

-- Speaker 0 00:04 Make it right. The manufacturing podcast,

Speaker 1 00:10 I recently read a statistic that said there were almost 4.5 billion users of the internet. Of that approximately 15% have a disability that could impact the ease with which they find what they're looking for as a business. They could be looking for you, but if you aren't doing some basic things to make your website accessible, then you could be missing out on significant opportunities and these adjustments aren't as daunting as you might think this week. I'll make it right. My guest is going to walk us through some ideas and approaches to help you get started getting your website accessible. I'm Janet Eastman and I'm pleased to have Jeff White of Kula partners as my guest. Jeff is a user experience and usability expert with over 25 years of experience. Jeff, you're going to load us up with some great ideas. Welcome to the show. Thanks very much for having me, Janet. My pleasure. So why is it so important for B2B manufacturers to get this website accessibility thing, right?

Speaker 2 01:11 I think that there's a number of reasons and I mean what we're going to talk about today, obviously it doesn't just apply to B2B manufacturers. It applies to absolutely anybody who is putting a site out there that, you know, if you are sharing information about your company on the web, you should be ensuring that that information is available to just about everyone. Because the fact of the matter is, like you said in the intro, you know, there's a significant portion of the population that are using the internet with a disability and we're not necessarily thinking about their needs as we, uh, you know, as we create sites, as we build marketing strategies and implement tactics, you know, most people and it, and it's not through any sort of form of, uh, you know, they're not trying to make their lives more difficult. They're just not there necessarily aware that this is even a thing that they need to be considering.

Speaker 2 01:59 And, you know, aside from simply having a site that is accessible and available to anyone with a disability, whether that's a vision issue or a, an auditory issue where they can't hear things properly or cognitive disabilities or other physical disabilities, you know, we have a large portion of the population that isn't able to do things in the way that, you know, normally, um, yeah, bold bodies are actually able to do so. So we have to, um, enable a number of different things within our web properties in order to make sure that those people can access them appropriately.

Speaker 1 02:33 Right. So some of the challenges that the visually and hearing impaired, uh, would have with a website are pretty obvious. But what are some of the things that most web designers just aren't recognizing and continue to get wrong?

Speaker 2 02:44 Well, I think that there's a number of things and luckily we have a series of guidelines. It's called the why CAG or the web content accessibility guidelines that are put up by the worldwide web consortium. And currently I think we're in version 2.1 of, of that document. And basically what it describes is all of the different things that we should be doing as web developers and designers and marketers to ensure that the sites that we're creating are, are available to people. And you know, it goes, it goes to a number of different things. It's the overall structure of the site, ensuring that we're using language and navigation that makes it obvious as to what we're, uh, you know, hoping people are going to be able to click on or navigate to within the site and making it easy to understand what's available to them as options when they arrive.

Speaker 2 03:33 It's providing alternatives for a rich media. So if you have a video files or audio files, ensuring that those have captioning or, um, transcripts in order to be read, if they cannot be heard, it's using a high contrast on all of the different elements within the site, especially as it moves down into smaller text and smaller content. And that's where there's kind of a ramping effect within the, uh, the Y CAG guidelines that goes from a to AAA where as you move up through that, it becomes more and more stringent as to the level of contrast that needs to be created in order to ensure that things can be read. Um, and that they're fully accessible on all types of devices. Because as you know, um, you know, --

-- mobile has long since surpassed desktop devices from a, uh, from a number of users perspective. You know, in a lot of the sites that we develop, you know, mobile can be up to 60% or even more.

Speaker 2 04:32 So, um, ensuring that things work well and are easily accessible on small screens is as important as ensuring that they work well on a, on a great big monitor or a laptop. So, you know, what a lot of designers just aren't necessarily thinking of is just the extra time that they're going to need to take as they build a site to implement these measures. And what a lot of marketers aren't necessarily thinking of is the extra effort it's going to require on their part to ensure that they're implementing alternative content for people with disabilities. So just so that we understand, um, what are the tools that the visually and hearing impaired are using to navigate the web? Well, it's actually, um, you know, it today is a much better time to be using assistive technologies because they're actually built into a lot of the devices that we all own now.

Speaker 2 05:25 Even if you haven't turned it on, you know, within your iPhone or an Android phone or, or a, you know, a modern Macintosh computer or, or even a Microsoft windows based PCs, you know, a lot of the assistive technologies for screen reading, um, for creating higher contrast texts and things like that are actually built in to the operating systems. Now I'm on top of that. There are other third party platforms that people can use. Um, you know, there are even systems that will translate, um, written text into braille for example, for, uh, for blind users. So there, there are a number of different tools that are available to people and um, designers should be testing as best they can. I mean obviously we're not all going to rush out and, and purchase, um, different assistive devices and assistive software. But there are a number of things that we can do and platforms that we can use to actually test against to see if our sites are being made accessibly.

Speaker 2 06:24 So you mentioned earlier, um, that marketers and web developers need to understand that this is going to take a little bit extra time to get it just right. When we talk about extra time, what are we talking about? Because I think that there are people that are going to go, Oh my, this is going to be a really arduous and daunting task. So yeah. What does it take? How much extra time does it take? I think the, you know, the time thing, if you're redesigning your website, it's probably not going to be a massive undertaking in order to do this. You just think about it from the beginning and from the start and uh, and you can be, you know, considering that and probably only adding, you know, an extra five or 10% to the overall, um, time that's required, where I think it gets a little bit more difficult for people who have existing platforms and existing sites with a lot of content in them.

Speaker 2 07:15 And going back and retrofitting some of these things can actually be a bit more daunting. Um, so I think really, you know, the, the key messages, if you're building a new site or redesigning your current site now is the time, you know, work with a designer or developer that understands this and ensure that they can actually get these things implemented for you. And if you've got an existing site, you can start by picking off some of the lower hanging fruit, such as, you know, going through your site and ensuring that any, um, rich content and rich media has alternative content. You know, so any videos has, have closed captioning. Any podcasts, have transcripts, any images, have alternative texts that describes the photo or the illustration, um, where you're then going to have to do a little bit more work. And it's probably going to have some additional cost is kind of having a designer or developer go through the site and enable things for keyboard navigation for example, to ensure that, um, users with, uh, you know, who are visually disabled can actually tab through the different navigational elements in your site or skip the navigation and move straight to the content to have it read to them.

Speaker 2 08:25 So those are some of the things that, uh, you know, that are going to be more difficult to do, especially if you have, you know, hundreds or thousands of pages of content. But, uh, they're absolutely necessary. And I think that there's a, there's anothe --

-- r angle to this as well because not only is it something that you need to be considering, especially given the size of, you know, modern B2B buying committees being so enormous. I mean, Gartner was saying a couple of years ago that there was eight in a, in each, um, committee. And now they're saying it's as high as 14, you know, and just given the percentage of disabled, um, the numbers that I have are largely around the American population, but given that percentage, I mean there's a good chance that there could be someone with a disability on the buying committee that is looking to work with your company. So, you know, putting your best foot forward is certainly a big part of that. As I was kind of getting to a moment ago. You know, there are a number of, there's a whole cottage industry of lawsuits that are popping up, uh, using the Americans with disabilities act and section five Oh eight of the, of that in order to actually Sue companies that haven't made their websites accessible.

Speaker 1 09:33 So this is, I mean, this is something that has been, they've been asking people to make their, they being, you know, whoever it is, people, um,

Speaker 1 09:43 to make their websites more accessible for a long, long time. And now that lawsuits are coming. I know that when I talked to you on the phone, um, prior to this, to this podcast, you had said that some very famous people have been sued because their websites are not accessible. So this is something that, I mean we have to reach this population and we have to get it right. Are there people out there who, um, I mean, I know that you've got 25 years experience in this, but are most web developers versed in this information?

Speaker 2 10:16 I don't think they are, honestly. Um, I think they should be. But, um, I do think that things are, are, you know, the tools that we use for developing for the web are getting better and better. The, the trouble is, is that if you're not starting a site design with accessibility in mind, it gets harder and harder the longer you go down the path of building it in order to implement it. So, you know, for every site that we build, you know, we do an accessibility audit at every stage. So when our interface designers are designing the initial comps of the homepage, for example, we, our QA guy is looking at them and saying, okay, this actually meets the contrast ratios that we need to have. This doesn't, you know, as designers we love to have little subtle things like 20% gray text on a white background or something like that.

Speaker 2 11:03 You know, and it, while it looks lovely, it's just not visible to people with low vision. So, you know, those are things that need to be considered from the very beginning of those projects. Um, whereas I think, you know, if people are using, um, pack era, you know, themes for their WordPress site or other things like that, they may not be thinking about those things as they're deploying that theme. They're just looking at it and saying, you know, this looks nice. Um, it fits our brand. And off they go. And the longer that you, that you wait to put these, uh, you know, to put this into practice, the harder it's going to be. As I was saying earlier, to be able to do it well and to not have it cost a lot of extra money.

Speaker 1 11:45 <inaudible> but you're saying that you know, somebody who does buy a theme or uses any one of these website builder. Yeah. Um, services. Yeah. I think of Wix or who, like whoever is out there. Yeah. Okay. Are these website builder programs Mmm. Easy to implement, implement all this accessibility into,

Speaker 2 12:09 I think a lot of them are. It's, it's there if you look for it. So I mean, even, um, you know, the, the, uh, the area in, you know, in WordPress to enter alternative text for an image has been there forever. Um, a lot of people as they're populating content in their site, they skip over that because they're, you know, they've got hundreds of images to put in. So then we just keep going.

Speaker 1 12:30 Well, and then they probably, if you're like me, I didn't know what that was really for. Yeah. Right. And he just told me and the light bulb came on and I went, Oh, that's why they always ask that.

Speaker 2 12:44 Yeah, exactly. And, but I mean the know with, um, with devices having assistive technology built in, you know, it's in your iPhone and all of that and you know, social media companies --

-- have done a really good job of this but not a great job of promoting that. It's there. I mean an Instagram you can put alternative text for every photo and video that you upload. Same thing on Twitter, same thing on LinkedIn, same thing on Facebook. Those tools are there. It's just like, you know, we, we're looking at it and saying, okay, I've got to get this up. But you know, the social post has to go live and we're, we're putting in the photo and we're putting in the, you know, the overall body text and the, and the link and not really thinking of, you know, what's going to happen if somebody sees access. Is that without the ability to see what we're doing?

Speaker 1 13:27 Hm. Well, and I guess ultimately it's, it's raising that awareness because, I mean, I learned something from every podcast, but the big light bulb you just turned it on for me. I didn't know why I was supposed to put that alternative text in there. Now I completely understand why that's so important and why they even asked me to do that, which is, which is great. Thank you Jeff. No problem. So can you share some stories? Um, you, you've worked with a lot of companies but companies that you know, may have, Mmm done this accessibility thing and the, and the results that they've seen from doing that or some horror stories where people haven't done it right. And the trouble is they've run into,

Speaker 2 14:07 well, I think they're, you know, there, there's a number of different things and as I mentioned before, you know, we, we kind of approach this from, from every project that we do. So, you know, for us it's just getting, whether it's something that we think about, it's something that we're passionate about. Um, I know that there are lots of other web developers who are passionate about it as well. The, the one thing that's really interesting about this is that a well-built, accessible website is not just a good thing for people with disabilities. It's a good thing for everybody because a site that is built to be accessible is also built very well for organic search optimization. And a lot of people don't realize that like if you simply take the time to enable these features to design with, it's accessibility in, you're not just making sure that people who have low vision or auditory issues or other things like that are able to access it.

Speaker 2 14:59 You're also ensuring that Google likes your site better, which is a beautiful hidden benefit of creating, creating a site, using semantic code and properly contrasting content and, and all of those different things. So I think that there are, you know, there's these, there are the obvious things that, that go into this and then there's the hidden benefits. You know, not getting sued obviously is a bit of a benefit. But, um, for us, you know, we have, uh, you know, we go to market and when we talk with a new client and we're approaching a web build or letting them know that this is something that we're going to be considering off the top and it's something that we're going to be training them on as we go through and help them enter the content into the site. And we're training the marketers to be thinking about this so that after we're no longer involved and they're continuing to add content and blog posts and other stuff in their site promoting social content and things like that, that they're actually going through and, and keeping that in mind to ensure that their site maintains that accessible angle.

Speaker 2 15:59 Um, so I, I think that there, you know, we haven't had a client who has had any particular horror stories about this, but we certainly have read plenty of stories about this. Domino's just settled the lawsuit. Um, I, in the last six months, I think it might've been a little bit longer ago than that, um, where they, you know, their pizza builder is not accessible and they were basically refusing to fix that and have been find a fairly hefty, a hefty fine in order to ensure that they do this going forward. Um, it all kind of came to a head about a year ago when Beyonce was sued because one of her fans was unable to purchase a sweatshirt on her site because it simply wasn't accessible. And so I think, you know, these stories help to spread the gospel, if you will, of, uh, of accessibility and ensure that people are thinking about this as they go into the design of their site. And as they're adding more content and as they're implementing their marketin --

-- g strategy, hopefully they're kind of continuing to consider the importance of making this site available to everybody.

Speaker 1 17:05 Hmm. Okay. I'm going to get you to recap a couple of things. So can you just provide some simple and effective tips to help companies start making some of these valuable changes that can significantly impact their accessibility? On their websites

Speaker 2 17:20 for sure. And I think that the first place to start is providing text alternatives. So any illustrations, any photographs or anything that's not text based on your site, you can go into your content management system, whether that's Wix or WordPress or anything like that. And there will be a box there where you can enter alternative content for that. And the thing to consider there is don't just say this is a photo in that alternative text, describe what it is, provide some context so that when people who can't see the image can actually get the benefit of what's in it. Um, the, uh, you know, if you're using video, you should be looking to turn on closed captioning within that. And one of the great things about a lot of these tools is that, you know, sites like YouTube actually will do this for you automatically.

Speaker 2 18:07 They'll listen for the tech, the, uh, the, the voices that are in your, in your piece. And we'll actually automatically add captions. You can go through and edit those and make sure that they're correct, but, uh, it's the ability to do that. Is there, um, an expensive, isn't it Jeff? Like, I mean, I've used this with other companies and it's really inexpensive to get even a long video closed captioned and very quickly. It's not even like two days. It's like almost instantaneous with some services. Yeah, no, it works really, really well. And you know, transcribing a podcast, there are yeah, plenty of services out there that will do this for, you know, there are some that do it, uh, in an automated way using, um, using technology that, you know, could be as cheap as 1 cent per minute and others are charging about a dollar or slightly less per minute of recorded audio.

Speaker 2 18:58 So, you know, even that is relatively inexpensive and then requires a bit of editing. But, uh, you know, it's, it's just so easy. And I mean, again, the brilliant benefit of having, um, a transcript of any audio on your site is that Google doesn't necessarily listen to the audio, but it will certainly index the text. So it's an opportunity, you know, if you have a 30 minute podcast on your site, well that's probably three or 4,000 words worth of textual content about a very specific topic and that's a huge benefit from a search or a search engine optimization perspective. Um, the other thing that kind of comes in more on the planning side cause it's a little bit harder to implement when you've got an existing site is to really think about your page hierarchy within the site overall. You know, we talked a little bit earlier about the importance of not using generic terms for your information architecture or main navigation.

Speaker 2 19:54 Instead use the names of the categories of products that you sell or that you manufacturer, um, use the names of the services that you offer rather than just saying products, services, and then making people jump down to a sub page to actually find that content. If you're smart about the way that you organize that information, not only are you going to be able to make it much more blatantly obvious what it is that you manufacture, buy or sell. As soon as someone arrives at the page, you're going to get search engine optimization benefit from that because Google likes that. You have very specific categories for that information rather than more generic ones like products. Um, and that really helps to ensure that as people are browsing through the site that they can find what it is that they're looking for. And as part of that too, ensuring that as people move down through the content within your site, that you're always using placemaking to enable them to understand very quickly where they are in the overall hierarchy of the site.

Speaker 2 20:52 You can do this through breadcrumbs where it shows you, you know, you're at home, the product name, category, the product name section, and then the spec sheet, you know, and then showing that as a, as a breadcrumb and using um, alternative highlights and other things within the navigation as you move --

-- down through those pages to ensure that people always know where they are and they can quickly navigate laterally within the site and understand exactly what it is that they're doing at that time. The other thing that I would say that's really important is to really limit the amount of PDF content that you use in your site. PDFs are, are great designers love them because it allows and to keep the, uh, the overall branding and layout things that they can do with those that are maybe a bit more robust than what they're able to do with the web, although that's changed certainly, um, over the last number of years.

Speaker 2 21:41 But PDFs are remarkably inaccessible in making them accessible as a nightmare. So if at all possible, you should be looking for any eBooks that you create, make them as web pages. Don't build the mode as PDFs that people can download, make that available as an option, but make sure that all of that content is also available on a, on a basic webpage that can be read by a screen reader, can be viewed and searched or indexed by search engines. You know, all of these different things are going to make the site more accessible, but also make your marketing much more, um, give you a much better ROI on your marketing.

Speaker 1 22:16 So you're saying that the PDF is not easily searchable either, right. With with SEO. So the webpage for that PDF is a really good idea.

Speaker 2 22:26 Oh, a hundred percent yeah. We actually gave a talk at a HubSpot's inbound conference a couple of years ago, go call kill the PDF. And it was all about the different reasons why PDFs are, are a nightmare to use. You know, if you've ever downloaded a PDF on your phone and try to zoom in to read it, it's just really impossible. But aside from that, it's, it's just a, uh, you know, a really atrocious format in order to make the content within it. Accessible screen readers have a really hard time with them because they don't know where tech starts and stops and they can't read them inappropriate ways. So if you're visually impaired and you've got a screen reader that's trying to read a PDF to you, there's a, there's a really good chance you're not going to have any idea what it's actually saying as it, as it's navigating through that document.

Speaker 1 23:09 Right. So as you say, create the webpage that is the PDF, but also have the PDF there if people want to print it and download it. So,

Speaker 2 23:17 exactly. Yeah. This is all about providing alternative ways to access content. So that's, you know, through the web, through a PDF, through audio that reads it to you through video. You know, it's about creating things that are available to everybody to consume, no matter how they choose to consume it.

Speaker 1 23:38 Wow. Okay. So one last question that I want you to recap on. Are there particular questions that accompany should be asking their web designer or the web designers should be asking the company when they're getting ready to set up their sites for accessibility?

Speaker 2 23:57 Absolutely. So I think, um, and we've seen this recently, which is great. I love that we're actually seeing people ask if we build accessible websites for a really long time. People were asking, you know, do you create responsive websites, um, in order to be accessible for mobile? And, uh, and that was, you know, that's one step towards accessibility is ensuring that sites degrade nicely to smaller screens and devices. Um, but they should be, should we be asking about, you know, do you develop sites and use the website content accessibility guidelines? To what level do you develop them? Is it a, is a AA is a AAA? Are you thinking about that? What additional costs are there going to be? Um, what, uh, additional burdens are there going to be for the marketer in this state to craft and write the appropriate captions and alternative tax for these different things?

Speaker 2 24:45 Because that's going to take some time on the part of whoever's creating the content to make sure that they're not just writing the body copy, but also ensuring that they have appropriate captions and all tags for the images. Um, so you really should be delving into that and ensuring that your, um, that your content and that your budget is going to allow you to do this. But also, you know, being able to sell the, uh, the idea that this extra cost is, uh, benefit to the overall production of the site. So w --

-- hen you're, you know, if you're having to justify the cost of a site and maybe it costs five or 10% more than you were expecting as a result of the accessibility measures, being able to prove why that's important to uh, to the decision makers into the purse string holders, you know, it is going to be a really important thing. Um, in a lot of cases it's just simply built in. So, you know, like we don't price anything for a site build that doesn't include this and we don't break it out as a separate line item. It's just an eight in what we do. Hmm.

Speaker 1 25:49 Wow. Jeff, I have learnt a lot today. Thank you very much and I certainly hope that our listeners have had some light bulbs turn on for them. There's a bunch of things that I will do to the websites that I manage to get them up to speed as quickly as I can right now. So thank you so much.

Speaker 2 26:06 Well, thank you very much for having me. It's been a lot of fun.

Speaker 1 26:09 Jeff White is a user experience and usability expert at Kula partners, and I hope you learned something today that you can take away and start implementing on your website. And if you're starting a new website, okay, maybe you want to get well, you certainly want to get on making it accessible as you start that process. That is our show this week.

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Speaker 0 26:44 Kevin Snoop, leadership advisor and author of the bestselling bookmaker, bright five steps to align your manufacturing business from the frontline to the bottom line. I'm Janet Eastman. Thanks for listening to the make it right podcast.

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