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Beginner's guide to WCAG 2.0 - know your way around web accessibility rules

Transcript from the 2017 Accessibility Conference

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OK, I'm here to introduce you to this next session.

Bill Anstice is experienced in assistive technologies. He is responsible for managing in-house scripting and PRO-Accessibility enhancements. He is very familiar with web and mobile

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accessibility and understands how barriers can impact the user.

John McNabb has a background as a software developer and learned early on to make websites that are semantic and universal. He wrote guides on how to make IT accessible and then worked in a role training people in accessibility standards. He now works as an accessibility consultant. Please welcome Bill and John.

(Applause)

JOHN McNABB:

Can you guys hear me? Great.

I just wanted to start by saying don't expect Bill and I too agree on anything. I say 'WACAG' and he says...

BILL ANSTICE:

WCAG.

JOHN McNABB:

We didn't rehearse this as much as we should have.

WCAG is to be important. You may have found yourself in a room testing with business people and you say, what you want us to change is a requirement. It is good to go back to some success criteria.

WCAG 2.0 goes down into guidelines and then success criteria. You want to be able to map back to success criteria.

Underneath the success criterion are techniques for success and failure.

All OK so far?

I'm spending more time on this hierarchy because I think it is important, so, at the top, we have the four principles. It is kind of wordy, and at TD Bank, where I used to work, we would have a document that said, "so you are building a table, here's how to do it."

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This is pure WCAG, vanilla WCAG. You should be able to see it, here it, know that it is there, whatever it is, on your webpage.

Operable – if it is a link, you should be able to click it.

Understandable – it should make sense in its coding and format.

Robust – it should still work in a new browser.

Underneath the four principles are guidelines. I will get into those in a minute. Under those are success criteria.

Level A is basic, AA is good accessibility and Triple-A is really good, but it is hard to get there. Triple-A limits your design choices and the kinds of content you can have.

If you are going to have a big, fancy info graphic, it might still be hard to hit triple-A.

BILL ANSTICE:

You are not going to find many that meet Triple-A compliant. It tends to be restrictive. If you are planning to make a website, you have a vision in mind. You want to have sliders, tables, and graphics.

If you want to implement some of these new technologies, typically it is the case that you are not going to be able to implement triple-A, because it is going to be restrictive on how elements are displayed, how they are seen and interacted with.

I would say pay more attention to A and double-A. Not that double-A isn't important, but if you look at the industry standards, everybody is looking towards a double-A compliance level.

If you are looking from a focus perspective, I would say that the focus should be A and double-A.

JOHN McNABB:

By the way, double-A covers level A.

When we were trying to visualise all of the different criteria within WCAG, we made a

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spreadsheet. It is a big spreadsheet. It is 62 rows. It is pretty detailed, and so you can see on the left these are...

BILL ANSTICE:

It is not showing your Excel.

JOHN McNABB:

Oh, oh, no. Well, here's a picture of Excel.

(Laughter)

On the left you have got a principle, the principle descriptions. Then you have the meat, that is where you spend a lot of your time. That is going to back you up. Those people are going to say, "Do we really have to fix this?" You are going to say, "Yes, this makes you do it. Otherwise we will get sued."

I think I already mentioned the principles. They are generic, but it is pretty easy to fall back on. Anybody have any questions so far?

OK, so, just as an example, to talk about something people are pretty familiar with, like alt text... We are going to drill down from one, which is perceivable, down to 1.1, which is a guideline for text alternatives.

1.1 says that you need a text alternative for an image. If you have an image, you need text to go with it so that screen readers can see it.

When you go past 1.1, you get 1.1.1. Now you get a specific success criteria. This is where the meat is. I will show you this slide later. It has got links in it so you can look it up.

That is it, that is the hierarchy. Principles go down to guidelines go down into success criteria.

I'm going to share some of these notes on the WC3 website. When it says that your image needs alt text, you need to be able to do that through a combination of automated and human testing.

It is a good idea to include users with disabilities.

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BILL ANSTICE:

Does everybody understand what we mean by "testable"? This is what we would need to prove as part of our test.

When we are looking at images needing alt text, that's what you are looking for.

That can be misconstrued, depending on which one you are at, but if you look at the success criterion, again, it should be testable.

JOHN McNABB:

And then, underneath the success criteria, there are several different techniques to meet that criteria. Is it where you are talking to the developers. They love this stuff. This is where they live and they will learn from this.

This one is really simple. It is an image tag and it has alt = free newsletter. This is a very basic example of what you can get from WCAG. You drill down into this success criteria, and then, after the techniques, we have failures.

I was watching a Mercy Sutton video and she mentioned failures and she said, "oh, that's harsh." I thought, no, that's clear. I love opinionated. Tell somebody that their website has a failure and they will fix it.

So, there's no attribute at all. It's a failure. Move on. Fix it.

When I was talking about the hierarchy earlier, to prove your case that something needs to be fixed, it's great to find a success criteria, but if you can't do it for one to meet your needs for that issue you have found, climb back up the hierarchy and use a guideline.

If you can't find 1.1.1, use 1.1.

I'm saying on the slide here that the success criteria have techniques and failures, and so do some of the guidelines. They are not filled in and specifically.

I donate if I can just flip over? Anyway, if you go to the WCAG site, they have a great cross reference page, and you go to this site and there's the principles, then the guidelines, and even

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at the guideline level, they have the techniques and failures. Then you go down into the success criteria. The guidelines and failures are more detailed but they also exist at that guideline level, so you can use them.

BILL ANSTICE:

Before we move on, the importance of what John is saying is you can be testing a webpage, and as you are viewing it you are going to find scenarios that don't perfectly match success criteria.

You will find them all over the place. That is when you start working your way back up into the guidelines.

"Do I have a text alternative?" No, but it would pass automated testing. When you pull it back, you say, if this should have text, this is where it would fail.

You will find scenarios all over the place, even websites like Apple, Google and Microsoft. These are industry leaders and they say that their websites are completely accessible. You run an automated test on them and they will fail.

Some of the ones that pass, again, if you dig in a little bit, your perception might be that they fail, because maybe it is not defined in the proper way.

Sometimes you need to go back to the guideline level to prove your point. If you know, looking at this, that there is something wrong with this and you can't find a criterion that matches exactly, go to the guideline. Then validate the guiding level.

If there is not a text alternative, you have failed that component even if you can't find it. It is important to keep that in mind as you go through your testing and development.

JOHN McNABB:

One of our managers at TD you to say you can meet all of the WCAG checkpoints and still has something that is inaccessible. That is why it is good to be able to climb back up the tree and find something generic that covers your point.

BILL ANSTICE:

That is exceedingly important, especially when we are using React and other things. Lots of technology is coming out, it is being developed regularly.

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Each of these here are implemented differently on browsers and between browsers. Something might fail on one browser and pass on another.

So, is that a failure? Maybe it is, maybe it is not.

JOHN McNABB:

A not so nice way of saying this is people keep finding new ways to screw up. There are no rules for it, because he would think to do that? But they do.

In order to meet a success criteria, you are testing to see if the different parts of the website meet these criteria. There are five types of performance requirement.

The first one is whatever element it is, it needs to be either A, double-A or triple-A.

BILL ANSTICE:

Moving on, A is basic, AA is good. Level A normally doesn't normally impact the pace of design. You are not normally going to notice if it has been implemented on a webpage. It is the most basic things. You know, tab order.

When you get into double-A, that is when you see some compromise. Maybe they couldn't make it accessible so you had to compromise and use something with Java.

Triple-A might mean completely taking out graphics. That is an extreme, but you might have to take out graphics. Maybe the infographics aren't there. Maybe have a complete text alternative as an option.

Triple-A might be something like you have to provide an audio file for every paragraph. That might be the most extreme scenario, but you are not going to go to that. You may not be able to implement it practically, based on the way your site is designed.

Google, for example, if they provided an audio file for each of their search results – their results are dynamic. It is not practical. But, at a triple-A level, in some scenarios, you have to provide audio for content.

JOHN McNABB:

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Performance 205. So, your entire page need to conform to WCAG, not just part of it.

305, complete processes. If you are doing a process, you are registering on site, so the entire workflow needs to be accessible. There is no point having part of it being accessible and you get stuck in the middle.

405, whatever you build needs to be accessible with the browser and the assistive technology. If somebody is talking to Dragon and they are magnifying the screen, it needs to work with those tools.

BILL ANSTICE:

What it means is that you will see some websites out there, and this might be controversial, but there are websites out there that say, "Download this plug-in and you will have a more accessible experience on this website." That means your website isn't accessible in the first place. Don't claim you are meeting double A, whatever it is.

I will throw these guys under the bus. This toolbar gives you a screen reader and some other reading tools. That is meant to augment the site and make it more accessible, but it is breaking the performance. Because is your website accessible if I have to download another tool?

No.

So, you want to make sure that you are paying attention to that and not looking at, you know, "Download this tool and this will make it work for you."

JOHN McNABB:

Finally, performance 505 is non-interference. If you have content on one part of your page, you should not have content on another part of the page that interferes with that.

There could be scrolled jacking. They could be sites where you are scrolling and the scroll doesn't work any more. Carousels, yes. A carousel should be keyboard accessible. You should be able to pause it. You should be able to move forward at your own speed.

BILL ANSTICE:

Media players. Media players that don't play automatically.

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If it starts playing, sometimes you don't have any ability to do anything on a page. I ran into a webpage recently with a nested i-frame. I think if I actually spent the time, it would have taken me 25 minutes to get out.

So, is that performance? In a scenario like that, it would pass any automated testing, but how long is too long?

JOHN McNABB:

The next two slides are sneaky tricks. So, you have tested it and you can't quite find a success criteria to match it. Maybe you are filling out a report, and you have a couple of success criteria you can always fall back on to prove your point.

BILL ANSTICE:

This is a little bit of cheating.

JOHN McNABB:

Don't start with this, but you can fall back on it.

If the structure is wrong anyway, you can fall back on this and say, well, it fails 3.1.1. This is pretty much for static content, whereas the next one is kind of the same thing. It is our content is coded, but it is more dynamic content. It is something updated automatically by JavaScript. If you are having a problem with this element, if you know it is not accessible, you can fall back to 1.3.1 or 4.1.2.

BILL ANSTICE:

Those are your back pocket wild cards. Don't use them all the time, because you could call that out the first time you see anything accessible. Again, try to focus on the criteria. That gives you something that is testable.

This here might be difficult for them to test. You might be able to see and experience it, but you might not have something you can specifically test to see if you have resolved it or not. If you are looking to get some attention to a web page you are viewing, then yes, these are your wild cards that you can pull out to at least get the attention there.

JOHN McNABB:

We thought we would cover just a couple of basic examples. Sometimes they are not really

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covered by WCAG.

Everybody is familiar with alt text, and it seems familiar, but it isn't.

For example, you have an image with meaning. They need text that describes the image. Or you have an image of text, and now you need alt text that includes all of the text in the image.

What is the next one? You have an image of a bill. Beside it, you have the word "Bill". Why read it twice? So, we give it alt text. It takes a while for you to bump into every one of these situations. It makes you think.

What was the last one? A linked image. A lot of websites have an icon, a logo, and if it is the TD bank site, it is this one. So, where are you going? Describe the link destination. "Home page", something like that.

If you have an info graphic, what can you put in? You can put something in that really describes the image. Then, for the alt text, you can put in, "22 profits. Click below for more detail."

This is something that everybody has access to.

Colour contrast. You think colour contrast is something pretty simple. Most of the time, it is. If you look deeper into WCAG, there are little outs in there. You can say, if it is incidental text, which means it is decorative or unimportant, then you don't need to maintain that colour contrast. That comes in handy sometimes.

If it is TD bank, it doesn't need to meet the colour contrast because that is the logo.

BILL ANSTICE:

Colour contrast typically fails a lot of automated testing. One reason is people use a lot of images and then have a background that is dark in colour. If your background is white and you have a dark image that is your background, in visually it passes the colour contrast, but in the automated, it is going to fail.

There are other conversations, but this is an important one to pay attention to. Depending on your font size, your colour contrast can change significantly. Larger the font, lower it has to be. If I had a font that took up the whole screen, it could be grey and everybody could see it, but it

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would fail the 4.5:1.

JOHN McNABB:

Link text. That should describe the link target, and you are actually allowed to say that it only needs to make sense in context, but really I think it's good to write such good link text that it makes sense out of context.

If somebody has a cognitive disability and they just look at this link, it should probably make sense by itself. Let's not use links like this.

Sometimes you can do more coding to add a bit more detail at the end.

BILL ANSTICE:

That is exceedingly important for those of you that have used a screen reader. If you are skipping from link to link, it doesn't read the context. If you have a bunch of "click heres", in context it makes sense, but if a user has a list of all of the links on the page, they are going to see just the link names. So, consider your audience. How are they going to be using the page?

If you are just having from link to link, or they are going to here is the link text. Is that sufficient for your webpage?

JOHN McNABB:

We thought we would go into some edge cases, so, funny cases where we would see what WCAG has to say.

This is a piece of a screenshot from the Apple website. It is talking about moving data from Android.

You can see there is black text in the paragraphs, and there are blue links embedded in the paragraph. Is it OK to have your links not underlined, just in colour. Who thinks it is OK to have blue links in a black text paragraph?

Well, according to success criteria 4.1.1, you shouldn't use colour alone to convey information. It seems like a bad thing to do.

But technique G183 says it's OK as long as there is a brightness difference, colour difference

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between the link text and paragraph text of at least 3:1. So, this failed, but not for want of trying. If this had been a lighter blue, this would have passed.

BILL ANSTICE:

Or consider something like a red/green colour-blind. If everything was in green and you used red to identify your links, technically it would pass this. It would fail the first checkpoint, as John mentioned. But then it would actually pass this one here.

You can see some scenarios where you have to explore a bit more. Sometimes you have to do a bit more than what the checklist all the criteria says. Again, consider your audience.

Would you see it this way? Does it make sense to you? Those are scenarios where you are going to find new things.

A JAWS user wouldn't have an issue with this because they are not paying attention to anything visual. A cognitive user might have some difficulty understanding why some fonts look a little off.

JOHN McNABB:

The other day we said, we don't like this, it's not the best solution. It would have been useful if they had underlined the links, something to visually identify them. It is not great, but it does pass.

Next one. Oh, one thing I liked about this page was when I tabbed to the links, you get the box around the link. It is great for sighted-only users.

Some of the browsers, by default, have a one pixel border that is hard to see around a text box. This is better than average.

OK. Low contrast. So, you are buying an iPad and you are choosing a finish, and underneath the finish there's a section called "storage". Storage is greyed out. Is that OK?

You are right, it is! It is OK to grey up the next step. It is currently an inactive step, therefore considered incidental. Therefore, you look up WCAG and it is cool. It is just a visual indicator that there's more to come.

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SPEAKER:
(inaudible)

JOHN McNABB:

Good point, great point. It needs to be coded as being inactive, yes, thanks.

So, we are talking about different levels of WCAG. I just want to mention that, believe it or not, according to the AODA, January 2021 is the deadline for companies with more than 50 employees to go to double-A.

I have been in situations at work where I'm trying to promote good alt text. I'm telling them, "You have to put in alt text!" And I leave this deadline out. It is good to know, though.

We have been talking about WCAG 2.0. There is some progress towards WCAG 2.1, which will tide us over until Silver comes out. That is a codename for another WCAG. We don't even know what it is going to be. We are going to put the slides online later, and they are just some links where you can read about this stuff.

SPEAKER:
We have a question.

SPEAKER:

I actually have a bunch of questions for you guys. Great presentation and I was really happy to hear about it.

I won't ask them all, but my main one is if you have a small team, like, one or two people, what are the highest impact changes that you can make to an existing non-accessible site?

If you were going to something with absolutely no regard to the WCAG rules, what's a good starting point to start changing everything to make it work?

JOHN McNABB:

It's a loaded question, because it depends on the content of your website. If it is basic, tables, things like that, everybody says that headings are important, and they are important, but if you are trying to make sure that somebody can make their way through a page, logical tab order is a big one. Making sure that the readability of the page is... That is of most importance to you.

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Table headings are a must. Those types of considerations are necessary.

A heading is important, but if it is a small page, I mean, I've seen webpages that take up on screen of my monitor. There's no scrolling at all and it has got five headings. Do I really need those headings? Not really. It would take me 5 minutes, using a screen reader, to move through it or to glance at the content.

You have to weigh up the content, the context of your page, the information inside it.

To give you the same answer in a different way, it's good to test it with a few different tools, and then work your way through the workflow, beginning to end, so if you are signing up for something, for example making fridges, make a purchase, see where you get stuck, and then prioritise those problems.

Bill is a genius at this. He works with colleagues with disabilities. I will go to him and say, "This is broken, but how badly as it broken?"

BILL ANSTICE:

The way I see it is visually impaired or blind users are using their keyboard. Dexterity based users are using Dragon. You are hitting two big groups.

Just on my experience, I know that a lot of users I work with typically have dexterity or physical limitations. They are using something to augment the keyboard input. So, making sure the website is accessible by keyboard is going to get you the biggest audience.

Somebody who is visually impaired might have a complete roadblock, but are 80% of your users going to get through it? I hate putting quantifiers on it, because I want to see the whole website fixed...

JOHN McNABB:

We are going to give a talk tomorrow on five different free tests. If you can't make it, just check for our slides later on. If you test with those five tools, it gives you good coverage.

SPEAKER:

Is there any indication of how WCAG rules could be used on other platforms, like mobile

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platforms? For me, it's hard to find rules for things that I think should happen.

JOHN McNABB:

We have looked for mobile checklists, and there are some documents on the WCAG site that will say how you can apply to mobile. Maybe we can post those later, but also the BBC has done some good work in terms of writing up their own mobile checklists.

BILL ANSTICE:

The new version of WCAG is supposed to include mobile accessibility, so that would be something that you can... It is going to follow the same kind of path as POUR, but it will include mobile.

As John said, even in our organisation we have essentially shoehorned web accessibility on top of mobile. So, on a mobile app, if you are putting a picture in there, it may not be alt text but it could be a control name that you apply. But the intention is still the same. Make sure there is a text alternative for images.

So, the guideline should still technically applied to even the components in an application, and if you look at... There has been some work done back in the day for an accessible application. A lot of people focus on WCAG now, but there is stuff for accessible web applications. If you look at their one to one, it is very similar.

SPEAKER:

I'm wondering, in your current roles, if you are developing successful content from the beginning but also it sounds like you are testing existing content and how you approach those two different things?

JOHN McNABB:

When you have a company where accessibility is new, and immature, you take what is already in production and you test it. Then you talk to the developer and get them to fix it.

As you progress, you get involved in the process. You talk to the designers and you look at their Wireframes and you say, oh, if you are going to Wireframe it this way, here are some things you are going to need to be aware of. You see the same people making the same mistakes over and over again. You will see people repeat certain techniques. Then you can use them and recycle them for training people.

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Then you will not be looking after the developers to fix things in production. You will start to work earlier, where you will test something before it is in production. Before that, you will give feedback when it is just an idea.

BILL ANSTICE:

The other thing I would add is when you are looking at developing a website from scratch, it is always great to have accessible samples, really.

Within TD, we have a standard, and gives a model how to code a form perfectly. It gives you a template. If we want to inject a few input fields, they are all coded, all individually coded so they are self-contained and I can copy and paste them into the development application.

They are all done in advance, and you have that successful bank so that it comes easier. You don't have to think, how does this work with this and do I have to put this here? If you have your samples already done in a library somewhere, which you can reference, then you can make sure you don't have copy and pasting errors.

It is a lot easier for reference that way. If you are looking at new development, even if it takes a couple of weeks or months to do the initial stage, I would say spend the time, consider what your page is going to look like, start thinking about what you are going to put into that page, and come up with successful examples so that really it becomes a copy and paste into it. That way, you are not thinking on the fly. When you think on the fly, you tend to miss something. Then you start to find issues later on during testing.

SPEAKER:

Well done. We are out of time, but you can come down and talk to them.

Please, everyone, join me in thanking our presenters.

(Applause)

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