

# Achieve Accessibility Excellence in all your Communications Digital, Document, and Print

(DESCRIPTION)

Text allyant, simple seamless accessibility, Dave Herr VP Enterprise Solutions, Aaron Page

(SPEECH)

Good afternoon-- or morning, depending on where you are located, everybody. And thank you for joining us today for Global Accessibility Awareness Day to talk about how to achieve accessibility excellence in all of your communications.

My name is Aaron Page. I am director of accessibility at Allyant. I help oversee our digital audit process to help ensure it remains conformant to the latest and greatest versions of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. I get to do a lot of accessibility evangelism work, like this talk with you folks today. And I also head up our--

Aaron, can I stop you for a second? Title page in all your communications.

I know, it's an extremely long one for me to try and hear it read out with a screen reader and get the whole thing.

Yeah, but it's all "in all your your"-- is that right?

We didn't write it. [LAUGH]

Accessibility Excellence in all your-- yeah, you know what? That's a good one. That one slipped by.

It actually says the word "your" twice in the slides? Is that--

Yeah, it's are and "your," like yours.

You are and your-- so which one do we want?

Just a second-- in all your, possessive. Like you-- yeah, your.

Yeah, you'd think it would be "your."

Sorry, I didn't mean to-- I'm like, wait, am I muted yet? Can I just talk and kind of--

Yeah, and because it's early on-- if we'd got halfway through this, we would have been coming after you with pitchforks. But no--

[LAUGH]

No, it's OK. I was reading it over and over again. I'm like, that doesn't look right. That doesn't look right.

Right after you tell us that you're just running the meeting, you interrupt us. No, no, it's a good call out. It's cool, though. For the purpose of this, I just say "Achieve Accessibility Excellence in All Your Communications," right? Just for--

I'm fine with that because then we're going to cover all these different topics, and then we'll go into the agenda page. So good-- all right, we can restart.

OK, so I'm going to mute myself again, and I promise I won't interrupt again.

Resist the temptation to do that again.

OK, I'll let you start again.

OK, thank you.

(DESCRIPTION)

Achieve Accessibility Excellence in all your Communications Digital Documents Print.

(SPEECH)

Good afternoon, everybody, or morning, depending on where you are located. Thank you for joining us today on Global Accessibility Awareness Day to talk about Achieving Accessibility Excellence in All of Your Communications.

My name is Aaron Page. I am director of accessibility here at Allyant. In my role, I help oversee our digital auditing group to help ensure our processes remain aligned with the latest and greatest versions of the Web Accessibility Guidelines. I work with clients in the event they are targeted by an accessibility-related lawsuit or demand letter. I run our accessibility claims team that helps clients in those situations.

And then I also have the opportunity to do a lot of accessibility evangelism work, like speaking with you folks today during this webinar. I happen to be blind. I was born with congenital glaucoma. I lost my remaining functional vision more than 15 years ago now. I've been working in the digital accessibility space for more than 10 years, the last six of which have been at Allyant.

So I'm really looking forward to talking with you all today on Global Accessibility Awareness Day. This presentation today, I'm going to be speaking with you alongside Dave Herr. I'm going to go ahead and hand it over to him so he can introduce himself. Dave?

Absolutely-- so hi, everybody. I'm David Herr. I've been the vice president of enterprise solutions here at Allyant for probably going on four or five years now. I've been with the company almost nine years at this point. I came from a long background in IT, so I was on the tech side of IT building data centers and storage virtualizations and things like that. And then I moved into the accessibility space in that 2012 range.

It's been very interesting of a journey because when we were building data centers and building IT systems, we hadn't really thought about accessibility in the early years of IT. But the last 10 years, the change and the push for accessible communications, being equal access for everyone, has really been a great thing to see. And as we've seen with some of the Department of Justice rulings and some of the changes in the laws, many, many organizations are now focused on accessibility and making it an important part of their communications strategy. So hopefully we can share with you how those companies and organizations are finding successful solutions for their accessibility needs.

(DESCRIPTION)

We make accessibility simple seamless and efficient.

(SPEECH)

Great-- thanks, Dave. Well, let's dive on in and start with just a little bit of background on Allyant. So at Allyant, we are focused on making accessibility simple, seamless, and efficient for organizations. We are a combination of three legacy accessibility companies, T-Base Communications, CommonLook, and Accessible360. And we really are a full-service accessibility solutions provider.

We can help you ensure that all of your communications, whether they are digital-- websites, mobile applications, electronic documents such as PDFs-- or your print communications, we can help you ensure that all of those solutions are accessible. So if you're familiar with any of those legacy companies-- T-Base, CommonLook, Accessible360-- they are all now part of the Allyant umbrella. And so it makes us very uniquely positioned in the space that we can provide that full suite of accessibility services to help ensure all of your communications are as accessible to as wide a range of users as possible.

So diving into our agenda for today, we already went through introductions and talk about why Allyant. We're going to move into talking a bit about why accessibility matters for those of you who might be a little bit more new just to the accessibility space in general. Then we'll talk about at Allyant what our digital solutions are to help ensure websites, mobile applications, web applications, kiosks, internet of things devices-- you name it-- all of those digital environments are accessible to users.

After we talk about digital environments, we'll move into talking about document solutions-- so ensuring your electronic documents, your Word documents, your PDF documents, those types of things are

accessible to users. And then on to print solutions, so your alternative formats-- Reflow large print, Braille, those types of actual physical print media forms of communication is something we offer as well. So we'll dive into that.

And then we're hoping to leave time at the very end for questions. Please feel free to toss any questions you have into the chat throughout this presentation. We will try to get to those at the end. If time doesn't allow, we will absolutely follow up with you afterward, though. We will track all of those questions, and we will follow up with you via email afterward.

So diving on in to simple, seamless accessibility here-- so again, we make accessibility simple and seamless for organizations. That's our number-one goal by being, as I said, a full-suite accessibility solutions provider. So anywhere else that you would go to receive a website audit, for example-- if you encounter an accessible PDF document on the website, you would have to go to another company in order to get the PDF documents remediated. If you had customers who required a Braille version of a statement that you produce, you would need to go to yet another company in order to get that.

And we at Allyant are unique in that we are able to provide all of those. So we can make your website accessible. If you have PDF documents, other electronic documents on your websites that you need to be made accessible, we can do that. We can provide you with tools and training to do it yourself and those other alternative formats.

So moving on to why accessibility matters here-- so aside from the simple fact that it's just the right thing to do, right, to expand access to as many users as possible. Somebody like myself who is blind and uses screen reading software, we want to be able to access things as well, right? And so there is obviously the moral imperative of it being the right thing to do.

But from a business standpoint, it's a way of expanding your market reach, right? There are many statistics out there-- some say 1 in 5. Some say more. Some say less. But there's no doubt that there is a huge market out there of persons with disabilities who might not be shopping with you because they aren't able to access your website, right? They might not be utilizing your service because they can't complete the application form document. And so it's really important to ensure that you have access to that wide market.

Connecting to a broader audience, which translates into more customers and increased revenue-- as we said, it's just tapping into that broader market that has significant purchasing power among those persons with disabilities. Sending a positive message about your brand-- there's goodwill to be generated in this, right? Also accessibility and usability tend to go well in hand. The idea that by making your site more accessible, your site is also going to be easier to use, and that's going to generate more goodwill among your customers as well.

So at Allyant, our track record-- the most prominent organizations in the world trust Allyant. We are present in a wide, wide range of verticals. So our clients include folks in the financial services sector,

government sector, health care sectors, education, and so many more. All of these organizations rely on Allyant to help create, assess, remediate, produce, track, and just help ensure that all of those communications are as accessible to as wide a range of users as possible and are produced in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

(DESCRIPTION)

Auditing and Review

(SPEECH)

So let's talk about digital auditing. So this is where I originate from in the organization is in our digital services group that does website mobile applications auditing. I'll hand it over to Dave when we start talking about documents and alternative formats. So talking about website and digital property auditing.

So our range of services in the digital space, it covers websites, client portals, mobile applications, internet of things devices, enterprise platforms, kiosks, you name it-- really any kind of digital environment. As we said, websites, web applications, desktop applications, email-- email is ironically a digital environment made in HTML most of the time that very, very often gets overlooked.

We are able to help you ensure that all of these digital mediums are accessible to as wide a range of users as possible and conformant to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

(DESCRIPTION)

Your experience

(SPEECH)

So what is the experience like working with our digital auditing services? So to start with, you will have a dedicated customer success manager. So every client is assigned one of these. They are your primary point of contact. So rather than hearing from different folks different times, sending your requests in to a generic email address, you will actually have a designated point of contact that you can reach out to if you have questions, concerns, you need to schedule QA testing.

Whatever it might happen to be, you will have that dedicated point of contact. And their role is to help ensure that you succeed, that your projects are successful. You can get them to be conformant, receive that letter of conformance if that's your goal, or whatever else your goal might happen to be-- VPAT, you name it.

Comprehensive audit reports-- so all of our audits when we perform them, they will come in the form of a very comprehensive report delivered in our HUB management platform. In that report, we will list out all of the accessibility issues that we encountered. We will provide screenshots to help indicate where the issue is actually located, along with a textual description.

So if you're somebody like me that can't see the screenshot, we'll also describe in text where the actual issue is located, the element that it is located on. And we will include a recommended fix, guidelines, priorities, quite a bit of information. It's a very comprehensive solution and a lot of information that is included with each individual accessibility issue that we identify during an audit.

We also will provide usability documentation. And so every single issue that we identify during an audit will include a priority level. And that priority level is a reflection of the practical usability impact on users. So for example, a button that's not marked up as a button-- screen reader user doesn't even know that it's a button. Keyboard users can't reach it and toggle it. The usability impact of that accessibility issue is huge, right?

Whereas a button that is properly marked up but the label just says the word "button" in it, that might be an accessibility issue because now screen reader users hear the word "button" twice. It is now redundant. But does it actually create a significant usability issue? No, it does not.

And so documentation around the usability of the site-- can a user like me actually go through the core user path of the site? If it's an ecom, can you navigate to a product and make a purchase? If it's a financial resources site or an investor relations site, can a user go in there and actually access the financial information? Is that information accessible? That type of usability analysis we can do for you. And it tends to be very important in the litigation side of things, which we'll talk more about in a moment.

The HUB compliance management platform-- so could spend an entire hour talking about nothing but HUB, but suffice it to say HUB is a project management and issue tracking platform. In a way, you might think of it something like Jira. However, the trick is that tools like Jira really are not that accessible to somebody like myself. And we have a large team of what we call screen reader auditors, native screen reader auditors.

These are folks like me who are disabled. They are blind or significantly low vision, and they use screen reading software on a daily basis. And we need these auditors to be able to access and use the platform as well to create issues and interact with clients. And so we had to build our own tool to do that.

And so this tool has evolved an incredible amount over the years. We call it the Allyant HUB. It has integrations into Jira. It's extremely powerful, and it's also accessible. So me and the other screen reader auditors, we use it all of the time. And this is the primary interface through which you'll be able to engage with your issues. Access screenshots, help desk tickets, other types of things like that will all be through the HUB platform.

Actual people auditing-- this is something that is very near and dear to me. We at Allyant very strongly believe that you cannot determine whether or not a site is accessible or whether it discriminates against a user with disabilities-- website, mobile app, whatever it might be. You can't necessarily determine that through automated testing alone, right? That requires live user testing to be able to know for sure that that website or mobile application is actually accessible and usable.

And so at Allyant, all of our digital audit work is conducted in teams of two consisting of one of the native screen reader auditors that I mentioned, whose role it is to ensure that the website, mobile app, whatever it is, is accessible to blind users of screen reading software. And we pair them up with what we just-- internally, we call them a sighted auditor. And that's somebody who doesn't have a disability.

Their role is to identify issues that affect other persons with disabilities other than blindness, right-- color contrast, closed captioning, focus indicators, those types of issues. And through that combined process of pairing up a sighted non-disabled auditor with a native screen reader auditor, not only can we identify as wide a range of issues as possible. We can ensure that the experience is the same.

So we quite literally take a top-down approach by starting at the top of a particular web page and moving down through it one element at a time to make sure that, OK, if a sighted user, the next thing that they see is the men's menu, and they know that it's a menu-- it can be expanded because it has a chevron-- is that experience the same for a screen reader user? Do they hear that there is a men's menu and that it is expandable?

And that type of ensuring that the experience is the same we very strongly believe can only be achieved through this type of paired auditing approach. Because if I myself as a blind user went to try to test this, say I triggered a button and the dialog box appeared. Well, if the dialog box isn't accessible, it might actually be really hard for me to know what happened.

Whereas a sighted user, they know that they clicked that button, a dialog box has appeared. But they might not necessarily know or understand how that dialog box should have read out with a screen reader, right? I as a screen reader user know exactly how a dialog box should read out.

And so it's with this combined approach that we can identify that wide range of issues and ensure that the experiences are usable and the same for all users who are attempting to access your digital environment.

So next slide, Risk Mitigation and Litigation Support-- so accessibility can lead to discrimination claims as people with disabilities are unjustly denied equal access to essential digital services. So at Allyant, we offer expert assistance to any clients who are being targeted by an accessibility-related lawsuit, demand letter, or other legal action.

We call it internally our accessibility claims team. That is our team of auditors who are trained to help respond in the event you are targeted by one of these. Our goal is always to support you and your legal counsel. We obviously, at Allyant, we aren't lawyers. We don't provide legal advice. What we are are accessibility subject matter experts. We can tell you what is and is not an accessibility issue, if it is or is not a violation of the Accessibility Guidelines.

And because we actually have folks like myself and the others on the accessibility claims team, our native screen reader auditors, we can also tell you if an issue actually creates a real barrier because that is an

important point. There really isn't such a thing as a 100% perfect, issue-free website, not a full-scale production website.

And so the question isn't, is there an issue? The question often becomes more, are the issues so significant they prevent a user from being able to access the site? And that is the focus in helping respond to this. And you only know that by having an actual native screen reader user use the website. That's how you find that out.

(DESCRIPTION)

An end-to-end solution

(SPEECH)

So next slide here, Managed Compliance Services-- so we provide a wide range of accessibility services in our audit group. It's not just, here's an audit. Here's the issues that you have. Go fix them. Good luck. See you next time.

Our suite is very comprehensive. So we will continue to do what we call ongoing support and monitoring of your website. And so websites, web applications, mobile applications, they aren't static, right? Many of these are updated multiple times a day. And so it is critical to do ongoing review to ensure that as the site continues to evolve and change over time, new accessibility issues aren't introduced, or if they are introduced that they're identified and that they are remediated.

And so that is what we call ongoing monitoring. And so usually we'll determine a cadence with a client on that, whether it be four months, six months, whatever it might happen to be, but some form of periodic review that again includes that live user testing because that's the only way to know for sure in order to help make sure that you are remaining accessible, usable, and conformant.

Continual automated scanning-- there is a role for automation to play in accessibility, right? AI is the big name of the game that you hear talked about a lot. And I think Dave will talk a bit about the role AI plays when it comes to electronic documents and the services that we provide there. The trick with AI when it comes to digital-- and we'll try not to get too in the weeds with this, but at Allyant our stance is that AI solutions are just not there yet when it comes to websites.

There is no solution that can run a scan on your website and identify all of the accessibility issues, automatically fix them for you, and ensure that the site is, in fact, actually usable. That just does not exist at this point in time. If and when AI tools reach a point to where that is possible, you can be assured, we will 100% want to leverage those, for our benefit and for yours. But as it stands right now, you cannot determine whether or not a site is accessible or whether it discriminates based solely off of an automated scan or some, quote unquote, "AI-based tool."

However, automated scanning, it has its role to play. It can help you identify some issues. If folks are being straightforward, they will usually tell you that an automated scan can identify somewhere between a



quarter and a third of actual accessibility violations. Downside being is that sometimes they can create a lot of white noise with false positives. At Allyant, we're always working to evolve our scanning solution.

Our scanning tool is actually used by our auditors during our actual audits. So whenever we identify a false positive being flagged by our scanning tool, we can report it to continue to work to evolve the model to try to reduce those as much as possible. But let's be honest-- there is no such thing as an automated scanning tool that you can run on a website that won't produce any false positives or extraneous unnecessary issues.

That being said, at Allyant, you do get access to our automated scanning tool. It's the same tool that our auditors use, so it really is designed to have its results align with the results that you will get in a live user audit. We just want to be very clear-- it's great to use this. Run those scans. Fix those issues that it's identifying.

Just understand that because a scanning tool, even our scanning tool says there are no issues, it doesn't mean it's 100% accessible. You have to leverage that live user auditing. And that is why for us at Allyant, our automated scanning supplements the live user audit. We don't scan first, live user audit later. We audit first, and our auditors are running the scan as they're doing it and checking those issues before they actually generate them in a project.

QA testing of new issues-- so we will support you during the actual remediation phase. So we don't do remediation at Allyant. We won't actually go into your code and fix the issues for you for multiple reasons. But first and foremost, it's to maintain some independence for that litigation support service that we talked about.

It's not our code. We aren't the ones changing your code. So we are still an independent third party that can provide that litigation support and that neutral evaluation of it. Whereas if we were going in and actually editing your code, then we can't be seen quite as impartial is one of the biggest reasons why we've largely stayed out of the remediation space, but there are others.

Our goal is not-- we don't go in and fix the issues for you. Our goal is to identify the issues and tell you and your development teams, here is how to fix them. And then we will actually validate that they are in fact fixed. So once an issue has been resolved, whether it's on the live production site or maybe it's on a staging environment, it doesn't really matter for us. We're happy to go in and quality assurance test the issue to make sure that it's fixed on whatever environment it might happen to be.

And so ideally, the idea is we identify an issue during an audit. You go and fix it. You say, here's the site where it's fixed. Go check. We go and check. And we mark the issue as complete, saying, you've now fixed it. It's good to go.

Sometimes it's not 100% there. Maybe it's partially there. Part of what needs to be done was done, but it's not 100% there yet, in which case we will designate an issue as partially complete and provide you the

additional guidance that you need to get that issue resolved. So that is how we handle quality assurance testing. And the goal is really to get all of those issues identified in your audit to that complete status.

Project roadmaps-- our customer success team will help you outline a project roadmap. And then in our HUB platform, you will be able to see that project roadmap along with all of your related activities. So literally from the time we start talking to you in the sales process through the time you receive a letter of conformance and your ongoing monitoring sessions, all of it we track in the HUB.

That way in the event you are targeted, we can produce what we call an accessible activities timeline. And that outlines all of the steps you have been taking, all of the dates for all of those things you have been doing to make your site accessible, all of those activities-- every session, every audit, every communication, you name it.

And then updated VPATs and letters of conformance-- so those are some relatively standard accessibility documentation. VPAT, the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template, and the letter of conformance-- if you resolve all of your priority 1 and priority 2 serious and critical issues, we offer what we call a letter of conformance that says the site or the app is substantially conformant to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines based on the evaluation that we've done.

And then litigation support, which I talked about before. But essentially, if you're targeted, we will review that complaint that you received. We'll identify the actual specific accessibility issues that it calls out. We'll review them to determine, are they real? If they're present, are they actually accessibility violations, or are they just more UX concerns? If they are actually accessibility violations, how practical of a user impact do those tend to have?

Since that's very important in the litigation space because not all issues are created equally. And an unlabeled image that is used to label the checkout button is a heck of a lot more important than an unlabeled image used on a seven-year-old blog post, right? And so it's important to understand the practical impact that an issue might create.

Continual training-- as part of our ongoing services, we also provide training. And so our goal is for you to be able to fix those issues that we identify in an audit. And then through training and just the ongoing learning, you will have fewer and fewer issues over time. The idea is you should need us less and less in the digital group as time goes on. As your developers learn to create accessible content, your component libraries and design systems, those are made accessible as well.

And then an always-on help desk-- so literally at the project and issue level, if you have a question on a specific issue, you can add a comment to that issue, check the box, and that comment will be sent to our help desk team, which we usually are good at responding within just two or three days.

So dedicated customer support manager-- already talked about that. You'll have that dedicated CSM as your single point of contact. Ongoing access to the Allyant badge-- this is actually a really important thing.

We tend to think of it in terms of risk mitigation. It's no different than having a Better Business Bureau badge on your site or a Verisign secured badge on your site. It's to show that you've already been taking accessibility into account. It's already on your roadmap.

And so that way if somebody comes to your site looking to file an accessibility complaint, they see you have the badge and maybe a working Skip to Main Content link. Maybe they'll just move on. Why target this site that has a badge from a known accessibility vendor when you could go to the next site that doesn't, right? And so every little bit helps when it comes to that type of thing.

OK, next slide, HUB compliance platform-- I kind of already talked about this, so I won't dig into it too crazy much. But accessibility audit issue report-- as I said, it'll list out all those issues, fixes, things like that. Ongoing compliance reports-- so as I mentioned, all of those accessible activities that you were doing to achieve compliance, those are being tracked. And literally at any point in time, we can generate a report for you that outlines all of those activities that you have been undertaking.

Knowledge base-- every issue-- well, I guess I should be careful. Not every single issue, but the vast majority of issues that we have are tied to related knowledge base articles. So if you need more information about why is this an issue or how do I fix the issue, you can click on a link there to the related knowledge base article, and you will be able to see more information, including code samples and other contextual information about that issue. And so really, really super valuable resource, the knowledge base.

Integrated help desk-- mentioned that already. Literally at the issue level, if you have a question on an issue, you can just type in your question, check a box, and it comes to the help desk. You can also do it on the project level. So maybe you don't have a question about a specific issue, but you have a question about a new update you're going to be rolling out. Maybe you're going to be updating the version of your CMS from one to the next.

Then you might want to reach out at the project level with this more general question unrelated to a specific issue. You can do that as well with our help desk. We have project-based help desk tickets as well.

The HUB toolkit, that's the scanning tool that I mentioned. We call it the HUB toolkit. It does more than just scanning as well. It also has great tools for being able to quickly see image alternative text, heading levels, different types of things like that. And again, that automated scanning component is built into the toolkit as well.

Developer integrations-- the big one that we have right now is Jira. . We have a bilateral integration with Jira. So our HUB is able to both push and pull from Jira. So if you use Jira, we are able to set up that integration. So if your team doesn't want to go into the HUB to actually view those issues-- they want to track them and respond to them from within Jira-- we can set that up to make that happen.

And then as your team responds to those issues, updates the statuses of those, those will be pushed back to the HUB, and the issues and information in HUB will be updated as well. So really, really valuable thing, something that was asked for for a really long time that is a powerful, powerful tool is the Jira integration there.

Next slide here, Software Accessibility Validation Services, ProcureEnsure. So if you are not familiar with Disability:IN and the Procure Access project toolkit that they have, highly would recommend that you take a look at that. But what this is talking about is procuring accessible information and communication technologies. And so we offer what we call ProcureEnsure. This is a free software accessibility assessment.

And so it usually takes somewhere around 2 to 3 hours is the amount of time we spend on one of these. The idea is for us, our native screen reader users to actually go into that software and see how accessible does it seem to be. If a VPAT is being provided for that software, is what's being said in the VPAT, does it align with what we see when we actually go in and use the tool?

It is not a comprehensive audit, right? We aren't going through it and identifying every single issue, and writing up issues, and suggesting fixes, and things like that. The idea really is to go in and to see, does it appear to be usable? Because I will be honest with you, as somebody who's blind and uses a screen reader, most of the time if a piece of software is not accessible, not usable, it doesn't take long to find that out, right?

And so that is the heart of ProcureEnsure here. And the Procure Access toolkit from Disability:IN, one of the core tenets that they underscore is the importance of conducting actual accessibility assessments. Because the unfortunate truth is that VPATs, the V stands for Voluntary. And many of the VPATs you might get, unless they're coming from a third-party accessibility vendor like Allyant, you can't often take VPATs at their word. And so conducting your own assessment is a really important step.

We at Allyant, we actually offer those types of assessments for free, and the idea being that if you ask us to review a piece of software, we find that software is not accessible, our hope is to be able to engage with that software vendor. So many people ask why ProcureEnsure is free. That's the goal behind it. But it's also invaluable to you because you can know before making the purchase, how does the software seem to appear from a kind of accessibility usability standpoint with a very easy-to-read color coded green, yellow, red-based report.

So Voluntary Product Accessibility Template services, so VPATs-- so the kind of primary accessibility documentation that you will encounter out there for digital assets or websites, mobile apps, pieces of software, that type of thing, the primary documentation is what's called a VPAT. It's a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. It demonstrates your product's compliance.

It can be based on either Section 508 or WCAG. There is actually an EN501 version of it, and then there is a kind of combined version. So there's like four flavors of VPAT that you may choose to use. Generally

speaking, for us at Allyant when we're producing these, it's usually either the Section 508 version or the WCAG-based version of the VPAT template that we use.

But what it does is it outlines all of the individual success criteria in the Web Accessibility Guidelines, and it allows you to designate whether you support it, you partially support it, you don't support it, it's not applicable. And it allows you to provide commentary around that. It's really important, though, with VPATs to have them produced by an outside vendor.

I actually, when I first started in the accessibility space, started by doing software accessibility testing for the University of Montana following an Office of Civil Rights complaint that they received. And one of the things that we really kept an eye out for whenever a VPAT was provided to us was to see who made the VPAT. Does it have a brand logo that indicates it was produced by an outside vendor? Because if it's produced by just the software's internal IT department, who may or may not know anything about accessibility, it's really hard to take that VPAT at its word, right?

And because VPATs are voluntary, you really can choose to put as much information in them as you want. And some are more accurate and more useful than others. And so really got to be cautious with VPATs, but we produce VPATs at Allyance based off of our audit results. So you can be confident that they are actually accurate because they will reflect the results of the audit that you can see there in HUB.

So once an audit has been performed and we know what accessibility issues are present, at that point, we can immediately produce a VPAT for you. It might not be a great VPAT. It might indicate you have issues. VPATs-- you can have a VPAT that says "does not support down the line," and that is still a valid VPAT. Their goal, though, is to get that VPAT eventually to the point to where everything is designated as "supports," right?

So once you get the audit, you can get your first VPAT. And it's going to basically be your worst VPAT, right, because it's going to have the most issues known at the time. But then as you continue to do your ongoing support, and you pick away at those issues, you can get an updated VPAT each time around. And once you've fixed all of, let's say, the 1.1.1 issues, then we can mark 1.1.1 as "supports" in your VPAT.

And so it will just get better and better from there. The first one you get is essentially always going to be the worst when it comes to that. And so the delivery with VPATs is really quite seamless. It's just something you ask your customer success manager. And as long as you've had an audit done already, it doesn't take us much time at all to produce that. It's just based off of the issues we already know of in our HUB.

So that is a high-level overview of our digital auditing services. Litigation support, auditing, HUB, VPATs-- you name it, we pretty much cover it when it comes to digital assets. I am now going to hand it over to Dave, who is going to start talking about electronic documents and alternative formats. Dave?

Excellent-- thank you, Aaron. So now we're going to talk about the other side of accessibility. When people are dealing with their websites and they're dealing with their digital assets, documents have traditionally-- when I got into this space in 2012, people were still working on the bare basics of their websites, if even that. And documents were a down-the-road kind of thing.

But as people have gotten deeper into digging into their digital assets, they're discovering that documents can be a large portion of their website, at least government agencies that have hundreds of thousands of PDFs on their website. So there can be lots and lots of documents, and they all can be major accessibility issues. But the good news is those problems can be solved.

So let's dive into digital documents. So as I said earlier, they're everywhere. And they're typically not accessible, especially PDF. One thing I've heard often times is that PDFs just aren't accessible, or can't be made accessible, or they just should be replaced with something else. And while that all sounds great, and again in 2012, when I got into this space, everyone was telling me that we were moving to EPUB. We were moving to other formats that were more accessible and that PDFs were going by the wayside.

And here we are in 2024, and PDFs are everywhere, and they're not going anywhere. They are digital paper. And they will be here for a long, long time. So the solution is to make sure the PDFs are tagged. But just because a PDF is tagged does not mean it's accessible. And I hear this all the time-- you can go into Acrobat, or you can go into Microsoft Office, and you can say add the tags, and then it will add the tags to the document.

If you then open one of those documents, and you use a screen reader and you can experience how badly a poorly tagged PDF, what the experience is, they're not accessible. And the reading order just jumps all around. And when tags are incorrectly identified so there's no heading level 1 so you can't go to the top of the document, I mean, there's just-- it's confusing. I'm sure Aaron can attest to how bad that experience is when the documents are not tagged correctly.

So the trick is you need to have software tools to ensure the documents are accessible. At the very basics, Adobe Acrobat Professional allows you to go into the PDF and add tags. And then it has some rudimentary accessibility components to allow you to work through the tag tree and to fix the accessibility of the documents. But that's very time consuming, and many organizations need to do this in a much faster pace than it's going to take using Acrobat. So you're going to want to look for some specialized software.

And then your final option with documents is to look at possibly outsourcing some of your remediation. If you've got a tight deadline, or you're dealing with large bulks of documents, and it's just not going to be solved quickly, you can look at outsourcing remediation. So we're going to talk about some of those options and some of the software tools that are available through Allyant.

(DESCRIPTION)

PDF Validator

(SPEECH)

So we've specialized in this space since 1999, so we've been doing PDF accessibility for a long, long time through our CommonLook division. And in the early 2010-2011 time frame, there wasn't a good testing tool out there for PDF accessibility. Adobe Acrobat's test for accessibility didn't prove that you were WCAG compliant or PDF/UA compliant or it met HHS standards.

So there was a need for a third-party tool. And there's the PAC tool that's out there. I think there's one more now out there now. But we were looking to truly give people a comprehensive test to the standard that they needed to go to. At the time, the federal government was Section 508, which was WCAG 2.0. It wasn't even that until it got updated.

So when people need to test to a standard and prove their documents were accessible, there wasn't one tool that tested against all the standards. So we took the testing component of CommonLook PDF and renamed it CommonLook Validator. And we put that out there as a free tool. So anyone can download this tool.

You can plug it into Acrobat, and you can use it to test your documents, and you'll know if your documents are accessible or if they have accessibility issues that you need to fix. So this is a free resource. I recommend everybody look at it if they don't already have it.

(DESCRIPTION)

CommonLook PDF

(SPEECH)

We then have what we call our power tool for PDF accessibility. It's a plug-in for Adobe Acrobat, and it's designed to pick up where Acrobat leaves off and speed up the process-- much more thorough. Let's say the table editor, you're trying to tag a table. And instead of having to go cell by cell and marking spans and whether they're a header cell or a header row, those kinds of things, you can do all of it by selecting some things in our table editor, and it will then tag the entire table correctly.

Same thing with lists, same things with other content-- it walks you through the remediation process. It then at the end does the testing. If anything fails in the test, in the tool there's wizards to fix what is found, and then you have an accessible document when you're done.

So you can do remediation in two to three times faster than doing it just using Acrobat. You'll have a report when you're done. Great tool, highly recommend it-- many, many, many organizations are using CommonLook PDF.

(DESCRIPTION)

Common Look Office

(SPEECH)

CommonLook Office is our volume tool. It's for users-- everybody, everybody that creates documents. So if you're using Microsoft Office, you're going to want to look at CommonLook Office as an add-on to help you make accessible PDFs out of Word and PowerPoint.

You don't have to be an accessibility expert to use this tool, which is one of the great features of it. It's not going to ask you how to properly tag content. It's not going to ask you if these tags are correct. What it is going to do is ask you some common questions about the structure of the document that you just authored. So if you don't have heading levels defined, it's going to make you go back and add heading levels. It's going to make you put an Alt text for images that don't have a proper Alt text.

You're the author. You know why you put that image in the document. What's it trying to convey? Type that in. You got the Alt text taken care of. Once it's done asking you those structure questions, it then generates the accessible PDF out of the document. So again, you don't have to be an expert. You don't have to know how to tag. All you have to do is answer some questions.

You'll start offering better documents once you start using CommonLook Office because you'll start using some of the style sheets and stuff that are built into Microsoft Office that will then create more accessible documents, which is great.

(DESCRIPTION)

Document transcription

(SPEECH)

We also have a tool called CommonLook Online that we've kind geared towards the educational professionals. It's an easy, simple tool to allow you to open up a PDF online using a cloud-based tool. Again, you don't have to be an accessibility expert, but you do have to answer some questions about the structure of the document. So it will tell you what it's identified, and then you'll go in and confirm that that is correctly identified. You may have to type some Alt text in for some charts or graphs or images.

Once you've done that, it will then generate in multiple formats-- right now it can do Braille. It can do large print, accessible Word. It can do accessible PDF and eText. So we've kind of built this for the education space, where they're not necessarily looking for WCAG 2.1 AA 100% compliance. But they're looking for, I need to make some accessible educational materials today for a student.

So with this tool, you can very quickly open up a document, make it more accessible, and then deliver it to the student so they can start using it and not have to wait for remediation or a long-term process. So that's where we've kind of put that tool.

So we're going to talk briefly about automation because I can talk about automation all day long. But the other challenge of documents is where they're created. And most of what we see on a website is not



private information, but it is marketing materials or documents you need to do business with an organization like forms and things like that.

But there's a whole class of documents that are generated from composition systems and billing systems and accounting systems. Think of your invoices, your cable TV statement, bank statements, investment statements, health care documents. These are generated from a database where they are taking typically a template tool. That template is built for that statement, for example. And then it's pulling my personal information out of the database, populating that template, and then generating a document that I can either read online, or download, or have emailed to me, or go into a customer portal to retrieve.

So it's containing a couple things. It's containing information that we don't want passed around. But it also needs to be an accessible document because you don't know who you're sending it to. So there are systems built and we have multiple tools now around automation solutions that allow you to generate either pre composition or more preferably post composition. Once your system has created that tool, through a simple API call, we can access the file, make it accessible, tag it properly, deliver it back to your workflow, and then you can deliver it to your customers.

So we're seeing more and more of these automation solutions come online. Most of the composition tools still do not generate properly tagged PDF. So we built post-composition tools that mean you don't have to toss your existing composition tool, and you can look for one of these automation solutions.

(DESCRIPTION)

PDF Software Training.

(SPEECH)

So in addition to software tools, there's training. And training obviously is very important. One of the things you're going to want to think about when you're faced with a large remediation project is how much impact can we have in the short term, and how much do we want to do like through an outsource of remediation.

So in other words, let's say I have 10,000 documents, and I have to make them accessible very quickly. I'm going to have to learn a software tool. I'm going to have to train a team to be able to do remediation. And that's going to take some time.

So we do look at this as sort of the short term and the long term-- short term meaning I'm going to probably remediate some documents through outsourcing. And we'll talk about that in a minute. Where I can send a block of documents out, get them back and guaranteed to be accessible, upload them, and then I can start working on my longer-term solution, which is to train my internal teams to create accessible content, to fix existing content, and to start producing accessible content going forward.

So we have a comprehensive list of software solutions or training. We'll teach you how to use our tools. We've got live self-paced modules. We have live training-- so a number of training components available to make sure you're successful in your accessibility journey.

(DESCRIPTION)

Compliant and Accessible

(SPEECH)

So let's talk about PDF remediation. You need to get your documents made accessible, and you need it done today, so you're not going to probably be able to remediate tens of thousands of pages of PDF one by one. So we have a quick process where you can send us the files. We give you a 100% quote where you know exactly what your costs are going to be.

With your approval, we get started. You receive the files, and you receive our accessibility report. Our accessibility report, that CommonLook report, will show that you meet either Section 508 or WCAG 2.1 and now soon 2.2, PDF/UA 1, which is now going to soon be PDF/UA 2.0, and HHS. So any of the standards that you need to meet, you can have the documents remediated to get them back with a compliance report, and they're 100% guaranteed to be accessible.

(DESCRIPTION)

Quality

(SPEECH)

You do want to make sure that if you do outsource remediation that you do it to a quality organization. I'm somebody that's been doing this for a long time. One of the problems with accessibility and remediation is the standards are not 100% clear in some instances. So you look at best practices. You look at what works well with assistive technology.

One of the advantages we have is that because we have blind testers using screen reader technology in our staff, we can test stuff. We can find out if there's some discrepancies, and what's the best way to tag for certain content. It is something we can have somebody like Aaron take a look at and tell us, yes, that's a good best practice for accessibility, or no, that isn't.

So we've been doing this for a long time, 25 years. So we do guarantee our work. And you want to make sure that anything you do with remediation that you get a guarantee.

(DESCRIPTION)

Print Solutions

(SPEECH)

So we're running out of time here, but let's go to print solutions real quick and talk about the physical side of accessibility.

(DESCRIPTION)

Textbooks

(SPEECH)

So everything we've talked about so far is digital. We talked about websites. We've talked about documents and things like that. But accessible textbooks and educational materials-- typically, you need to offer those in alternative formats.

So we've been supporting this for a long, long time through our T-Base subsidy, where we offer Braille in many different formats-- so Unified English Braille, and UEB Technical, and English Braille American edition, and things like that. So we've been offering various versions of Braille.

We do a lot of large print. And we're seeing more and more large print especially as the Baby Boomer generation gets older, and they start asking for their Comcast bill or their statement or whatever it is-- their telephone bill-- in large print. And so I can definitely see that as something that continues to grow. But we've been offering these various alternative-format documents-- these are physically printed that we've been offering for a long, long time to our clients.

We can take various electronic formats in. Lots of times-- like for textbooks, it's not going to be secure. But let's say it's somebody's financial statement or their banking statement. Those have to be secure. So we've built two SOC 2-compliant, HIPAA-compliant data centers in North America-- one in Canada, one in the US-- to serve our clients in both countries around accessibility.

So they can send us their secure customer statements. They are brought into our data center. There's no connection to the internet. The printing of the Braille, the printing of the large print is all done in a locked down, secure location where you can't bring in your cell phone or a camera or anything like that. So it's highly secure, and we can provide these materials in large volumes to many, many clients across North America.

(DESCRIPTION)

Questions?

(SPEECH)

So with that, let's get to some questions because we've only got about 4 or 5 minutes, and I did see some questions that were coming in. So I'll read them off, and then either, Aaron, you or I can answer them as we go along here.

So first question is, "What's a typical process for a digital audit, and do you test every page of a website or just do samples?"

I can take that one since it's on digital. We do not, since as I mentioned, we strongly believe that the only way to ensure conformance is through live user testing. Obviously, it's not possible to live user test every single page across an entire website, nor is it really necessary, right? Think about how a typical website is built. It's usually built largely off of templates and off of components that are coming out of a design system.

So you have a carousel that is used maybe for different reasons, and it contains different images, but it's the same carousel in the code used on multiple pages. You might have a template that you were using for your product display page and your product listing page. And so auditing every individual product display or product listing page doesn't make sense when they're all based off of the same template, right?

And so our audit process, where we really start is by helping you-- working with you to identify that representative set of pages that helps us capture all of those various templates and the majority of those components that are used frequently throughout the site. And our goal is to identify the accessibility issues with those and resolve those because that's where you're going to get the greatest value and help ensure that the site is accessible to as wide a range of users as possible.

And then beyond that, it really is relying on a representative set of pages that kind of represent the core functionality of the site, right? What do you use the site to do? If it's to make a purchase, then you want those purchase-related pages. If it's an investor relations site, then you want those pages a potential investor is going to go and read, the financial data, prospectus, that type of thing.

So the context can definitely matter, too. But definitely, we don't try to audit every individual page. Certainly, you can run an automated scan on every page with the HUB toolkit. But even that we tend to advise against because large-batch results like that aren't the most useful. It really is better to focus much more on a granular level on individual pages and user flows and components.

Excellent-- so then the next question is, "How do I tackle a large number of PDFs to remediate for accessibility? Is it realistic to learn to use your software tools, and can I make an impact quickly?" And I'll go ahead and answer that one.

It's probably not realistic that you're going to-- let's say you're in Colorado, where they have a July 1 deadline. You're probably not going to be able to learn our software in two weeks and remediate 10,000 files by July 1. It's probably not a realistic approach. But you can start to make an impact. You can start to remediate some of those documents. And you can then consider outsourcing some of those documents to catch up with your deadlines.

But I always refer to this as more of "it's a marathon, not a sprint." So you are going to learn this over time, and you're going to make an impact going forward, but it's not going to be overnight.

We're running out of time here, but let me read one more question here. "How do we deal with our website from an accessibility standpoint if it's constantly changing?"

That's a great question, and you're absolutely right. Websites and mobile applications, they are constantly changing, right? And that is why it's really important to ensure that those templates, those commonly used components, that whenever a developer or a content author is creating a new page or whatever it might happen to be, that those tools that they're using are creating accessible content.

And training also is a huge part of that. We hit on training earlier when we were talking about digital. And it's really important to ensure that your developers, your content authors, the folks who are putting that content up, that they understand accessibility, and they understand how to use the tools that you have provided, whether it's your platform, your content management system.

Those tools have their own tools to make accessible content. And it's important that your content authors and developers know how to actually use the tools provided to make content that is accessible because that's how you will ensure that accessibility isn't achieved on Monday and then broken on Tuesday.

Exactly-- and then we're running out of time here, but last question-- "How long does a digital audit typically take?"

That's also a really good question. And so this one is a little bit tricky because we've seen it kind of all over the place, right? I've seen clients go from SOW to receiving a letter of conformance in less than six months. We have seen clients who it's taken more than two years. Really, the determining factor here comes down to your development team and the development resources that are willing to be allocated to accessibility.

As I said, we don't do remediation. But what we do do is quality assurance test the remediation work your teams have done. So if 200 issues have been identified, and your team is only fixing 5 or 10 a month, it's going to take you a really long time to actually reach conformance. As opposed to if you establish a regular cycle of every two weeks, we want a batch of 30 of these resolved, then you'll achieve it far more quickly.

And there will always be some back-and-forth. Some issues are never going to be fixed right the first time around. Time's got to be allowed for that, too. But really, the determining factor more than anything is the kind of cycle and the sprint cycle that your development team chooses and how much time and effort and resources they're going to put in to resolving the issues as quickly as possible.

(DESCRIPTION)

Thanks!

(SPEECH)

Excellent-- well, with that I think we're wrapped up for time today. I want to thank everybody for attending our session. And happy Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2024, and we look forward to talking to you soon. Take care, everybody.

Thank you all for joining us. Take care.

(DESCRIPTION)

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