PRESS RELEASE

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WECO PUTS A HUMAN FACE ON TESTING FOR WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY AND IS ADDING TESTERS TO MEET DEMAND

WeCo responds to the shift, from automatic checkers to people with disabilities, in the web accessibility marketplace by hiring additional Testers. WeCo uses use-experienced testers to ensure the website is accessible to the real-life end user.

With automatic website checkers providing only 25% accuracy, the need for human testers is becoming necessary to ensure the website is accessible to the real-life end user. Although a slow shift in the market, people with disabilities testing websites is becoming more and more necessary for the end-user and WeCo is hiring additional testers to fill those needs.

The Internet, with flashing graphics, video, and all the bells and whistles, is designed for those with normal sight, hearing, motor skills or cognition. The Internet, on the other hand, can be a nightmare for those with disabilities because of websites with these same features. WeCo hires individuals with disabilities to be Certified Test Consultants to test websites for accessibility. These are individuals who combine WeCo training with their user-experience of navigating the Internet with their disability and device. According to WebAIM, "One of the best ways to determine the accessibility of your pages is to get feedback from individuals with disabilities". WeCo is responding to the shift in the web accessibility marketplace from automatic checkers to individuals who are disabled.

Web accessibility testing tools are software programs or online services that help determine if a Web site meets accessibility standards. There are free automatic checkers available on the Internet which could be used initially to find what is not accessible on a website. While automatic accessibility testing tools can reduce the time and effort to evaluate how accessible websites are, no tool can automatically determine the actual accessibility of websites like a human tester who is disabled. People with disabilities should be used as a final check to make sure everything on the webpage is actually accessible to the end user. This is the where the web accessibility marketplace is shifting.

WeCo, a company that works to improve website accessibility for the disabled, currently employs 23 Certified Test Consultants (CTCs), all of whom have a disability of sight, hearing, motor skills or cognition. The severity of the CTCs' disabilities, and how long they have had them, vary in order to test clients' websites under the largest variety of conditions.

CTCs use common adaptive devices – and, more importantly, their own experiences with websites – to evaluate website accessibility. They work under guidelines developed by WeCo based on recommendations from the World Wide Web Consortium and the University of Illinois Great Lakes Americans with Disabilities Act Center. They check a website's separate features and overall function, approaching the site as an end-user. When an end-user rolls over an image, for example, there can't just be descriptive text associated to it, the description must provide enough information about the image.

"WeCo Certified Test Consultants give our clients really targeted feedback on what's inaccessible on their website and what needs to be fixed," says Lynn Wehrman, WeCo Founder and CEO. This feedback raises issues automatic checkers do not".

The goal is to ensure compliance with Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. While that law predates the Internet, it was amended in 1998 to require access to electronic and information technology provided by the Federal government. The law applies to all Federal agencies that use electronic and information technology such as computers, software, and electronic office equipment. It does not apply to web pages of private industry.

Based in St. Paul, Minnesota, WeCo is a mission-based, for-profit organization. While creating a strong accessibility learning environment for businesses, WeCo also provides professional employment to people who live with disabilities. WeCo is recognized by the State of Minnesota as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise. In the first year in business WeCo was featured in the MarketWatch Wall Street Journal, Google Finance and Tech{dot}MN. Find more about the company at theweco.com.

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