: If it's a logo, make sure those words are in there because that's probably important to be able to know what that says.

Maddie: Definitely. There's a lot of really good resources online, which we'll include a bunch of resources in the show notes of this. You can also review this on our blog, which we'll also include in the show notes. Even going to our social media, we're not perfect. We have to adjust and make better alt text all the time.

If you're just trying to understand what you might want to include, you can check out our social media pages to see what we're doing. You can add alt text to any image on any social media platform, but the process might be a little bit different.

You can easily just Google how to add alt text on Instagram, and it'll teach you how to do it. That's just one really good, first easy step that's just so important. It's hard to underestimate how important it is. I think that's where we're starting with it and I think where we get the most questions, too.

Keith: It's probably got some of the most bang for its buck. It's very easy to do and it helps a lot of people.

Another thing that's really easy to do and helps a lot of people is just choosing the right font. All right, in a lot of social media platforms, you don't have a choice as to what font is going to be used, but where you do, you want to choose right.

You might think it doesn't really matter too much. Well, generally there are two types of primary fonts. They're called serif fonts and sans serif fonts. Serifs are those little decorative marks that if you think of a font like Times New Roman, it's not just Roman.

Maddie: Times New Roman. [laughs]

Keith: Oh, it's a classic. I guess everyone's seen it, so it's a good example. The letter forms have, they're called tick marks officially, little accent marks or decorative features on them. The thought used to be that it helped people. It actually really doesn't, in the end.

The sans serif fonts, which just means without the serifs, they just tend to be easier to read. Some of the more common examples are Arial, Helvetica, Tahoma, Calibri, fonts you've seen all the time.

If you use a computer, you've seen those fonts. They are good examples to start using. If you have to choose a font, choose one of those. Most likely, it'll be just easier to read for most folks.

Maddie: Have you ever gotten an invite to an event or an email from maybe an older person in your life, and they decided to use the most curly cue font that just isn't script or cursive writing? It's just like, "I have no idea what this says." Even as someone who doesn't experience visual, textual-related disabilities, that's even hard for most people.

It's just better to pick something a little more simple. I will say not like a caveat but as some context, as we said, opening the show as well, it definitely depends on the community you're working with, what they prefer. Some other things to consider is if folks need larger font. Some people with low vision prefer large fonts, so they're able to read the content a little bit easier.

Other people might prefer serif fonts if that makes it easier to read for them personally. If you're creating content for a certain community or are engaging with folks of a particular disability identity, just check with them what works best for them and be able to adapt to their needs and make sure it's accessible.

Keith: For sure. Also, serif fonts, you can use them a little bit. They have a place. If you have large-size fonts for titles or headings, things like that, a serif font is OK. It's more readable at larger sizes. Even we'll still use them sometimes for the main headline or title of something.

When it comes down, especially when you're getting down to smaller, like 14 or even 12-point font size, the sans serifs, it's automatic. That's what we go with.

Maddie: I think one final thing to note when thinking about font is to also consider these decorative or characteristic aspects of them. When you're creating a Word doc or a website page, whatever it might be, try to not use bold, like bolding or italics, too much.

You want to make sure you're using them sparingly to emphasize an important point. I have ADHD, so sometimes it might be difficult for me to follow really busy fonts and text.

When you're reading a font, the entire thing is highlighted, bolded, and italicized. That's not really enjoyable or accessible for anybody to read.

Keith: It loses meaning, right?

Maddie: Yeah, exactly.

Keith: If everything has got something to it then it doesn't mean anything.

Maddie: Yeah. I think that's really the takeaway, is that you want to be using those things to emphasize a meaningful point or something that you want to draw more attention to so that people are drawn to it.

Keith: Then this is just a quick design tip for anyone. You don't need to use more than two fonts.

Maddie: [laughs]

Keith: When you're putting something together, just use a couple. Make sure they contrast but they're not too decorative. Again, simply use bold just where maybe it's absolutely needed.

Just keep it clean and simple, and everyone it doesn't matter who they are, everyone will be happy and it will be a more comfortable document to read.

Maddie: If you're listening and you're wondering, "What about headings? What about sub-headings and things like that?" We're going to talk a bit more about less word formatting in a bit, so just tuned.

Something else to consider with accessibility is colored contrast. This is something I know Keith and I can really empathize each other with. This is something that we struggle a lot within our advocacy with other organizations that are trying to be more disability inclusive.

Color contrast is much more important than you think when organizations make graphics or nationwide campaigns make graphics that are just almost completely inaccessible because you can't even read what it says. They're shooting color contrast that just makes you want to pull your hair.

Because I can't count the amount of times that we've had to remake graphics to then put out, because we can only put out accessible content important to us that we have to go back and retro-fit some of this stuff.

It's important we share that information with those folks and educate about color and contrast. Anyways, that was a possible tangent, but...

Keith: That's so true.

Maddie: Yeah. It's really important when you do graphics and text and things like that to have a high color contrast. That means, quite plainly, maybe having a light background with darker text or a darker graphic that meets certain contrast requirements.

Alternatively, some people in the disability community actually prefer dark backgrounds with lighter text, let's say a black background with white text as probably the most accessible version of color contrast that people find.

Because it makes it so much easier too, and I'll let you touch on how to go about checking color contrast.

Keith: Sure. One note real quick. There was a period of time where I guess it was a fad on the Internet to have a light grey background with medium to darker grey text. At first glance, it looked nice, it looked artsy but you would get a high fatigue reading it. It was hard to read.

I don't personally have a visual disability, but I have 50-year-old eyes. I can read it. I don't want to read it. Maybe technically I can but it's uncomfortable and it's not easy. It's not something that I want to do, so color contrast is really important.

There are some rules. A lot of the things we're talking about there are some underlying guidelines out there where we have consortium has the accessibility content guidelines. They have this ratio of what the foreground color to the background color should be. We're not going to get into the weeds on that.

What you need to really know is that there are some tools out there and we'll put some links out, that can check color contrast for you. You can use an Eye Dropper tool and select the two colors and it will let you know if it's accessible or not.

Some different factors there, sometimes if it's larger text it might be accessible or a smaller text is not, and so on. The idea is to make sure that contrast is really good. It's very easy to check, like I said, there's tools out there.

One thing I want to note too is that there are people out there that have color blindness. The contrast itself is one thing, but choosing color, don't rely on color. In some cases, don't make something red because it's important because that individual...

First of all, a blind person with a screen reader is not going to know that the text is red, but individual with color blindless isn't necessarily depending on the type of color blindness they have, going to know the text is red.

One of the tools we make sure we link to, has an option where it emulates color blindness with your color selections to see what it looks like, but it's really cool. It shows you accommodations that you'd, "Wow, I never would have thought this would look like this to somebody." It really helps.

Maddie: Definitely. It's so important. There are so many elements of this that it can feel overwhelming but we're trying to make it as accessible and easy to think about as possible. The next thing we're going to talk about is hashtag. [inaudible 15:08] I do, I would say a lot, but all of our social media. [laughs]

Keith: I was going to say by a lot you mean all.

[laughter]

Maddie: Yeah, all. One thing that I try to advocate for online and also model when doing social media is something called camel case. If you think of a camel in your mind and visualize it, typically it has those humps on its back and that's where this gets its name.

Camel case essentially means you want to capitalize each word of a hashtag to make it easier to read. Not only is it easier for everyone to read when each word is capitalized, but screen reading software can better read out a hashtag to a user if the words in it are capitalized.

If you don't capitalize each word, it might just be a long line of letters and or numbers and it can be really difficult for someone who's using a screen reader to make out what the hashtag is saying.

Say, for example, the phrase Disability Rights Florida. If I didn't capitalize each word, disability, rights and Florida, and just put all of those three words next to each in a hashtag, eventually, it might be able to make out what it says. That's a pretty long, almost probably 20 letters right next to each other. It can be difficult to read what that says.

I think that the only last thing to consider with hashtags is to put them at the end of your posts on social media. It's a lot easier for everyone, and especially someone using a screen reader to read your social media post without hashtags all embedded within the text and included in the caption.

You don't really want to mix plain text and hashtags throughout a post, because it can get confusing to read. One caveat with that is that it can be difficult on Twitter because there's that character limit of how much you can include in a tweet.

Sometimes that's OK, you'll see that we've done it before to include a hashtag or two in the caption or in the tweet text itself, but try not to make that a habit. Only do it when it's really necessary and there's no way to get around reducing the text of that tweet, or simplifying the text of that tweet so you can add a couple of hashtags at the end.

Keith: I'd say one another good use for camel case is when you're writing out a website address, especially a longer one. A good example again, DisabilityRightsFlorida.org. If you capitalize the D, the R, and the F, again just like in the hashtag you can see what the words are in the URL and in the address a little easier.

I think same goes with the screen reader, like you said, it will read that out as words versus just a string of letters.

Maddie: That too with email addresses, anything that's a long list or a long string of letters or numbers. Wherever you can capitalize a word to make a better distinction for someone who's reading it is the best.

Keith: It is. Definitely. On that same vein, talking about keeping words and language simple, our next point is to make sure that your content is written using plain language.

Plain language, plain text simply means using simple, shorter words. It makes what you're writing a little easier to read, makes it more accessible for people. This also sometimes means you're not using a lot of academic or legal or medical jargon.

If you do have to, then maybe you define it somewhere in there, listing out what an acronym would mean, make sure you spell things out, but also writing really simply.

When you're writing, you want to think about making your sentences as simple and direct as possible. The best way to do that is to write in what's called active voice. There's active versus passive voice. An active voice is like, "I did this." It's very straightforward. Whereas passive voice is more like, "The thing was done by the person."

Maddie: [laughs]

Keith: It's a little wordier, a little less like, "What?" Also, where you can, smaller chunks of text are better. If you can put something in a list, whether that's bullets, numbered items, so on, some logical way to order the content, that can help a lot too.

It's always good to go back and re-read what you wrote or have someone else read it that maybe isn't as aware of the content as you are and see how much they understand it. Sometimes when you know what it is, you write it and you're like, "Sure, this makes sense." Yeah, to you at the moment as you're writing it, but let someone else take a look at that.

Maddie: This is not to make assumptions about folks or promote stereotypes about folks, but there are certain folks within the disability community who might not be able to process information in the same way that you do or be able to read things out of a certain reading level.

It's not just within the disability community as well. When you think of historically marginalized communities that have been maybe denied access to education.

Maybe they live in rural areas and they haven't been able to access education but don't maybe interact with "academic or elevated jargon" the same way folks do if they work at a university, or even people where English is maybe their second, third, who knows, language.

Just considering the vast community of folks, the vast amount of people that could be seeing and reading your information, and thinking, "Hey, if I was in this person's shoes, would this make sense to me? Would this be easy to read?" Especially, if you're an organization that's trying to assist people from different backgrounds.

Whether that's disability like Disability Rights Florida or another organization dedicated to racial equity or language accessibility, whatever it may be, you want to make sure that you're not putting content out that's almost deterring you from being able to better engage with the folks that you're trying to reach.

Keith: Exactly. What constitutes easy-to-read language? Essentially, you want your content to fall in a sixth, seventh, eighth-grade level.

There was a study done some years ago now. I don't remember the exact percentage, but I want to say it was nearly half, it was 47 or 48 percent of the people that are out there reading the web read at around a sixth-grade level.

That's not even really an accessibility statement as much as it is just a general population statement. If you want to reach the most people, you want to write at a level that is comfortable for them to read and understand. That's what you want to shoot for.

How do you know if you're doing that? There's a couple of ways. Word, other Word processing programs still have the proofing tools. I think you run the spell check, and at the end, it tells you...There's different ways for different apps, but it'll tell you your reading level. There's a few different ways, but one of them is a grade-level score.

Even better is something called the Hemingway app. I just go with Hemingway app.

Maddie: I love Hemingway.

Keith: Since it's come out, it's what I use now to check almost anything I write. It's really great. It gives you the score, but then it tells you why. It's breaks down like, "Well, this sentence was using passive voice. This sentence is a little too long. In this sentence, you used this kind of..." It's really incredible.

You go through and line by line, like, "Oh, I can fix that. I can fix that. I can fix that." Before you know it, you watch the grade level drop as you make the edits. It's really great. It's really great.

Maddie: It's a great tool, and we use it all the time.

Keith: For sure.

Maddie: Next on our list to talk about is text spacing and text alignment. For folks that are on social media, say, maybe here in, that's writing a novel on...

Keith: [laughs]

Maddie: ...Facebook and wrote seven paragraphs all in a row, or on Instagram, where someone just types and types until they hit the character count and they hit Post, power to your aunt, power to that person...

Keith: [laughs]

Maddie: ...but it can be a lot to read. It's important to add spaces in-between maybe some of the main messages of those points. Like we've been saying, especially for accessibility reasons, how you mentioned before, with bullet points or numbering, you want to make sure that your text is in clear and concise points so that people can digest it a little bit easier.

It's also really important with text and text spacing to consider alignment. You want to be mindful about how your text is aligned because some alignments are harder to read. Just as an example, one text alignment is full-width text. If you're familiar with this, it essentially just takes the text that's in a text box and spreads it out so that it fits the text box.

That means, one, there's these huge spaces. They end up being maybe 20 spaces in between some words, and then other words don't have any space in between them. Things like that are really hard for everybody to be able to read, let alone maybe someone who has a visual disability.

Keith: By the way, you may see full-width text also mentioned as justified text or full justified or full justification. Different programs call it different things, but they all mean the same thing, making the text go fully to the left and right margins.

When I was learning graphic design and such, they refer to it as a river runs through it because it looks like there's a river going through your text because the gaps are so big sometimes.

Again, some of these things, I think, are almost usability, which you make something usable. If it's usable, then it's usually easy to make it accessible. To me, this is just a basic, make your content usable and comfortable. I just don't think people like that full-justified text anymore. It's very jarring.

Sometimes, you don't have a lot of control over that in your social media. When you're working in a word processor or if you're designing a Web page, those are things that you can set. Left-aligned is really the way to go.

Center, you can do it occasionally if you want something to stand out. That's fine. You wouldn't want to have large chunks of text center-aligned. Personally, I don't like center-aligned bullets. I think that looks a little odd, but so just use it, anyway.

Maddie: What's the point of the bullet list? I don't know. I get the point but it's just almost...

[crosstalk]

Keith: Bullets should be aligned, right?

Maddie: Yeah. [laughs]

Keith: I've never understood that.

Maddie: It's supposed to be easier to find the bullets so that it's easier to digest the context. I don't know.

Keith: I don't know. I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Maddie: The next thing you wanted to talk about was links. When adding links to a document, maybe an online newsletter you write, blog, PowerPoint, website, whatever it is, you want to embed links whenever possible.

Instead of just copy-and-pasting this link from a website that might be, I don't know, 60 characters long, that is...

Keith: Very hard to read. [laughs]

Maddie: Very hard to read again. It doesn't have cable case. It doesn't have all of these accessibility facets to it. It is very difficult to read. To embed a link, you want to just take that link text and instead put it within plain text of your document.

To do that, you can highlight that text or scan over it and then connect that link to the text using the link function, say, on Word, on your website software, whatever it is.

Keith: One thing to note though, when you're doing that, be very careful of the Click Here link.

Maddie: Where?

Keith: Yeah, right? Click here for what? We've all seen so many links that just say, "Click here or here," or something equally vague. This goes back to something with individuals that use screen readers primarily because one of the functions of a screen reader is to scan the page for links.

Let's say you go into a page because you're looking to download something. You go to that page. Instead of the screen reader reading every word of that page, the user already knows what they're looking for.

There's a keyboard command that triggers this sort of link scanner. It'll just go through and read the links. If that individual is hearing links that just keep saying, "Click here, click here, click here," that's meaningless.

Then they do have to read through the whole content to figure out what it is. If the link says, "Download the whatever," or, "Listen to our episode," or so-and-so, then you know what you're looking for. That's one of the main reasons right there is for screen-reader users.

Maddie: That advice, I think, is obviously crucial and really helpful for Word documents, PowerPoints, websites, whatever it may be. In the context of social media, you're not able to embed a link in a post caption, like that captioned text.

Keith: That's a good point.

Maddie: Instead of, again, posting that long link in the caption, and then that same person that's using the screen reader, their screen reader might read that entire thing, H-T-T-P-S, colon, forward, forward slash. [laughs] It's going to read the thing letter by letter, mostly likely. That is not helpful whatsoever.

Instead of pasting that long link into a social media post, we highly recommend writing that through a link shortner.

You might have seen...I've always called it bitly or tinyurl, but I don't know if other people say it a different way. It's B-I-T, dot, L-Y, or T-I-N-Y, dot, U-R-L. Those are both free, tinyurl is free. bit.ly, you can have a certain amount, or you to pay for a subscription or have it tied to something. Anyways...

Keith: There's plans, yeah.

Maddie: Exactly.

The purpose of those is that it shortens the link to be, maybe 10 to 15 characters, instead of these 50-character-plus long websites. People would be able to see that and know that's the link to what's maybe mentioned in the text, without having to read a super long link.

One thing too is, this is accessibility, but it's also just annoying, like when you see a long link.

Keith: [laughs]

Maddie: Especially if you're someone that uses a screen reader, you feel like, "Oh boy, here we go. This thing's going to be reading this link for a minute." [laughs] That's just almost inconsiderate to that user's experience.

Keith: What if you're using Twitter? It'll forget about your character count too. This is friendly just for that, honestly.

Maddie: Exactly. It's just a multipurpose reason, why to do that.

[music]

Andrew Gurza: Hello there, and welcome to "Disability After Dark," the podcast shining a bright light on disability stories. I'm your host, Disability Awareness Consultant, Andrew Gurza.

This is a podcast where you sit down with your close disabled friends and talk about things in the disability experience that we never ever get to shine a light on. That's why it's called Disability After Dark.

Each week, we'll explore everything from disability, to ableism, to sexuality, and so much more, including things like disability grief, disability joy, and so many different conversation topics around the disabled experience.

We even have special bonus content like "Quarantine and Chill," a podcast within Disability After Dark, where we explore the effects of the ongoing pandemic, or a "Bump'n" podcast, where we talk all about sex and disability and sex toys on the show.

Tune in wherever you get your podcast, and let's shine a bright light on disability stories. Thanks, everybody. Bye.

Narrator: Dating with a disability can be hard. I know that because I struggled for years to date somebody with a disability. Having cerebral palsy, I encountered many people not even considering me as a potential partner.

When they did, there were judgements and attitudes. But succesful dating and finding a healthy, joyful relationship, it's entirely possible. I finally figured out how to do this. I have been with my husband for over 15 years now.

The key is simply keep trying. Continue to go for what you want, despite the heartbreak and rejection. Believe in your potential as a dating and relationship partner. I know that sounds very simple. It's not.

That's why I created Dating Made Easier, the monthly membership that will teach you how to get the results you want, feel more comfortable and confident dating, and give you consistent support with monthly workshops, brainstorming, and networking.

Go to radiantabilities.com/datingresources and join today.

[music]

Keith: The next thing to talk about, captioning, captioning video content. This obviously only applies when you have video content. YouTube is huge. A lot of people post YouTube videos nowadays, I've heard. [laughs]

Maddie: Why are you saying like you're not on YouTube ever? [laughs]

Keith: No, I'm kidding. I'm an ol' fuddy-duddy. I don't use social media. What is this social media you speak of?

Maddie: Oh, my God.

Keith: No, obviously video content is huge. Someone with a disability, that is deaf, hard of hearing, you need the captions. They can't hear the content. What good is a video if you can't hear the content?

Captions obviously provide real-time on-screen text, everything spoken within the video. Good captioning also includes information about other things that are going on, like sounds, the music that's playing and so on, so you can get a better, just overall understanding of the content, of what's going on, not just spoken word.

There's different ways to do that, depending on what you're doing on the platform. YouTube makes it relatively simple. They do have their automatic captioning. I don't know, it's wonky. If it's simple content, it doesn't do a bad job sometimes. It's worth trying. Turn it on and see what happens.

If the quality is not very good, there are lot of ways to get your captions made cheaply. We'll put some links to resources out there that will create captions for your videos for, again, a dollar a minute or something. If you have a 20-minute video, it'll cost you 20 bucks and you get captions.

There's free options too. They're not as powerful and sometimes they're automated as well, just like YouTube. Quality varies. Even if you have to create it manually, if you're video's not very long, it's worth it.

Maddie: It's definitely worth it. Something that you mentioned is that YouTube's captions, they're automated. They're not going to be perfect, but if you have a good foundation, you're not going in and transcribing the entire script of what you said, maybe you just go in and tweak some words that are mixed up, or add some punctuation where it's relevant.

The amount of time that would take you, versus writing the captions, or even if you don't have a budget for captions, that's a good way to get around that.

Keith: It is.

Maddie: You alluded to what we're going to talk about next, which is audio descriptions. You mentioned, maybe there's music or a relevant sound. Another kind of aspect to consider when doing descriptions is doing a verbal description of the visual information that is conveyed in the video.

This is incredibly helpful for folks who are blind or low vision, fully understand the things that are going on in the video, in the event that's happening, artwork, locations, things like that.

You essentially just want to talk your text. If there's important text on the video and it's not in the audio, you want to make sure that information is available through audio descriptions. You don't want to narrate everything or say everything because then it can be redundant, but it's important to include the most important aspects of it.

You'll want to have people in the videos introduce themselves as they appear, whether that's doing a visual description and saying their name, allowing the blind or low-vision person to identify that voice with a certain individual that's being featured in the video.

Then, additionally, if there's a scene or moment that is purely visual, you want to make sure that you describe that. An example is a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat. If it's quiet to show the illusion of the magic trick and you don't want to give away what's about to happen, you have to make sure that you're going to say that out loud.

If this is potentially hard to comprehend, sometimes for folks audio descriptions can be a little bit harder to maybe decide what is important to include or not include, just ask yourself if you were to watch a video with your eyes closed or turned away from that video, what information are you missing to understand that video?

Whatever information you come up with is what should be included in audio descriptions.

Keith: Exactly. That also includes text that might be titles, things like that that appear in the screen that no one's saying that information in the video content. Then you need to have an audio description that states what that text says.

Sometimes when it's introducing somebody, or again, a title or a section, a heading in the video, you want to make sure you read that content as well.

The next thing is relatively simple. You'd usually think it's straightforward, but you'd be surprised how often people forget to do it. It's about acronyms and making sure that you identify the meaning of your acronyms.

People throw in things. Again, you've got text limits in social media. People are used to communicating in their own shorthand. People throw out acronyms and don't really identify what they are.

You want to definitely make sure you identify them, at least the first time. Spell out something and then maybe in parentheses put in the acronym. Then if you use it a second or third time, you can just use the acronym. It's been defined, but don't do it all the time.

You don't want your content looking like a bunch of capital letters. It lowers the readability, and again, for screen readers, it makes it difficult to understand the content because it's just reading strings of letters and not really giving you a good indication of what is trying to be communicated.

Maddie: Our next thing on the list is content warnings or sometimes referred to as trigger warnings, or it can be shorthand to CW or TW. Some topics of discussion or your content could be distressing, harmful, and difficult for people to engage with.

If we're talking about trauma, if we're talking about systems of oppression, if we're talking about things that are very real experiences that people have had in their lives either years ago or recently, it's not our way to know what someone has experienced, and it's not our choice to make if someone should or shouldn't interact with some content.

To create a safe space and safe environment for someone who's engaging in your content, offering content warnings when there is reference to violence or abuse because it allows someone to choose whether to engage or not engage.

At the beginning of some of our blogs or podcast episodes, we've had to include content warnings to ensure that people who might not be equipped to deal with that certain information or it could put them in a dangerous position can choose to not engage in that. That's their choice.

I think what's most important to take away from this is by providing this content warning, you give power back to folks that have been hurt or harmed by experience or at a traumatic event in their lives who would much rather avoid engaging in content that brings that up for them. That's totally valid and totally their choice, and should be respected.

That's one simple way to keep people safe and ensure that they're not re-traumatizing themselves beyond their own will, unknowingly.

Keith: Next thing, we'll talk about using styles for formatting.

What that means, essentially, if you think about content, if you think about a lot of documents you'll see, whether it's on the Web, whether it's even an old newspaper or something, a magazine, when you open it up, a visual reader will see, "Oh, this is obviously the title, and then I see that there's some subheadings along the way."

You know how the things are organized and you can go there at a glance. You can say, "Oh, I want to read this chunk because it's plainly identified." For someone that uses a screen reader, that's not obvious.

If you're creating your content by, "OK, I'm going to make this a title. I'm going to make it 18 points. I'm going to make it blue. I'll make it this font," it'll jump right out. Again, to a visual user, yes. To someone who uses a screen reader, it's just more text.

Just like with the links we talked about earlier, screen-reader users have a way to also scan headings, just like I described. You'll pick up a magazine. You'll just be scanning it for what you want to read by looking at those headings. That's what this does for someone with a screen reader. They can just read the different headings in the page, jump to the section that they want.

The way to do that though is, again, not just making it 18-point in blue and Times New Roman or whatever but making it an actual header. This is going to vary depending on the medium that you're writing your content in. If you're blogging, you probably have seen heading options for formatting, heading one, heading two, and so on.

If you're using a word processor, a lot of people aren't as familiar with what is out there for that. There's always something generally called Styles. Microsoft Word is definitely called Styles. I believe most word processors refer to it the same way, but it's the same thing.

Instead of just formatting your text manually, you'll select the text and say, "This is going to be heading one." It'll do a visual formatting for you. It'll also add some metadata to the document that says, "This is a heading."

If a screen-reader user reads that document, they know, "OK, this is the main heading and this is heading two and this is heading three, and so on." It gives them some sense of organization.

One of the first questions I always get is, "What if I don't like the way those look?" There's different styles. There's different design options. Again, using Word as the example, there's, I think, a design tab. You get a bunch of different document designs. You can pick one that you like better.

You'll still have all those same options. You can also edit it, create your own. We have a custom style here that we use, so we know that everything is, one, accessible but also using our logo colors and things like that. You can make custom styles, put one together that you like, that works for you but it's accessible.

Again, think about color contrast and all those other things we just talked about. They all still play into this. That way, you're giving your document that extra content that a screen-reader user needs to better understand it.

Maddie: Definitely. As we move on to this next, towards the end of this list here, all of these things work together. We're talking about all of these accessibility concepts. More likely than not, you're going to have to use multiple of these accessibility best practices to ensure that your content is accessible.

If you're making a graphic for social media that has text and images and whatever on a graphic, if it doesn't have color contrast, if it's in a hard-to-read font if you don't include alt text, if you have all of your hashtags all throughout the text of the post, you can't pick and choose which things that you want to do.

You need to take actionable steps that work for you to start implementing these things. It's not like you can be an accessibility expert overnight. I think this next example highlights that, where it's just not a one-size-fits-all situation, despite what might be said about this.

The next thing we're going to talk about is web accessibility overlays and why you really should never use them.

Keith: Never, ever. Never.

Maddie: It's Keith's actual mortal enemy, I think.

[laughter]

Keith: That's right.

Maddie: An accessibility overlay is a website add-on that claims, keyword "claims," but that involved in italics to fix any accessibility issues that your website might have. Common ones that are promoted are called AccessiBe or UserWay. There's a lot of these.

They claim that they can just instantly, poof, get rid of all of your accessibility issues and turn it into a full accessible website. It's just not true. I'll let you talk about this a bit more since this is more like your wheelhouse. Also, you've dealt with these more than I have.

Keith: They overpromise and underdeliver, essentially. As Maddie said, they tell you, "Well, we'll make your site accessible." This is more for bigger businesses and things, but they'll say, "You can use one of these and you won't get sued. Your site is accessible now, right? You won't get sued."

It's not true. There have been companies that have used these, saying, "Oh, our site is accessible now." No, they have been sued. They have lost. Don't believe the hype.

Our audience here is not necessarily the corporations...

[laughter]

Keith: If you're making a small website, but you're marketing it and you want people to know about it, everyone's susceptible to having some sort of kick-back if your site's not accessible. These are not the solution, they're not the solution.

They promise that they can do all these different things, and on the surface, "Yeah, OK, I've made my font bigger, I've changed the font, I've..." I don't know, there's so many different things it will do, change the color contrast, this or that. The problem is, it's doing it as an add-on, as a plugin.

The way your website is built, it's the way it is. If it's not accessible, think of a building. You can have a building that's an old building, and it's got cracks and it's falling apart. The foundation is bad, the walls are falling apart. You can put some putty in the cracks and you can paint, and you can make it look beautiful on the outside, but that house is still falling apart.

Maddie: That's the landlord special, that's what they call it. [laughs]

Keith: That's right. Here you go.

That's what this does. I'm not saying websites are crumbling, but if it doesn't have the accessibility, that's the analogy here, is that you're just giving it a coat of paint and hiding things, and making it look like it's in better shape than it really is.

We'll have resources you can click on to learn a little more about why that is. There's some very adamant statements out there about not using these things. We'll post some more information. Just make your website accessible by making the actual code, the content, the meat of your website accessible, and don't try to use one of these to just an after-the-fact fix.

Maddie: You touched on something that I hadn't thought to include in this podcast. I just wanted to note, accessibility and ADA, and all of these things that are protections put in place to help prevent and [inaudible 47:30] discrimination against people with disabilities.

When you have companies and folks coming to you, telling you, "It'll make your site accessible, and that way, you won't be sued," it's, "OK, timeout, timeout. Is your goal not to be sued, or is your goal to tap into disable folks as a user base, or a new part of your audience?"

Keith: "Are you fighting an enemy or are you being welcoming and inclusive?"

Maddie: Yeah, and there's a lot of studies and a lot of research [laughs] that has been gone into, when organizations make their stores accessible, their content or websites accessible, whatever it may be, it opens the doors for the disability community to become patrons of that.

The disability community, estimates vary, but potentially 25 percent, if not more, of the American public has a disability and/or identifies as having a disability.

If you were to turn away one in four customers just because they have a disability, that's just bad business. It's bad business to just want to make your website accessible just to hope that those one in four people don't sue you, because your website overlay, accessibility website, doesn't work.

Anyways, I could go off about this topic, [laughs] but that's so important to highlight here.

This isn't like, "Oh, we're going to make it accessible, so the people -- I'm disabled, I'm not being condescending -- so the disabled people can have access, and pity on them that they've never had access before." No, it's good business. It's good practice, it's good work, and it's good community inclusion.

Anyways, it just always makes me so angry when people are like, "Why should I do this?" I'm just, "Oh my goodness. That's so naive."

Keith: It's so true. One of the things, whenever you're creating content, you want to do it with accessibility in mind. You don't want to think of accessibility as, "OK, now I've made this website," or, "I've made this content. Now what do I do to make it accessible?" This is a bit of a different point.

Maddie: It's connected.

Keith: It's connected, but it's not something you do after the fact. It's not like, "How do I fix it for accessibility?" Just create it with accessibility in mind. That's a term, accessibility in mind. Keep it at the top of mind while you're working on this stuff. One of the best resources out there on accessibility is called WebAIM. It essentially stands for, Web Accessibility in Mind.

You just think that way when you're creating the content, making sure that...You're creating content, you want it to be available. You want the most people possible to experience it.

Maddie: Yeah, what's the point of making it? [laughs]

Keith: It's not a fix, it's not an add-on, it's not a way to not be sued. Just create your content so that the most people possible can enjoy it and experience it.

As we've touched on it in other places, it goes beyond that anyway. The more accessible you make your content, the more usable you make it, and the more enjoyable you make it for everyone. It's a win-win.

Maddie: I want to just say one last thing about what you just mentioned too because this is how I saw it be connected to what I was saying is, when you don't create content with accessibility in mind...Say you are a company that has a huge website with tons of pages and resources, and duh-duh-duh-duh.

If you've never considered accessibility, fixing the accessibility in your website may be a fairly undertaking.

Keith: Exactly.

Maddie: We're not understating that that's overwhelming. We're not saying...

Keith: A redesign, perhaps, sometimes, like completely redo.

Maddie: Exactly. Keith and I are not understating that could be a very time-consuming, potentially, process. That's totally valid. You may have resistance against the amount of money, your time, or energy that could take. That would all be made up by the disabled patrons that could access you content inside your store later.

If you use a website overlay and pay a company to do that to your website, and then you find out that all this time it wasn't actually accessible.

The time that you spent implementing the website accessibility overlay, or paying that company, or telling disabled folks, "Oh, you're wrong. We have an accessible website. I don't know what

their user experiencing, or they're 'complaining about our website.' It is accessible," all of that energy could've been put into making your website accessible.

Which you can, honestly, do better than an overlay, just by listening to this podcast. [laughs] It's true.

Keith: It's true.

Maddie: Anyways, that is my soap box for this episode.

[laughter]

Keith: No, I'm with you. It's interesting talking about website stuff. The last couple of points we were going to talk about relate to website accessibility. If you're not a web builder, if you have nothing to do websites, this may not be for you. Even if you're a blogger, anything like that, this is all worth thinking about.

To be honest with you, a lot of it is a summary of the other things we talked about. Again, when we're talking about common website accessibility issues, it's because images don't have all text. A screen reader doesn't understand the structure because you're missing headings. You're just using colors and font sizes and things.

Again, color contrast, links that say, Click Here, I don't mean to gloss over this, but it's again, these are all things we've just talked about. The content is confusing. It's not written in a easy-to-read manner.

The only thing that would be a new item here would be forms on a website. We were going to talk about that. A form on a website can be unusable for someone with a screen reader.

Maddie: That's with a contact form, or request assistance form. That's what we mean when we say forms, by the way.

Keith: Perfect. Thanks for the context there. When a visual user is experiencing a form, they'll see a blank, but in front of it it'll say first name. Then another one says last name. "OK. I know what to put in that blank."

If you don't build it right if the labels don't correspond with the empty fields, a screen reader could go through and read empty...It depends on the screen reader what it's going to say, but essentially it just informs the user that it's an empty field. "OK. Great. What am I supposed to put in it. I have no idea."

Maddie: Is that a phone number? Is that an email, a name?

Keith: Exactly. There's no way of knowing, so that's an issue. It's beyond the scope of this to explain how to fix that in a Web design sense, but it's something to look out for. There's resources available on how to fix that.

Maddie: Now that you have all of these things to consider, especially when talking about accessibility overlays and things like that, you can also test your website. You're like, "Oh gosh. I've never considered accessibility in my entire life. What am I to do?"

You can test...

Keith: [laughs] That's right.

Maddie: ...your website to see how inaccessible it is, the same way you can test accessibility on a Word doc or a PowerPoint. If you didn't know you could do that, you can. It'll tell you which images might be missing alt text.

If it's cool with you, I'll let you talk about testing your website because you know a bit more about screen readers than I do and have gone through this process a bit more than I have to be able to try navigating a website to ensure that it is accessible for someone who uses a screen reader, augmented different devices to navigate their websites, etc.

Keith: Sure. There's a couple of things. There's automated testing, and there's manual testing. Automated testing, it's a Web-based accessibility scanner. A very common one, I mentioned WebAIM earlier, they have a tool called WAVE. We'll put a link to it in the notes. WAVE is a good one, and it finds a lot of common problems.

Again, it's an automated test. It's built on code. It can find some things, but it can't find everything. It can't check some things that you need a human being to manually test, but it's a great start. It'll find a lot of good things. Do that, fix those problems.

The other way is, though, that you can do some manual testing. It's really not that hard. One of the first, easiest things you can do, load your Web page and then don't use your mouse. Unplug it, put it aside, whatever, and try to navigate with the keyboard.

Generally, a screen reader user or someone who uses other assistive techniques, pointing devices, or so on, if they navigate through with a keyboard, they hit the Tab button to tab through the content, by that, essentially links and things, like menus and whatnot.

If you hit Tab and you can't tell where you are on the website, there's not a box around the content or that box is jumping around in an illogical order, then you've got problems.

Another thing you can do, and you actually would do this in the WAVE test, there's a slider at the top that says Styles On/Off. Styles, again, is just all the formatting of a website. If you turn that off, can you still understand the site?

If there's things that you can't understand, content that's suddenly missing, that's a problem, and that's something that needs to be fixed. Like we mentioned earlier, read through the links, again, the click here's, that sort of thing.

A test that you could do for forms, as we talked about, if you were to click on a label, so let's say you click where it says first name, not clicking in the blank but you're clicking on where it says first name, if the cursor appears in the blank, that's a good sign. It's probably accessible.

Again, I don't want to say that one test makes it, "Yep, good. Got it. It's fully accessible," but it's a good sign. If you click on that and the cursor doesn't appear in the blank, then most likely there is a major problem and a screen reader would not associate the label with the blank. That's another really quick, easy thing you can do.

Make sure your audio and video have captions or transcripts, at the very least. If captions aren't possible, at least have a transcript that someone could refer to, and scan the content for readability. We talked about in Word or using the Hemingway app.

For a website, there are tools out there where you can put the URL in, and it'll spit out scores on that content. Again, grade level stuff, things like that, we'll have links. Those are some basic things you can do to get a good sense on what's right and what's wrong regarding the accessibility of your website.

Maddie: Even though we've come to the end of the list that we created for this episode, we also wanted to note that even if you are like, "Whoa. This is a lot. How could there possibly be more...?"

Keith: [laughs]

Maddie: ...there's always more you can do.

I think the takeaway is to create a website or create content that doesn't just meet "ADA requirements or conditions." You want to shift your mindset to valuing disabled books as users, as a patron, as listeners, readers, whatever your business, or whatever the context is that you're trying to implement accessibility.

Like we mentioned, they're a huge untapped source of engagement and audience. We really wanted to highlight that because what we're saying right now, some of these things might be more important, depending on which certain communities you're trying to highlight.

One example that we didn't touch on that we could probably spend a whole episode on is language accessibility. How we can talk about making things easy-to-read language or plain language documentation, things like that, but for those who don't know, American Sign Language is a completely different language from English.

It has different syntax, vocab, structure, etc. that doesn't...It's not a direct translation from English. You can't just put something on your website in English and expect someone who signs to be able to read it. That's not even to mention that not everybody uses ASL or American Sign Language. There's home signs, indigenous sign languages, and lots of different things to consider.

That's one way to consider that. At DRF, we just implemented something called Signly, where ASL users can go on the site and select information and pages translated into sign language. There's an interpreter on our page that will sign the information instead of them trying to read it in English.

We're a disability organization that's been around for many years. Just now, we're potentially the first disability organization in the whole US to have American Sign Language available as a

service on our site. That goes to show that we're always growing and learning. Implementing accessibility practices is going to take time.

Keith: It's a moving target a little bit. New things come out. New things are found. You're always tweaking and enhancing.

Maddie: Definitely. There's definitely things even beyond ASL accessibility, language, and things like that that we could have probably touched on, but that's really the main takeaway, is to think about it as accessibility as a practice and not a requirement, and an intention, not an afterthought.

It doesn't just benefit people with disabilities. It benefits everybody. Once your site or social media, whatever, is accessible, you will see the fruits of that labor pay off 100 percent.

It'll, at least at the end of the day, bring you comfort, peace, and understanding that you've done your best to put on content or a website that is intentional and strives to be inclusive, especially in a time where we've become more divisive on these concepts.

Overall, we hope this was helpful to you and that you were able to take something away from this episode to implement in your own life. If you liked this episode, please help us be found by more folks by sharing it with a friend, giving us a like, review, or rating wherever you're listening.

We definitely want to keep making more content that you enjoy like this, whether it's more episodes about accessibility, maybe some in-person accessibility considerations for event planning, or buildings, things like that that you'll be able to enjoy and find helpful. Engaging with the content, subscribing, things like that will definitely help us be able to do that.

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