

## WeCo: Making the Business Case for Accessibility Transcript

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I'd like to welcome everyone to Making a Business Case for Accessibility. This is designed to be both a guide and discussion to help you present and make your case for a need for digital accessibility in your organization.

I'm going to share my screen at this point. If you're viewing, you do not need to have to see the presentation to be able to get the information. It is just a nice guide for those who are visual users.

Those that are listening to the recording, you may look at this presentation online. Our PowerPoint is fully accessible. If you are a non-visual user, you can access these slides. The images have been tagged. The outline pages have been reviewed so that you're able to access the information that we have in the slides.

If you're simply listening today, everything will be just as accessible to you through CaptionAccess, our live captioning, or the transcript below the recording, or just by listening today.

A little about me. I'm Lynn Wehrman, founder of WeCo. My professional background starts in communications. I started with a literature degree. I did a lot of writing in my career for training. I became a federal program coordinator. I found myself in government through what I call a "professional perfect storm," I was one of the first government accessibility specialists on a state level. I worked with the Great Lakes ADA Center to set up one of the first

accessible document conversion processes used for Minnesota. That's where I'm coming from regarding today's information.

A little about WeCo. We're not your typical accessibility company. We are a mission-based accessibility company where accessibility is all we do, not just a product that we've added on to enhance our bottom line. It's how to live daily. That's because everyone that's a digital expert at WeCo from our accessibility specialists to usability testers, all live with one or more disabilities.

Welcome. I'm going to prompt a screen share for you. We have a small group today. If you're viewing online, you'll be able to accept my screen share and see a visual presentation. We're just getting started.

If you can mute yourself -- if you're online, wave your cursor over your box. Hit the microphone. Or mute your phone. We like to allow you to mute yourself because it's a little easier for you to ask questions when we come to the end.

To recap, I'm Lynn Wehrman, founder and president of WeCo Accessibility Services. My background was in communication. It I worked on the ADA [Inaudible] plan at MNDOT. I moved on to website accessibility.

Our company, WeCo Accessibility Services, is a digital accessibility company that's been founded and is based upon people who live with disabilities as your subject matter experts. Everybody that works on digital access from our specialist accessibility supersets to usability testers live with disabilities in real life. It makes a difference in what we do. We're invested in what we do. What we help you achieve, we use every day. We're invested in the positive outcomes.

We like to call ourselves subject matter experts at your service. It's not always easy to get together a group of people who live with disabilities to test your website for usability or advise you. We do that for you. Everyone on our team is trained and certified and lives with one or more disabilities.

Our accessibility specialists are great at understanding our testers because they work with them all the time. If someone you're working with on the accessibility team doesn't live with a particular disability themselves, chances are they have a pretty good insight into those who do on our team.

We'll talk about what we're going to get into today. This is a new class. This is the first time we've taught it. It was something that was requested by a lot of our clients.

How do you make a business case for accessibility? It was an interesting class for us to write because we do this a lot every day. It's part of how our business grows and how we sell our services. We think we've got some solid insights to offer you some good takeaways.

First, we'll cover how we got here, to a place where accessibility is something that we need to do?

We'll look at the progression of human rights and the law. This information can be helpful for you in framing a convincing argument for the need for accessibility. It shows how we've moved through time and how important accessibility has come.

We'll also cover does fear motivate? That's important because fear of being sued gets most people to consider accessibility. We theorize that it's not necessarily the greatest motivation and why.

Next, we'll look at a new socially aware culture that we're living in that's also driving accessibility.

Then we'll review the benefits of accessibility. Some of these will be obvious, but there might be subtle nuances to them that you'd never thought of before.

We're going to look at ways that return on investment can be quantified depending on your industry, your particular organization, and where you're going, and how risk management can be applied.

Finally, we'll look at addressing roadblocks and how to convince others.

My background as a young woman was in sales. I dug into how to convince others and how to frame arguments. We hope to offer you some of that today, as well.

We'll start first with how did we get here? I will let you know that it's easier for us to roll through the material first. We'll be doing that and opening up for questions at the end. It's a new class. It's a very small group of people that signed up. It will be pretty casual. You'll be able to ask us a lot of open questions at the end. I wanted to assure you.

If something occurs to you, jot it down so you don't forget.

This is an interesting progression. I was able to speak at World Information Architecture day at the Minneapolis library Saturday. I presented this information there. It's been kind of fun preparing for this stuff and getting it out to you

Human rights are driving accessibility right now. I thought why not look back at what that timeline has been. This is not a complete timeline, but it shows trends and sudden jumps that we've had towards human rights.

At the close of World War II, there was a document released called the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights that really started to change how we, as a world, viewed the human rights of people. This was very understandable that this would come out after the horrible human rights violations from World War II. As a globe, we started to really think about what that meant and how we, as nations, could uphold rights of human beings in our countries.

In 1993, the United Nations developed the Human Rights High Commissioner that started to shine a spotlight on what human rights means.

There was a code of conduct developed that year called the Paris Principles adopted by the UN Human Rights High Commission. That's interesting to look at because it deals with how courts

recognize human rights, different aspects of society. It really starts to delineate what that means and how it's translated into laws, things like that.

In 2008, we had the Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities. That was widely accepted across the world. Interesting to note that the United States was not one of the countries that adopted that convention. However, it does have an impact upon us.

Accessibility as a human right is something that has been emerging. The UN Human Rights Commission defines the progress this way: Human rights are now a global [audio cut out.] There's a global consensus that human rights violations should not go unpunished.

With all this momentum, we're starting to see that people who live with disabilities are viewed differently than they were years ago. This is a statement from the UN human rights office of the high commissioner.

"It has been a paradigm shift in the recognition of the human rights of people with disabilities, especially and crucially, their right to effective participation in all spheres of life on equal basis with Others."

As a woman of 55 years that has seen a little bit of life and grown up in a family where nearly everyone lived with a cognitive disability, I can see the difference in what is accepted in the workplace and social environments when I and my sisters were growing up and now.

My oldest sister studied to be a nursing assistant. When she got out of vocational schools, she got a job. On the job, she had absence seizures. They're called petit mal. She would stand there. A lot of people didn't know she was having them. She'd blank out for a moment and ask you what you said. She's pretty sure she had one of these on the job. A week later, she was fired for something that she actually didn't do.

This kind of thing, we accepted. As young women living with cognitive disabilities, we said she wasn't able to hide that, so that's how it goes.

How easily we accepted that in remember that and remember thinking that you have to make sure you're on top of your medication and everything so people don't find out that you have epilepsy was really normal. That isn't normal anymore. It's interesting to see how that shift has happened.

The question that we always get when trying to make a business case is that accessibility is insinuated whether it's said out loud or not. It's insinuated that accessibility is bad for business, that the cost cannot be justified, that there is no return on investment.

Let's suppose that that is true. If we determine that accessibility is bad for business and we've had all of these human rights developments that have happened over the years, we know that the perspective of people being able to partake in information is there in the public and it's being reinforced legally. Can we roll back the requirements?

Let's say we did. Let's say we were able to legally roll back those requirements. What would our impact be on our businesses? We actually did this in December 2017. The Americans with Disabilities Act, the law that applies to everyone whether you're for profit, nonprofit, church, business, government (government does have their own subset of laws), the ADA is the thing that most of us look at.

There were web rules that would define what access is for people living with disabilities that were about to be released in late 2016 and early 2017. We all wondered because they weren't being released. In late December of 2017, the Department of Justice announced that they were being withdrawn. There aren't going to be any more rules. We aren't going to do it.

What happened with that is that a lot of legal chaos occurred. In between 2017-2018, the number of website inaccessibility lawsuits under the ADA began to surge. There was a lot of legal precedents that kept it going forward. People kept filing lawsuits. Many people had already started to view website accessibility as a right they should have as someone living with a disability or people they knew should have.

In a lot of ways, the question is if this train has left the station. Also, which side of history do we want to be on?

Let's take a closer look at the effects. These statistics blew my doors off. Some of these are newly released. They come from two respected law sources, Lainey Feingold, Seyforth/Shaw. These focus on ADA related lawsuits. In 2015, we had 4,789. In 2016, we had 6601. In 2017, 7633. In 2018, they jumped to over 10,000. We have had a 33% increase in these types of lawsuits since 2013.

In this new legal landscape, which is why I wanted to lay out the carpet for where the human rights stuff came from, was that something that was intended to help businesses through less regulations had made things worse.

The next thing we'll talk about is that we're living in a new socially aware culture. What actually happens when human rights and social responsibility begin to govern our choices?

This was a really cool study I ran across called From Obligation to Desire by an organization called BBMG. It is packed with interesting statistics.

"According to a 2014 survey, 2.5 billion consumers worldwide, representing 36.4% of the global population are aspirationals. They define themselves in part through brands and believe that they have a responsibility to purchase products that are good for the environment and society."

The example I love to give is that I can't buy my 28-year-old daughter clothing for her birthday unless it's properly sourced. She feels that strongly about it. I don't buy her cosmetics or bubble bath without it being properly sourced. She has a strong conviction about that. I'm of a different generation. It's rubbed off on me. I use a B Corp to buy my paper goods. Most of us do something like this or know people who do. It's becoming part of the norm.

Cause sponsorship or businesses that support social causes and efforts as the way they do business, which includes WeCo, mission-based organizations, are expected to do about \$2.23 billion this year in business. That's a 4.5% increase over 2018.

We're dealing with a consumer that cares.

These individuals, most of us, choose to do business with organizations that demonstrate that they're, in this order, responsible, next caring, next advocate for issues and also protect the environment. That's how we're starting to make our buying choices.

Also, that is how we are choosing -- if you work in government, you know that those factors do impact you because they impact the social reputation that your organization has.

This is the question that I always love to discuss with people. Does fear motivate? We're always seeing that in this industry.

You will notice that in our social media feed, we'll push out some stats because we think they're important for people to know, but most of our social media tires to be more positive because I believe that fear can motivate, but it inevitably exhausts us. It generates a lot more frustration than positive results. If we're able to identify the opportunities in an initiative and seek buy-in, that yields more positive results.

As you frame this business case, I'm hoping that this historical view of human rights, seeing where socially driven markets are going, are positive ways to say that our culture supports this. This is what our culture wants. That's helpful to have.

Let's talk about the benefits of accessibility. This is the stuff that you came for and expected.  
[Laughing]

Hopefully, this will help you set up a strong business case in the ways that you can apply these to measuring that return on investment and applying them to risk management.

Spoiler alert. These will be very simple, but I'm hoping we're able to give you strong insights to make them ring true for your organization.

Accessible design is more inclusive. This means that your information is going to reach a larger number of people. The key is that you need to understand just how big a demographic

that you're working with people living with disabilities. I've made these arguments to leadership when I worked in state and to people that I sell to. It's like, "Yeah, we know it's more inclusive, but we don't have customers who live with Disabilities." We would beg to differ.

The last census reflected that nearly 20% of Americans live with some form of disability. Pew Internet Research Project N 2011 indicated that 54% of adults living with disability go online.

In 2019, we know those numbers are bigger because the number of us that live with disabilities is growing as our population ages.

Accessible design is welcoming. This sounds like an obvious thing, but you may not realize how much more impactful a welcoming, accessible website, database, software product, is to someone who's part of a group that's largely been ignored and has not been able to access things in the past. This is your chance to be a hero. It's an excellent opportunity to gain ground fast with a group that's the largest unrecognized minority group in the U.S. and globe.

Accessible design improves usability for everyone. Whether we live with a disability or not, accessibility features have been documented to improve usability for everyone. Whatever message you're sending, selling, or service, it's going to be easier for everybody to get at.

Bottom Line: what works better for some works better for all.

We know that accessible design improves search engine optimization. Search engines gage and reward accessibility.

Remember that part of what you're trying to do is make sure that people can find your information. I have often said this to people that I've coached with web development. If people can't find it, it's inaccessible. Search engine optimization is really important.

Accessible design manages risk in regard to laws, legal liability, but in other ways, too.

If you're in an industry that requires accuracy, accessible design can really improve the clarity of the information you're trying to put out. It will teach you to do things like write clearer, leave more white space, make things more searchable. If you're in an industry that helps people in crisis, that's another example. It can make the information easier to find. You're more likely to deliver on your promise.

When any of us are in crisis, we have diminished cognition. Things that we teach in accessibility can make it much easier for someone with diminished cognition, for instance, to find something.

It's not just managing the risk of legal liability. It's managing the risk of not meeting your goals or initiatives.

Accessible design also improves your image.

In a world where all of us are starting to vote with our dollars, image can be everything. Companies that live by defined principals and transparency will have an edge over companies that don't.

I had fun looking into surveys about image.

In a 2017 survey by digital.gov, they took a survey of organizations across Europe who had integrated accessible technology strategies into their practices. They reported that 85% of the private sector and 77% of these public sector organizations cited a positive impact made by accessibility and helping them establish a social vision for their company.

At WeCo, our mission is also our marketing strategy. It's also an ethical roadmap for how we treat clients and staff teams. We can vouch for the fact that accessibility is an excellent moral compass. It bleeds into all kinds of other things. It flavors your organization with a desire to be helpful and useful to people who work for it, to people who interact with it in different ways, and to clients or tax payers. It's something that you may not be fully aware of, the image part, but it really does seep into the patchwork of your whole organization.

The series my favorite one. I'm going to cite more information from the digital.gov survey. Accessible design inspires innovation.

At WeCo, we've always known that people who live with disabilities are master problem solvers. When you have to figure out how to get a door open and you're in a wheelchair and there is no electronic switch, you learn ways to engineer things in your life that other people who don't live with disabilities never encounter.

People who live with disabilities, including them in your organization can really challenge others to rise to that level of problem solving. We've certainly seen that.

This 2017 survey from digital.gov, the European organizations that were surveyed reported that accessible technology allowed more people to work remotely more easily and eliminated lost productivity due to illness, weather, etc., which we're certainly living through this last month.

I think in Minneapolis, WeCo has been at our office 5 days this month because of the snow. But I think my productivity went way up because I've worked from home. We don't skip a beat because we do accommodations that enable people to work from home if it's hard to get in. We're totally set up in the virtual office. We have personally lived that.

I think this is neat, increased diversity. Over 80% of organizations surveyed from the private and public sectors agreed that their accessibility strategies helped them build a more diverse work force from a broader work pool and maintained disabled employees

I wondered why WeCo was so diverse. We had a mission of diversity, but we're a tiny company with limited resources. It's not like we could pick and choose from a lot of individuals for some roles. Currently, all leadership roles are held by minority women. I'm finding that that seems to be a natural byproduct of what happens when you have accessibility as a major part of your mission. It seems to attract diversity.

Those will hopefully give you some new ideas on how to make a business case and present them in a fresher way.

Let's wrap up here with roadblocks. This can be a tough conversation. I'm going to give you a heads-up that we'll be honest with you as a group of digital professionals who live with disabilities having this discussion here and in your organizations is the only way to address these roadblocks.

The first thing I encourage organizations to talk about is that it's common to have a level of discomfort discussing disabilities and being around people who live with disabilities that are visible to us.

Societies, over time, have felt it's better to put people living with disabilities out of sight and mind. While that's changing, I think that our internal processing about this hasn't quite caught up with the trend of acceptance. I find it easier with people who are younger generations than those closer to my age. That's probably just because we're used to a different culture and time, just like when my sister lost her job in the '70s because she had a seizure in front of her boss. Accessibility is often viewed as somebody else's responsibility. Whether we admit it or not, we live in a culture that reinforces if it isn't about me, it doesn't exist or matter.

So, while there are times in history when we could come together as communities, this is still a pervasive attitude in business. It's not our client or employee, so it's not our responsibility.

Finally, if it doesn't impact us, we can't justify spending that money because we don't hire that demographic. We don't do business with that demographic. That demographic isn't big enough.

I don't hear this as much as I did when we started WeCo 8 years ago. I used to hear it a lot. I heard people say things like, "We don't have any employees who live with disabilities." I've even had people say, "we don't hire people who live with disabilities." I'm not hearing that as much.

It's important to realize that all of us, even people who live with disabilities, are uncomfortable around other people who live with disabilities, to a certain extent, because I'm the boss of a company of people who live with disabilities. My disability is mental illness. That can be uncomfortable for my staff if I talk about it. We actually have talks about Lynn's depression

and things like that. We get that that is something that affects all of us. The only way to get through that is to talk about it.

It's important to realize that demographic shifts are happening. That's why these conversations are so important.

Again, largest unrecognized minority group in the U.S. and globally is people living with disabilities. 20% of the U.S. population. 1 out of 5 potential customers. This is exploding. This is a great stat to bring back from the National Institute of Health N May 2016 is that the youngest of the baby boomers hitting 65 by 2029, the number of people with visual impairment or blindness in the United States is expected to double to more than 8 million by 2050. It's going to be so common to have a disability that if your business isn't accommodating, not developing screen reader access, for instance, you'll lose so much of the market share it could truly impact your ability to stay in business.

To wrap up, we suggest having a conversation. Be honest. Accept what you learn. You may not hear what you want to hear from the people you work with. That's OK. That's where they are now.

Address what's holding the group back without judgment. Remember that accessibility is a journey that involves much more than code changes. It's the change that happens inside each of us that's really the most important thing.

Give everybody space and respect to make that journey.

I believe that most people want to become accessible. They bought into old storylines about why it's not possible.

So, I think that gentle education is much more effective than force or anger because I think most people will get there when they have the facts.

Just a few things that we're going to share about bringing others on board -- this is the part where my background in sales enters in.

I believe that nothing in this world happens until someone sells something. I don't know who said that, but we're selling every day of our lives. We think selling is a bad word, we think we don't do it, etc. We're selling whether we're selling our kids that they should pick up their room, selling a coworker that they don't want to go to Subway for lunch and they'd rather go to the pizza place. We're selling all the time. There's nothing wrong with that. We're trying to sell an idea.

We looked at how people are convinced. We recommend that you define the terms of the discussion. What are we talking about? An accessible public website, our intranet, making our primary product accessible first and taking it a step at a time? What's most important to the company? Define those parameters before you go in. Otherwise, it can be such a big, daunting thing. Accessibility of everything can be too much for people to take sometimes.

Next, listen, listen, listen to reservations. You may not hear what people tell you, but you need to hear it. Acknowledge and identify. Ask questions about what they're not comfortable with because these questions and what they're telling you will be your roadmap to get their buy-in. You want to get that all out on the table. Encourage people to tell you everything that you're afraid of, that you don't think will work, that you think will be a problem.

In that process, you will ultimately gain their trust and respect. Remember that that listen part is a really important part of how you convince people.

You've done your homework. You gather those facts. Look at the sides, especially the ones you don't want to look at. Develop your reasoning. Back up your reasoning with facts. Most importantly, make it personal. How will this impact the person or group?

I often hear that they're afraid it will create too much work, people are afraid they'll become obsolete because they don't know what to do, so we have to talk about training them and reworking the work flow, things like that.

Realize that these things have a personal impact upon the people in the teams that you're engaging with. Acknowledge that. Work that into your proposal. That's really helpful.

It's also helpful if you work with someone who lives with a disability that may be impacted, maybe someone can't do their work because a system isn't accessible or others on your team have people in their personal lives who live with disabilities. Those personal tie-ins can make a difference.

This slide has some of the facts that we list on our website. We have a website page called Make a Case for Accessibility. It's the basics we went over in the prior slides like increase traffic to the website and broaden the audience.

This is something we want you to know that is there in print to take advantage of on our website.

In the next few slides, we'll talk about how we bring these to life and demonstrate for a business case.

For people who aren't visual users, I have facts on the left. On the right side, I have back-ups, ways we'll demonstrate it.

First, laws are facts that we find are usually backed up best by cautionary tales or examples of organizations that have faced legal ramifications of inaccessibility. Again, we have some of these on this Make a Business Case for Accessibility web page. It's easy to use those. It's easy to find them through an internet search.

Audience needs, the needs of people living with disabilities, and the fact that's best backed up by statistics and case studies that show the need and demonstrate the gaps that are present in filling them. Again, we have these on our website for you.

Economic impacts are another one. It can be demonstrated by illustrating the spending power and (this is a big one) networking capability of people who live with disabilities.

One of my favorite stories is one of our client relations specialists who lives with blindness and is connected to a group of people in the Twin Cities who also live with blindness and low vision. They share ideas and support each other through an email listserv.

Maureen tells this story that you may have heard in a talk. In the last few years, she's in a wheelchair and blind. She buys her groceries online and has them delivered to her home.

A local company had an online ordering service that worked well. They redeveloped their web page and made it impossible for people to check out without first checking a box that wasn't tagged. The screen reader couldn't pick it up. She couldn't check out. She had to call every time and they had to check out for her. She let them know that they needed to tag the box in the code, so she knew it was there. They wouldn't do it. They even came back and said she could just call and they didn't have time to do that.

She put that out into the listserv and found out that lots of others had the same experience. Someone said that this other local grocer has a perfectly accessible online system to check out by yourself with. Mass exodus of people from one grocer to the other. I'd love to find out how it impacted their bottom line. This is a big group of people in the Twin Cities talking to each other.

Economic impacts aren't the bare number spending. It can be the fact that some people who live with certain types of disabilities network really well and share ideas with each other.

If you're making something accessible for a group that works for a group, they'll let their friends know.

It's important to include project figures to demonstrate how much it will cost to do the work in a project versus what it might not cost to do the work in the project. That's where catenary tales come in. Companies that have been in similar circumstances -- trust me. We've done so many audits across so many industries that probably someone in your industry has been impacted. You can probably find those figures.

Finally, social impacts carry a lot of weight as well. This is where you can add stories of users, maybe customers that you have, people that you know personally and how it might impact them.

Your business case needs to answer whether or not accessibility is good for your business. It really does.

The successful business case will move the question from "can we afford to do it?" to "can we afford not to do it?"

We will be posting this presentation on our website with the slide deck. If you don't take this down, don't worry about it.

Where we find a lot of our information -- a lot of this is attached to the free resource page -- the U.S. Department of Labor, census Bureau, CDC, Pew Research, disabled World (which amassed extremely interesting disability statistics), and WWC

A few closing tips. Show instead of tell. If it's possible to have live device demonstrations, WeCo does these. We do a certain amount for free to the public. If you can bring people to free ones or have us come to your company, that really drives home the pronoun to

If you're viewing the slide, this is our director of accessibility services, Suanne Rodriguez, doing a demonstration at Medtronic. Personal impact stories can really pack a punch.

In fact, use ours. That's what we're here for. Take the stories we tell. Use those in your business case.

The bottom line is that awareness will make your case.

Accessibility can be a way to attract business. Can you name clients who need it? It can help you secure contracts. Can you name RSPs that you've missed that require it?

Also, think about the fact that your competitors may be doing accessibility work. They may have a well-known accessibility profile that you can bring into your business case to help reinforce the argument.

What is the public perception of your company regarding accessibility? Is insensitivity costing us more than money? How can that translate into dollars down the road?

Again, accessibility is a journey that starts inside of us. We like to think that it's about code. It's really about attitude. When making a business case for accessibility, first be there. Believe it before you can bring others on that journey. Allow them time and space to get there. It is a real process.

We do have some free and low-cost resources that can help you on our website, [theweco.com](http://theweco.com), from our accessibility library. Part of it is making a case for a business page. We have blogs and things to come to your inbox to remind you to be accessible.

We have impactful stuff on the ground in Minneapolis. We're the home base for Twin Cities Meetup. We manage it in our north office. We have another one at the end of March. It's on the meetup site. We have free and affordable single seat training classes listed on our website resources.

We have public learning events. If you can get people to meetup, get them free trainings, and on webinars like this then it helps. You don't have to do all the convincing yourself. When people understand why, the how becomes easier.

Know that we're here to help. We're mission-based. We have a lot of free resources. I say that enough people buy from us that you don't have to worry about using our free stuff. We want to help you get there.

[Meeting adjourned]