

WECO: BUILDING A CONSENSUS FOR YOUR ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

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Kelli Ryan: Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to our webinar. It starts at 12 p.m. and goes until 12:30. I'm Kelli Ryan, Director of Operations. I'll moderate the training today. Reach out to me via chat or kelli@theweco.com should you have questions or issues. Materials referenced can be found in a section of WeCo's website free accessibility library. You can find this information in the link in the chat box. We'll begin shortly, and promptly at 12 p.m. Thank you.

Lynn Wehrman: I'd like to welcome everyone to "Building a Consensus for Accessibility." I'm Lynn Wehrman. I think, Kelli, you'll need to advance the slides for me.

Kelli Ryan: I'll absolutely do that.

Lynn Wehrman: I want to welcome everyone. I would like you to pause for a minute. I am having a slight issue with the view on my screen. There we go.

"Building a Consensus for Digital Accessibility." It's a guide for you and also to answer your questions about how to get people in your organization onboard to understand that digital accessibility is a need. Again, my name is Lynn Wehrman. I'm the founder and president of WeCo. My background is -- my education is in communication. My career path originally was sales and communications, but I found myself working on transportation programs in Minneapolis because the quasi-government group I worked with wasn't having luck with transportation planners getting options like bike commuting programs, bus programs, so they hired me for doing coalition building and selling people on initiatives.

My entire background and career has centered on how you help people understand that they need to change behavior or do things differently. And it's interesting because in preparing for this class, I realize that has been what I have been doing my entire career.

I wandered into transportation through commuter transportation and worked as a federal coordinator for Minnesota transportation. I was asked to begin to work on accessibility for MnDOT's Americans With Disabilities Act transition plan. They needed to convey work that was due, to a committee of stakeholders and members of the public who lived with disabilities. At that time, no one knew how to communicate with people whose communication needs were different. I grew up in a family that had prevalent cognitive disabilities and I live with that myself. I'm very comfortable in that role and discussing with people about that.

That's where I come from. I hope my career history will help you as you work to bring others on board in the need to be accessible.

Before we start, I want to thank director of operations, Kelli Ryan. This session is closed captioned and I would like to thank our captioner, Raven, from CaptionAccess.

This session is being recorded and will be made available to you probably after Thanksgiving. We take a little bit of time to clean up the presentations and make sure we have a transcript and captioning available so it's accessible to everyone. But it will be on the WeCo website, and Kelli will email you when the recording is available.

A little bit about WeCo. We are mission based. Accessibility isn't just a product we add on to make money. It's how all of us live every day. Everyone who works on accessibility initiatives at WeCo is required to live with a disability. You are really getting subject matter experts.

We are invested in your accessibility because we live with the results. This is Chad Cook who teaches with Dragon Naturally Speaking.

This is another lead tester, Kate Olsen, who lives with a congenital hearing disability. We are subject matter experts and have a trained team of accessibility experts that teach, do manual audits, and guide our clients through remedies. We have 20-30 test consultants that represent all four disability classifications, cognitive and sight disabilities, and they perform usability tests from their homes, with our platform.

We are mission based and available to help you with a number of free services like this webinar, but we bring this entire group of experts along with it.

Today, let's talk about what's ahead. We are first going to look at some things that will help you build that business case. These are based on things we observe here at WeCo because we help clients build a business case every day. Sometimes it's one lone employee that comes to us for updating a website. Sometimes it's an entire department that is facing a legal need.

First, it's important to understand the socially and legally aware culture that we live in, particularly in the United States. Next, the benefits of accessibility and ways you can quantify return on investment and ways you can measure risk management. Also, addressing roadblocks. I'll teach you some sales techniques for convincing others.

Let's first talk about a culture we presently live in that has become very socially and legally aware. This summary is accurate [On screen.] Human rights and social responsibility govern a lot of choices as consumers. You can leverage this to support the accessibility work you want to see in your organization.

In the United States especially, but we see it worldwide, we are living in a very socially driven marketplace. I love this quote [On screen.] You can read the entire study, but

[Reading quote on screen: According to a 2013 survey, 2.5 billion consumers worldwide . . .]

An example of this I like to give is my daughter and son-in-law. They are 28 and live in a different city and I love sending them gifts. But I learned they are much more receptive to receiving gifts from organizations that are socially responsible, those that make a small footprint on the environment. It could be handcrafted things by people in other countries where opportunities are limited, for example. That's where I, as someone who is at the end of the baby boomer generation learned, that that culture was changing for different generations. But I know a lot of folks feel the same way, people of all different ages. We are really seeing our purchases starting to be driven by the good those purchases can do.

Cause sponsorship. We don't find this necessarily surprising at WeCo, because we run a mission-based company. We know a lot of customers come to us because we provide employment for professionals who live with disabilities. It's not surprising to learn that cause sponsorship is being incorporated into a lot of business models and it's really driving our economy. We saw a big increase from 2018 to 2019 in cause sponsorship worldwide. 4.5% and 2.23 billion dollars in sales of goods, sales of services and this is from Adelman's brand study.

We have a consumer who cares. They choose to do businesses with organizations that demonstrate that are responsible, caring, advocate for issues and protect the environment. This really helps you set up a good case for becoming digitally accessible. Being accessible to consumers at any level is vital for businesses to thrive.

The question I often am asked -- in December 2017, the Department of Justice withdrew the ADA web rules. We know what we learned from the US access board were going to be fashioned closely after these guidelines 2.0 AA. Those web rules were never released. Before they were released, the announcement was made they were being withdrawn. I often get the question: Does this mean I don't have to be accessible? You might get this as you approach people in your organization or group. The answer is "no" because the law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, still states that places of public accommodation, and in the past that has meant restaurants -- the ability to get into a restaurant with a wheelchair, for example, is protected under the ADA.

Court rulings since 2012, especially, have started reflecting that the courts view the web as a place of public accommodation. We have developed strong precedence of rulings against defense representatives. What is the effect the lack of rules has had on the legal environment?

It has actually escalated the lawsuits. This is of great concern. Different sources have pushed to release those rules because when there's legal clarity there's less confusion and lawsuits -- not saying this would necessarily happen but a lot of us believe there would be less lawsuits if people knew what the rule were and could play by them.

Since 2013, overall, a 33% increase in lawsuits tied to website accessibility and the ADA. Those figures are only expected to increase throughout this year. In short, this isn't going away and the reason I used a train image on the prior slide is because really, the train has left the station. Website accessibility is becoming accepted by individuals, by businesses and basically not getting onboard with that could create some legal issues but also some public relation issues.

The great thing I like to say about website accessibility is that it's not rocket science. It's a series of steps your staff can learn and you can integrate that into existing process. I and people at our company work on this every day. There's nothing to be afraid about. It's really an opportunity in a lot of ways. We hope to show you that.

I always like to ask, at the end of the lawsuit piece, "Does fear motivate?" I know there are a lot of people, well-meaning people, evangelizing for website accessibility. The fear of lawsuits, loss of positive public image. We at WeCo believe fear only motivates to a point. We witnessed this in clients that come to us. Fear is exhausting and it doesn't really energize people. But if you can help people

understand the *positive* reasons they should do something and start buying into an initiative, it energizes them.

I often think of a web developer I met at a meetup in St. Paul when our company was very young. I was talking about not just building a website, but building inclusion and how exciting it was for me to witness people who worked with me on the ADA transition and they were blind and could never look up their own bus schedule or talk on the phone and how their world opened up. So, that person said he was really excited and his world opened up after that.

It doesn't have to be something frightening or something that feels like a burden. It can be a fun challenge that can make you feel really good about your work.

We're going through the benefits of accessibility. Some of this is very obvious, but there are some things that might not be as obvious to you.

Accessible design is more inclusive. We find that when people start to redo their websites and make them accessible, they are often surprised that their clients who aren't living with disabilities are more pleased with the website and find it easier to navigate. Accessibility makes design more inclusive for everyone and brings everyone closer to the same page.

A growing number of us will need digital accessibility. I just updated these numbers yesterday. Over 22% of us in America live with disabilities. I just updated that number from 19%. 54% of adults living with disabilities go online and we know that is higher because that Pew Internet Project is a little bit dated. But more of us are becoming disabled as we age. There's also an increase in disability due to different conditions and diseases present in the world that are more prevalent in younger people as well.

Accessible design is welcoming. This is my own thought. Working in a company that's almost all professionals who live with disabilities how excited people particularly living with low vision or blindness, when they find an accessible online service they shop with. We went through this with a staff member who was shopping with an online grocer in the area. The grocer made a change to their online format and she could no longer shop independently. She and a number of other people who were blind moved to another online grocer who was then accessible.

It's one thing to make something legally accessible. It's another thing to think about how you are including people and welcoming them and how that word can spread. It never hurts to be welcoming.

It also, again, improves usability for everyone. This is one I touched on a moment ago. We get very focused on digital legal accessibility and it is possible to make a website accessible and have it be unusable for someone living with a disability. So Uax [sp?] a part of creating a pleasing experience for all users and accessible design really enhances that.

It improves your search engine optimization. Accessibility is well rewarded with search engine optimization from adding alternative text tags, to using properly coded headings. It's something that will definitely increase your visibility.

And it manages risks in a lot of ways. Certainly, the first one we think of is legal, and being able to also manage the image of the company to make sure that people view our companies favorably.

And it improves your image. That goes back to the early slides. People want to do business with businesses that care about people. That's the bottom line. They want to do business with businesses that care about the environment. I think we have so many choices, as consumers, now, even more than when I was younger. The presence of the web and our ability to market businesses has meant there is no business -- and this is quote from *Forbes* magazine. "There is no business too big to fail and no business too small to succeed." This has multiplied consumer choices greatly. We as a consumer market are deciding we want businesses that contribute to our quality of life and planet. Having design that is accessible helps improve that image for you.

And it inspires innovation. Here's the one thing I think you probably didn't bet on that accessibility would do for you. We see it at WeCo and companies we work with. Working on accessible solutions gets people's gears moving and gets them thinking about innovation in ways they never thought before. Not just with accessibility. People start being inspired to solve problems in more innovative ways, when they start working on accessibility. We see it over and over again. And people start to feel good about their work, too.

I don't know that we have ever measured it, but we notice that -- one project will bleed into the next. People work on accessibility and ask themselves whether they have really thought about whether the company is welcoming to people with more cultural difference in their organization. We start seeing people start to solve things in a more open and innovative way.

We are going to wrap this up today and talk about roadblocks and what could be holding us back. I'm going to warn you. I am going to say some things that might not be easy to hear, but they are important to think about. I'm going to qualify that. I'm in my 50s, and my generation lived in a culture of more unspoken nonacceptance of individuals living with disability. I think it's lessened today, but I think it's still out there. It's not that anyone means anyone ill. It's just that if you aren't used to being around people who live with disabilities, you might be uncomfortable because you don't know what to say about a wheelchair, for example, or how much assistance I offer if someone is blind.

"The responsibility is someone else's." That's not part of our business.

Also, "It doesn't impact us." Some potential clients have said to me they don't serve people with disabilities, but it's likely the people you hire and do business with in the future, might live with disabilities.

These are things you have to talk about within an organization. Are we uncomfortable? Do we feel like it's not our job? Not financially worthwhile to do these things? Get those things out on the table.

Because what we are dealing with here is the largest minority group in the United States, in the world. The largest unrecognized minority group in the United States and across the globe. 20% of the United States population and only getting bigger.

For instance, with the youngest of the baby boomers hitting 65 by 2029, the number of people with visual impairment or blindness will double. That's a lot of consumers you might alienate if your website isn't accessible.

It's important to have that discussion within your group. Let's get it on the table and talk about what's holding us back. Accept what you learn and address people's concerns without judgement. If there's anything we have learned by forming WeCo, is to not judge where people are at any given time. People, by and large, don't mean to be exclusionary. They don't want to be hurtful. They just don't understand or don't feel comfortable. Starting those discussions, I think, is really important.

To bring others onboard.

We are running a little bit behind schedule, so I'll go quickly.

You realize you have to sell the concept, and selling isn't necessarily a bad word. We do that every day. We sell our kids on the fact that they need to take out the garbage, sell our boss that we need a raise. Selling is just a part of life.

How do we convince? I think of how we do this at WeCo and how I have done this in my career. First, define the terms of the discussion. Make sure people know what digital accessibility is so they know what you are talking about, how it applies to your company and what steps you envision them taking. Listen to their reservations, acknowledge their questions, ask questions so you know what they don't

understand. And realize when they ask questions, it's usually a sign they are interested. The most important thing is to gain their trust.

And gather your facts. Look at all sides, develop reasonings and back up the reasoning with facts. Also, make it personal. How does it apply to the person in their role? How does it apply to the company? Do they know someone in their life with a disability?

These are the basic facts of what accessibility can do for a company. I'm not going through these. They are listed on our website under our "Make a Business Case for Accessibility" web page.

This chart is important, because we have learned how we demonstrate and back up facts. Laws are usually backed up with cautionary legal tales. Some are listed on our website. Our audience needs this. This is backed up. The economic impacts of accessibility can inaccessibility. Back that up with spending power, networking capabilities of people living with disabilities, and how that can impact figures of projects, work you couldn't get before, because you are accessible. And if you are doing government contracts, that would definitely apply. And social impacts, personal stories. There's a real person out there that will be impacted by us doing the right thing.

The question is, "Is accessibility good business?" The question has to be changed from "Can we afford to do it?" to "Can we afford *not* to do it?"

We have the "Make a Business Case for Accessibility" on the website and these are other areas where we got information for that page and other presentations. The United States Department of Labor has a lot of statistics and my favorite is Pew Research.

When you present the information. I think this is super important, if you can show device demonstrations. Our YouTube channel has wonderful demonstrations. Personal stories. Bottom line awareness. Accessibility can attract business and secure contracts. Any way you can show instead of tell, can be more powerful.

Other ways to present information. What are your competitors doing? How is the public perceiving our decision to be accessible or inaccessible? Is that insensitivity costing money?

Making a business case really begins with belief. It really is a journey in which you are changing much more than just code. It's changing how people view people living with disabilities. How people view business potential tied to that market, and social responsibility. It's a very emotional thing. We want and should keep it about business as much as possible, but you have to understand that there are

sensitive emotions that are tied to this. It's a journey. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and can take even an year or two for some organizations from talking to acting on it.

The takeaway we have for you at theweco.com, resources [reading list/on screen.] That's the file path. Everything we have that's free and available is under the Resource tab. There's a presentation template you can download and alter that has most of the statistical slides we covered. We developed it so you can just drop your logo into it and use it for a presentation. There are many other resources [listed on screen.]

We also believe exposure to professionals living with disabilities, exposure to the people that are working on accessibility, really makes a difference. We encourage you to take advantage of more free resources. We have a Meetup on Monday, November 25th. Representatives from General Mills, US Bank and Optum Health. Sometimes bringing your boss or coworker to that can sometimes have more impact than just you talking about it. That's on Zoom.

Here's another list of free low-cost resources [On screen.]

Thank you for being here. We are sorry we ran slightly over and started a little late. But this webinar will be recorded to refer back to and offer to others. Kelli will reach out to you when this is available on our website. We encourage you to go to theweco.com. Look at Resource tab and go to "A Business Case for Access."

We are here to help along the way. I'm opening the line, just in case anyone has questions. I am available to hang out a little bit later if you would like to ask something.

Kelli Ryan: There are no questions in the chat.

Lynn Wehrman: Thank you everyone.

Kelli Ryan: Thank you for joining us for our webinar. If you have questions, you can reach me at kelli@theweco.com. I will be sending the link for free accessibility library where you can find "Making a Business Case for Accessibility." Thank you all and have a wonderful day.

[End of webinar.]