Aaron Page and Ben Ogilvie interview transcript

Aaron Page (00:00:00):

Hello, everyone. I'm Aaron Page Vice President of Accessibility at Allyant. We are so glad you could join us today for what I hope is going to be an incredible conversation. Today's talk is part of an ongoing one-on-one series where we connect with fellow accessibility ambassadors, champions, and evangelists to hear from them and learn from them as we work to strengthen our own accessibility programs. I am thrilled to you to introduce today's guest, Ben o Ogilvie. Ben, I am so sorry. Once again, if I pronounce your last name incorrectly here.

Ben Ogilvie (00:00:32):

All good.

Aaron Page (00:00:33):

Um, who is the head of accessibility at ArcTouch, but Ben also wears a couple of different hats. So he also works for the Global Accessibility Awareness Foundation, the GAAD Foundation, uh, in a leadership role on their board, um, uh, which, and we're gonna talk a little bit more about that and his role there at the GAAD Foundation here in just a little bit. So, Ben, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. Let's kick things off, shall we?

Ben Ogilvie (00:01:05):

It's my pleasure, Aaron. Thanks so much for having me.

Aaron Page (00:01:07):

Yes, thank you. So, I wanna start maybe by talking a little bit about your personal journey. I know for me it's something I, I love about accessibility is, is hearing from folks and learning what brought them to accessibility and what, what their kind of journey and story is. So, um, can you give us a brief overview to start off with, of ArcTouch who you guys are, what you guys do?

Ben Ogilvie (00:01:30):

Yeah, absolutely. Um, so ArcTouch, uh, started in 2009 at the kind of dawn of the App store. We started as an, uh, iOS engineering shop, and, uh, over the years evolved to do Android and then, uh, other things, IOT, wearables, web car and infotainment, inflight entertainment, XR, you name it. Um, and we get to work in all different industries with everything from Fortune five hundreds to innovative, innovative startups, uh, around the world. And we just get to build really cool stuff, which is really fun. Um, and my job is to make sure that we, uh, build whatever we build for our clients in a way that works for everybody.

Ben Ogilvie (00:02:14):

Um, uh, you asked about how I got my start in accessibility. I was in 2009. I was working for Apple, uh, in kind of an it, uh, support and, uh, retail operations role. And my dad was training for a bicycling race, uh,

for his 60th birthday. And he came around a corner in our neighborhood and collided with the delivery truck and became quadriplegic. And so I, uh, flew home to help retrofit his computer so he could keep his job. And it was way harder than it should have been. And, uh, you know, I thought, what do people do if they don't have a computer nerd in the family? You know, something that's already life changing shouldn't also have to be career ending. But, you know, there we were. Um, he was able to keep his job for another, I think, seven years until he chose to retire. Um, and, uh, I stayed on at Apple for a few more years after that, but I decided I wanted to be closer to building product. Uh, so I joined ArcTouch in 2013, um, in a product management role. And I was kind of doing stealth accessibility for a number of years around the edges. Uh, as long as nobody asked questions about timeline or budget, I just tried to make sure that I could, you know, we could make things a little bit better along the way as we were building whatever our clients needed built.

Ben Ogilvie (00:03:33):

Uh, and then, uh, in 2019, um, my wife and I had our first son and, um, uh, the day after he was born, he started having seizures that wouldn't stop. And, um, you know, we came to find out that he had had a, a brain injury, uh, before birth and, uh, that resulted in epilepsy. And so when I got back from the ICU I told my management, Hey, this is not something I can kind of be doing on the side anymore. Um, this is, I'm gonna be doing this work for the rest of my life. Um, and I kind of frankly said, I, I can do that work here or I can do it elsewhere, but I need to be doing this work. And they thankfully said, do it here. Um, they pulled me off of all my other projects, um, and gave me the, the space and the team, uh, to, to build a program around building apps, accessibility first for our clients.

Aaron Page (00:04:28):

That's, that is an incredible, uh, incredible story. You know, it just makes me think about how, you know, disability, I i is something that you can just unexpectedly right? You, you may not have a disability today, but you can tomorrow, right. As your father experienced. And, you know, at at the very least, his experience introduced you to accessibility, which probably helped you be a bit more prepared when your son came around. So.

Ben Ogilvie (00:04:54):

Yeah, absolutely.

Aaron Page (00:04:55):

Quite a story.

Ben Ogilvie (00:04:56):

You know, and, and I kind of, I kind of tell people I'm, I'm the extreme definition of sandwich generation.

Aaron Page (00:05:01):

<laugh>.

Ben Ogilvie (00:05:01):

Um, you know, I've got, I've got a parent and a child, um, uh, who, who have lived experience. And so, you know, my job is now to help talk to our clients who maybe haven't had that personal connection

yet. We all will at some point, whether we age into it ourselves or we have a family member or someone we care deeply about, um, who, who comes into contact with disability, either temporarily or, or, uh, longer term. You know, my job is to just help our clients make that connection, uh, and understand how it's not just a compliance thing, but you know, it, it really can, can be a mechanism for making sure their, their products reach the largest possible audience and that they're kind of future proofing it for themselves and, and anyone else that they want to keep as a client longer term.

Aaron Page (00:05:53):

Right. Absolutely. I, I agree. You know, kind of, kind of on that thread, I, I would be curious, uh, as the Head of Accessibility at ArcTouch, what does a day in your role look like? Kind of start to finish?

Ben Ogilvie (00:06:07):

You know, uh, every day is, is a new adventure. Um, one of the great things is, like I mentioned, we get to work in almost every possible industry. And the ways that accessibility makes sense and fits into one client's industry and, and where their product sits, whether they're fully consumer facing or whether they're more upstream, um, in, you know, somewhere in the middle of an enterprise workflow, um, differs in some ways. And then there's a lot of similarities as well. So, you know, my day starts with kind of catching up on what's going on in the various projects we have in flight. Uh, I'll check in with our teams who are doing the work day to day for our clients and see if they've got any blockers or anything that needs escalation. Then I spend a lot of time talking to both existing clients and, and new clients, um, depending on where they are in their journey of accessibility, maturity, kind of meeting them where they are and, and helping demystify it to a degree. Um, and helping connect them with the, the right next step in, in that journey. Whether it's kind of the initial conversation around what is accessibility, why does it matter? Why is it more than just a compliance requirement? And what are the benefits to business? What are the legal, uh, considerations where they're doing business? Um, and, and all of that. And then on to clients who we've been doing this work with them kind of alongside them for, for a number of years, and how do they kind of continually improve, uh, in their process. And, um, so I, I kind of wear a combination of, uh, education, um, development, uh, delivery and community, community engagement hats, uh, kind of all, all rotating, uh, uh, throughout the day.

Aaron Page (00:08:07):

Sound sounds very familiar. Uh, I think being a, a Head of Accessibility at an organization usually means you are our chief accessibility evangelist and an educator, right. All rolled into one a teacher. So definitely ring some bells with me for sure. .

Ben Ogilvie (00:08:24):

Yeah, for sure.

Aaron Page (00:08:25):

Uh, let's move on now and talk a little bit about gad Global Accessibility Awareness Day. Um, it's coming up on May 15th. So for those who aren't familiar, can you give these folks an overview of what Global Accessibility Awareness Day is?

Ben Ogilvie (00:08:44):

Yeah, for sure. So in 2011, I think it was, and somebody will probably correct me if I've got the year wrong, um, Joe Devon was a developer, uh, who's who his own father, uh, was going through some age related, um, acquisition of disability. And he was frustrated watching someone he looked up to and who he saw as, uh, you know, brilliant man, unable to do his own banking. And he felt that that was just, uh, unacceptable, uh, that the bank where his, his dad was banking, didn't think about accessibility. And, and Joe wrote a blog post on a, a MySQL blog at the time that said, accessibility needs to go mainstream for developers now. And that blog post kind of blew up and got picked up, um, and amplified. He partnered up with Jennison Asuncion uh, who is, uh, uh, accessibility evangelist and has been for, for many years. And they partnered up and, and put together their this day of awareness that they thought was gonna be a one year thing. And it got a huge amount of traction in its first year. And then people immediately started asking, what are we doing for next year? And it just ballooned into this huge thing that got hundreds of millions of, uh, kind of engagements every year since then to the point where major global brands now change their, um, their homepage on Global Accessibility Awareness Day. Apple and Nike and, and Microsoft all have big events focused around GAAD. Uh, they often have accessibility related product announcements that come around, come out, uh, at that time. And it's just been become this incredible movement of, uh, awareness that all started with a, a little blog post, uh, about 15, 14 years ago.

Aaron Page (00:10:53):

That's incredible. I actually did not know that, that that global accessibility awareness day spawned from a single article. Right. Um, just shows you, you never really know. Right. Just speaking up about accessibility can make all the difference.

Ben Ogilvie (00:11:08):

Yeah.

Aaron Page (00:11:09):

Um, well, you know, as we are here at another Global Accessibility Awareness Day, as you think back on the last year in accessibility, um, are there any victories or losses, steps forward or backward, things that, that kind of resonate with you that happened over the last year?

Ben Ogilvie (00:11:29):

Yes. I mean, I, I will say, and, and Joe, um, Joe Devon, founder of gad, uh, became a mentor of mine, uh, a few years ago. Um, because he had built a, um, a, a digital agency that focused on building accessibility first products. And, um, I, I heard him speak a number of years ago, and he said, when I started my company, I expected to come into, uh, an environment where all these brands and, and, um, big companies, multinational companies, had these large, mature accessibility teams. And I was really disappointed to find that I had basically no competition.

Aaron Page (00:12:11):

<laugh>

Ben Ogilvie (00:12:11):

And that, that even these massive teams and, and huge multinational organizations still didn't know what accessibility was really about, or many of them didn't. Um, since then, I, I will say that the, um, awareness around accessibility has, has certainly reached, uh, in many cases a, a much more mainstream place. Um, the action around accessibility is now the question.

Ben Ogilvie (00:12:45):

Um, many companies have GAAD events. They, many companies know that they should be thinking about accessibility, but the, how, how to keep it prioritized as part of the ongoing drumbeat of product development is the challenge. And that's what the GAAD Foundation's mission really is, is to disrupt the culture in disability, or, sorry, in digital product development, and make accessibility a fun fundamental requirement of the product development lifecycle. Um, you know, Joe, a number of years ago started putting out the state of accessibility report that first focused on websites and then started, uh, in 2021, I think, to, to look at mobile apps as well. And that was actually the last year that, that, um, uh, his company at the time put out that report. We've just now, uh, in, uh, in April put out from ArcTouch, the state of mobile app accessibility report, which we kind of see as a spiritual successor to the, the SOAR report that Joe and his team had put out a number of years ago we're specifically focused on mobile apps.

Ben Ogilvie (00:14:01):

And so we looked at the top 50 apps across iOS and Android and five different industries, um, kind of diverse industries to try to understand what is the current state of accessibility when it comes to native mobile apps. And what we found was, um, uh, disappointing, but not surprising. Um, you asked about steps forward, steps back, and what we found in looking at 200 different user journeys across these 50 50 apps is that almost three out of four of those user journeys delivered a poor or failing user experience for users of assistive technology and at least one step of the user journey, which can, can result in drop off and, and attrition and failure to convert and all the things that businesses care about. Um, and so kind of coming back to the question of do we, have we made progress? I would say the awareness has definitely made progress. It's part of the conversation now in ways that it didn't used to be, but the execution is still where lots of teams struggle.

Aaron Page (00:15:09):

Yeah. You know, I, I couldn't agree with you more, right? If, if, if everything is accessible inside of your app, but then you get to one area that is not, that could be a, a, a deal breaker, right? If, if I can make my way to your product and add it to the cart, but the actual cart itself is not accessible, then what good is it? Right? So having any breakdown in that user journey, to your point, could, could cause folks to go away, right? I would if I couldn't use the cart on an e-commerce site or app.

Ben Ogilvie (00:15:40):

Yeah. And, and that was one of the things that we looked at in the report. Um, in addition to kind of our internal testing, uh, with our team of, uh, of accessibility experts, um, we have a team that has been doing accessibility in mobile apps for, you know, a, a number of years now, but we don't have a large team of users with disabilities. So we actually partnered with, um, uh, usability testing, uh, uh, company Fable to bring users with disabilities into the, the assessment and analysis and kind of provide, not just

validation of what we found in our internal testing, but giving that additional color and clarity and, and awareness around the actual impact, the real user impact of those findings. And that's what we found is that, you know, when you, an app is really only as good as its point of highest frustration. Yep. And so, you know, we found that even one step in that core user journey, uh, in, in those apps could be the difference between, uh, a sale or a conversion or retaining the user or not.

Aaron Page (00:16:47):

No, that makes, makes absolute sense. Excuse me one moment. Uh, had to cough real quick. Uh, alright. Um, so one last question for you in regards to GAAD before we kind of move on here. So you're a member of the GAAD Foundation. Uh, I will say that's an organization I actually wasn't all that familiar with either. Um, can you tell us what the GAAD Foundation is, what they do, and, and kind of what, what your role with them is like?

Ben Ogilvie (00:17:16):

Yeah. So I am on the board of directors, uh, of the GAAD Foundation. Um, the, the board, um, has, uh, members like me who come from different organizations and, uh, we serve a three year term, um, on the board. And we try to bring the message of GAAD and the, uh, kind of amplification of accessibility outside of just the accessibility community. Lots of incredibly skilled, talented, passionate professionals all working on accessibility. But we find that the most important thing is that, um, we can't just be preaching to the choir, uh, of people who already recognize the value of accessibility. We've gotta be talking to the business leaders. We've gotta be talking to the founders and, and, um, engineers and designers who haven't heard about it yet and don't know what it's for. And maybe, or, or maybe if they have heard about accessibility, see it as something that slows them down in, in their creative or development process.

Ben Ogilvie (00:18:21):

So our message, our, our mission with the GAAD Foundation is, as I mentioned, to disrupt that culture of digital product development. Um, we do that through a number of different, uh, uh, initiatives, one of which is every year, uh, we hold the, the GAADy Awards, the GAADys, uh, where we recognize, uh, digital products that have been developed over the last year with accessibility as a foundational component. Uh, and that involved users with disabilities at every step of the product inception through design and development, testing and delivery. Um, we, uh, uh, just recently the GAAD Foundation partnered with WebAim to put out a, the first annual global digital accessibility salary survey to help companies recognize what, uh, accessibility professionals do currently and what they should get paid, what they earn. One of the great findings there was that, uh, within the accessibility profession, uh, at least people with disabilities earn more than their non-disabled counterparts, which is kind of, uh, counter to more broadly a lot of what the, the data shows that people with disabilities often earn less than their non-disabled counterparts.

Ben Ogilvie (00:19:40):

So it's good to see that on, on average, uh, at least within the accessibility community, that that, um, disability representation, uh, is, is present and is that lived experience is compensated, uh, monetarily in a way that that really shows that value. Um, and, uh, the, the other thing that, that the GAAD Foundation does is help amplify those events that are being held around the world, uh, within organizations either publicly or privately to, uh, to recognize and raise that, that awareness, uh, of

accessibility within those organizations. So if you, if people go to Accessibility. Day, uh, we're, you know, now a, a, uh, a little bit out from May 15th of this year, so we start to see more and more, and we'll continue to see until, basically, until day of, we'll continue to see more and more events show up on that website, um, for events that are happening all around the world.

Ben Ogilvie (00:20:50):

And so that's one of the other aspects of, uh, uh, GAAD Foundation. And then the last one is, uh, the GAAD pledge, which every year GAAD Foundation works with one organization that takes, uh, a pledge to make. And it's typically something like, um, uh, a foundational, uh, framework or, uh, platform that many developers use across products and across companies. GAAD Foundation will work with that, uh, framework to make that foundational platform more accessible. So that, that's kind of a key leverage point in the building of accessible products, is that the, the building blocks become more accessible and therefore teams that may not even know, um, as much about how to build accessibly, get the benefit of those building blocks being more accessible themselves.

Aaron Page (00:21:46):

That's fantastic. I I couldn't agree with you more. Right. If you can work with, with the platform developers and vendors to ensure that the platforms themselves are accessible and promote developing accessible content, uh, it makes all the difference. Right? We, we at Allyant work quite closely with Shopify on the accessibility of their platform, and, you know, if you are creating a website kind of outta the box, it, it has a lot of those accessibility enhancements baked right in, and it's, it's a great way to get accessibility at scale.

Ben Ogilvie (00:22:15):

Yeah.

Aaron Page (00:22:16):

Uh, well, so funny you mentioned accessibility kind of, and the creative process. Let's, let's talk a little bit more about that. You, you mentioned this already, but how aware would you say your clients are about the accessibility of websites and mobile apps? Are more clients asking about it, would you say?

Ben Ogilvie (00:22:37):

Yeah, I would say that, you know, in the, um, you know, 15 going on 16 years that I've been, uh, doing accessibility work in some capacity, um, and, and certainly in the 12 years, uh, that I've been at ArcTouch, it used to be that I would bring up accessibility in the early kind of, uh, scoping conversations and just get blank stares for the most part. Um, and I would kind of have to start at the beginning in discussing what accessibility is and what's what it's about. Um, now it is much more common that the questions are, that I talked through with clients are not as much about the what and much more about the how, um, how do we make sure the timeline accounts for it? How do we involve users with disabilities in the early process? How do we do that in a way that maintains project velocity and, you know, is balanced with the other deliverables and timeline requirements and everything else? How, how do we make sure that accessibility is included and doesn't fall by the wayside, um, in a fast-paced, uh, product development, uh, environment. And so it's, you know, great to see that, that those conversations have, have moved along.

Ben Ogilvie (00:23:57):

Um, certainly there are some clients who are still very much new to it, and, you know, we'll probably talk about this more later, but, you know, are, are getting a, uh, a very, um, rude awakening or wake up call with the, uh, European Accessibility Act coming down the, the pike here in very short order.

Aaron Page (00:24:16):

Right. This summer.

Ben Ogilvie (00:24:17):

Um, and, and suddenly they're realizing that it does apply to them. And so there's a bit of a scramble at this point on how to, how does that get operationalized in a sustainable way. Um, so, you know, we have, I will say I have more conversations around operationalization and kind of maturity and sustainability. Um, so I, I count that as a win e even if there is, uh, e if even if there are fire drills along the way.

Aaron Page (00:24:46):

Yeah. Yeah. No, I, I agree. I mean, it's, it, it, it's, you're moving beyond that 101 level of what is accessibility and why is it important to, how do we implement it? Right. And I Yeah, I agree. It sounds like progress to me. Yeah. Um, you know, talking about accessibility in the design process, um, would you say is accessible design becoming a standard expectation, or is considering accessibility in the design process something you still really have to emphasize to clients?

Ben Ogilvie (00:25:17):

Um, it really does depend on the client. Um, it, it depends on whether they've had that lightbulb moment and, and really believe in the value in aligning accessibility first, uh, in aligning an accessibility-first approach with the other business metrics and, and approaching it in a, in a sustainable way. Because the, the least expensive way to approach accessibility is in the requirements and the design,

Aaron Page (00:25:52):

Right?

Ben Ogilvie (00:25:53):

Um, the, the most expensive way to do it is to retrofit it after the fact. And I think for better or worse, a lot of clients have to go through the painful version of that before they really believe and see the value as new, new features evolve on top of, you know, once we've remediated something and we kind of move forward and we, we have the ability to kind of bake in the, the accessibility considerations to the design process that they start to see, oh, this actually is a lot easier now.

Ben Ogilvie (00:26:24):

Um, and so I would say, you know, for some clients it's a, it's a hard and fast requirement. It's right there from the beginning. Others, it does, we do still find it's kind of a, a, um, you know, we'll do that in the next sprint sort of thing. And that, that's what causes the cascade and the snowball. And, um, one thing that we really appreciate, you know, we've, we've worked with, with Allyant for a number of years, and

one of the things that we really appreciate is the way that y'all have worked with us to establish kind of a, a just-in-time assessment approach. Um, as we're going through sprints, we can deliver small, small bits of functionality over to y'all, um, that, you know, we may have missed things in our own, um, design and development processes, even though we have, uh, a pretty robust process internally, we're always gonna miss stuff. Um, and so we appreciate the kind of, uh, ability to, to iterate and turn those things around in more real time when the designs or the code is freshest in the team's mind versus something that, you know, is, uh, addressed months later when maybe the team has turned over, uh, a bit. We've, we've had some, some new faces come in, uh, or that, that section of the code is no longer really hot. Um,

Aaron Page (00:27:45):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:27:46):

And I think the, that more agile approach to accessibility is really the, the way it has to be done to, to make it sustainable.

Aaron Page (00:27:54):

Yeah. Yeah. No, I, I completely agree. You know, I, from my experience, um, you know, when a customer says, here are 200 issues, can you check to see if they're fixed? Usually that doesn't go very well. Whereas a customer who says, here are 10 issues, we've just been working on this one little section, we just made modifications to fix it. Can you make sure it was done Right? Right. And, and doing it in those bite-sized chunks, and that agile approach just tends to be so much more effective and, and cost effective. Right. Saves time, saves money.

Ben Ogilvie (00:28:28):

Absolutely.

Aaron Page (00:28:29):

Uh, so let's talk for a minute about challenges. What kinds of challenges do you face when advocating for accessibility?

Ben Ogilvie (00:28:40):

Uh, you know, it's, it's mostly the usual suspects. You know, it's, uh, either the misconception that it's too expensive or that it is something that can be caught in QA and, and added in. Uh, you know, I think in a lot of cases, those misconceptions come from just a lack of awareness, um, or a lack of exposure to the human impact of inaccessible experiences, or the, I'm gonna say the, the comparative approach of the, the cost of fixing later versus kind of doing it from the beginning. Um, we get a lot of it. Either it takes too long, it slows us down, um, it costs too much. Or <laugh>, the, the, the really challenging one is, um, you know, we've got such a small user base, we don't have any users with disabilities who are using our product, so we don't really need to do this.

Aaron Page (00:29:59):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:30:00):

And, you know, I I often, I often come back to, you know, the story about my dad, global real estate executive who one day was using products a certain way and overnight needed to use things a completely different way. So on the one hand, yes, you probably within your a hundred person user base have people with disabilities who just haven't disclosed that, uh, to some degree, or if not, that, if you want your product to be retained and renewed, if you don't, you know, the highest cost for users is acquiring new users. If you need to, if you lose users because you haven't made a product accessibly, you always have to go out and bring in other new non-disabled users to, to kind of backfill that, uh, that loss. Versus if you build accessible products, um, you get to retain everybody as long as you've, you've made a great product, um, regardless of how their, their needs may change over time.

Aaron Page (00:31:08):

Sure.

Ben Ogilvie (00:31:09):

So I think those barriers are just a matter of nobody. I don't think anybody wants to do the wrong thing or wants to exclude people actively. Most people don't. It's just a lack of awareness and, and lack of exposure and experience, um, that, that drives some of that, uh, those misconceptions. Um, that, you know, we have those conversations with clients regularly, and most often the highest impact thing is just to, um, show someone unable to use their product and they go, oh, I don't, I don't want that.

Aaron Page (00:31:42):

Yeah.

Ben Ogilvie (00:31:43):

I don't, I don't, I don't want that to be the experience for anybody. Yeah. Let's do that better. And, and, you know, I find that that's the quickest way to overcome, uh, some of those barriers is to just give people a little bit of, uh, of awareness.

Aaron Page (00:31:58):

Yeah, I agree. The, the power of the screen reader demo was one of the first things I learned when I started working in accessibility as a blind person. I could, I can spend an hour trying to explain why it's important to make a document accessible, but if I spend five minutes showing you what it's like when a document is not accessible, um, that tends to be much more impactful. Right. Yeah. So couldn't, couldn't agree with you more. Yeah. Um, well, one last question on this topic. So, how do you go about balancing accessibility with innovation? When you think about how rapidly technology advances and oftentimes the, the latest and greatest isn't accessible quite yet, right. How do you balance that? How do you address it?

Ben Ogilvie (00:32:45):

There's a number of different aspects to that. One of which is often when you design for the, there's a, a great quote from Jutta Treviranus who is the, uh, head of, head of inclusive design. No, I've, I'm gonna butcher her title. She's at OCAD University, um, and leads an inclusive design, uh, uh, program,

uh, at that university. She has a great quote that is along the lines of, when you design for the margins, you get the middle for free. Um, and really how that translates is that when you think about the extreme use cases on the outsides of the bell curve, you derive those insights of the, the highest innovation approach to, uh, a way to build a thing. And then you get the middle of the bell curve for free, um, in, in solving those, those extreme use cases. So, and there are so many examples over, you know, centuries realistically, where something that was built for an accessible or disability specific use case in the beginning became so impactful that it was widely adopted as the way things are done. Um,

Aaron Page (00:34:04):

Right. They even have a name for it, the curb cut effect.

Ben Ogilvie (00:34:07):

Exactly. Yep. Um, and there's, you know, text messaging began as a, a disability accommodation, um, you know, podcasting, all, all of these, like, there's just so many things. The typewriter began, uh, as, as a blind accommodation, and that became keyboards and computers and all of those things like accessibility really can be a driver of innovation if you frame it correctly. And so, um, in the same way that kind of involving users with disabilities at the inception of a product requirement, um, can drive the most efficient implementation of accessibility, it can also drive the most flexible or most robust thinking around how your product is going to, to serve multiple use cases and innovate in, in a crowded market. Um, so there's that aspect to it, uh, which is just kind of that mindset shift around accessibility and innovation don't have to be in competition or intention with each other. They really do compliment each other and can, can one begets the other.

Ben Ogilvie (00:35:23):

Um, and in other cases, um, where we're working on something, for example, we've got clients who are, you know, exploring spatial computing. We don't have anybody that's, that's really jumped in with both feet just yet. Spatial computing is one of those spaces where, uh, the way that you approach accessibility is not yet standardized. There's not a, there's a number of groups like XR Access, working on best practices around, uh, what does it mean to be, uh, accessible in a 3D, um, immersive experience. Um, and I, I really appreciated the way.

Aaron Page (00:36:05):

To be Determined.

Ben Ogilvie (00:36:06):

Vision Pro came out, apple did Apple's thing and provided accessibility APIs in the 1.0 release of their Vision Pro, uh, SDK, which no other headset provider had done. So that at least there's a baseline standard of common behaviors and things that users know to expect in that spatial experience. And each experience is not being, uh, kind of invented by whole cloth, um, uh, in each app independently. Um, so I'm hopeful that those areas of, uh, new innovation are being considered with accessibility as a foundational component, more so now than they were when, for example, the, the web was, uh, first created or when, um, when mobile apps first started. Uh, I'm hoping that future generations of, uh, innovative technology are more considered for a broader range of users.

Aaron Page (00:37:10):

And I think you're right, right? Apple is such a great example of that, right? They're, they're a huge innovator who has taken their commitment to accessibility very seriously. And I, I know I, and, and many other blind folks that I know, we're all very kinda eagerly anticipating a lot of the accessibility features and tools and assistive technologies that are likely gonna come down later on down the road as a result of a product like the Apple Vision Pro, right? To be able to wear a headset and have it guide you around or read your microwave, things like that, um, it's, it's an exciting time to be somebody with a disability.

Aaron Page (00:37:48):

Alright, well, let's talk about accessibility as a business differentiator. Next. Get a little bit onto the business side of things. So first question here is, do you consider ArcTouch's commitment to accessibility to be a business differentiator for you guys?

Ben Ogilvie (00:38:09):

I, I really do. Um, I will say there's not a ton of creative agencies that do the breadth of kind of custom design, custom development work that, that we do who also have invested, you know, many years towards building an accessibility first practice. And, you know, as we've had more success stories around products that we've built for clients, we start to get more clients coming to us directly asking about how we approach accessibility. And, and that becomes a differentiator in the way that as they're, they're, uh, evaluating which agency they wanna partner with to build products, that becomes, uh, one of those things that they call out in their feedback as, Hey, y'all are the only ones who really brought this up during the, during the process, during the, the bid process. Um, y'all are the only ones who highlighted it as not a compliance checkbox at the end of the process that maybe they'll, they'll meet, but as a foundational component of the way that you think about building products that are lovable and delightful for as many people as possible. So I, I really do see it as a differentiator, and it's, uh, kind of continued to be more and more, uh, the case. Um, and especially we've had, we've had really great response to this, the state of mobile app accessibility report that we put out, um, ton of interest, a ton of, um, uh, kind of conversations that have been started because of it. Um, and it's really, it's really great to see.

Aaron Page (00:39:56):

That's fantastic. You know, I, I, I always come back to just this idea of, of ask the question, right? Or bring up accessibility, you know, just it coming up, whether it's in a sales call, I got started in accessibility, asking it during a meeting that I was in as a student employee working at the IT help desk, right? You just never know how, simply bringing up that topic of accessibility can change the dynamic of things later on down the road. And, you know, to your point, your customers, you're the only one who's talking about it in that way. And, and that brings them back to you. And I think that's just so, so important.

Ben Ogilvie (00:40:33):

And I'll say we, we absolutely stand on the shoulders of giants. Uh, you know, we're not the, we're not the only people in the world who have done this. But I think, uh, with the, the type of, um, I think the combination of mobile apps and the elevation in awareness around accessibility, that that's come into play over the last, I'd say five years, uh, in a way that it didn't, it, it wasn't like even pre pandemic, right? Um, uh, I think that we are, um, fortunate to be positioned that we've, we've made the investment, um,

to upskill our team so that we're ready to meet the moment with the EAA coming into play and, and, um, the kinds of clients in the, the diversity of industries that we get to work with who are all starting to really understand the value of accessibility. And I, I, I do think it's a differentiator for us, not to say that we're the first to do it by any stretch, but I think we, we are positioned in a way that that's been, uh, really serendipitous with the kind of, uh, confluence of a number of different things.

Aaron Page (00:41:49):

Oh, and there's just no question that ArcTouch is such a leader in the mobile accessibility space, right? Um, they're called the web Content accessibility guidelines for a reason, right? They're based on web. And so you guys are really, I think, on the forefront of taking that web standard and applying it to that mobile context and makes you such a leader in the space.

Ben Ogilvie (00:42:10):

We, we really enjoy, uh, we've got a member of our team who's on the mobile accessibility task force, uh, of the, the W3C, and they are, uh, working to provide clearer guidance around how the web content accessibility guidelines apply to native mobile, um, and where, where they are, where mobile implementations are fully aligned with the text as written in WCAG and where there are deviations or implementation considerations that are, that are, um, unique to native mobile. Um, and it's been great to have, um, you know, folks on our team collaborate with that broader global community of experts, um, on, on those definitions.

Aaron Page (00:42:54):

Yeah. Yeah. There, there's, there's a lot of discussion, a lot of debate, a lot of development on that front, right? Because again, it's, you're, you're interpreting this standard into an entirely new platform. So a lot going on on that front. You know, one, one more question around kind of competitive advantage. What about your clients? Do your clients, after it's all said and done, do they walk away feeling like they've gained a competitive advantage by embracing accessibility?

Ben Ogilvie (00:43:21):

Yeah. Uh, you know, one of our, um, one of the things that I, um, have really enjoyed recently is we got brought on by Coca-Cola, uh, to work with them on a redesign of their plus one loyalty app. And originally we were gonna do the, the interface design. And in one of the first meetings we brought up, Hey, here's how we think about accessibility and disability inclusion, um, and how we approach that as, as foundational to our, our designs. And they were so fired up, um, they just said, that's so perfectly aligned with the way that we, um, want to connect with, with our customers and, and make sure we're, we're really reaching everybody. Um, and we've gotten the chance to kind of show them how we approach bringing users with disabilities into those initial concepts and wire frames and test 'em, uh, and, and make product adjustments all along the way.

Ben Ogilvie (00:44:34):

Um, we worked with them on providing the annotations for their engineering team and helping their engineering team understand the nuances of accessible native app development, um, and worked with, worked with you all, uh, again, for the kind of conformance, uh, conformance side of, uh, making sure that everything's coming out well. And that team that brought us in, um, uh, for that app, I, I got to share a panel discussion with, uh, Hannah Arner, uh, at Coca-Cola back in December, um, where we got

to talk about, okay, once you build a, a platform and a scaffolding that is an accessible channel, how do you then make sure that all the content that continues to come through that channel going forward remains accessible? And that's given, uh, her and her team a chance to talk to other teams, uh, inside and outside Coca-Cola about, um, how champion accessibility has allowed them to reach, uh, kind of maximize the, the users that they can engage with. Um, and now we're getting to talk about, you know, what does authentic representation look like in, um, in marketing and advertising, um, that, that, uh, Coca-Cola is tackling. Um, and it's just, it's really cool to see, you know, one team get so fired up about, about disability inclusion and to see that ripple out, uh, to other parts of an organization and a business as well. Um, and, uh, and it really does allow them to, um, you know, both from a commercial standpoint and from a storytelling standpoint, they, they get to do good work and then brag about it, which I think is the coolest thing, you know?

Aaron Page (00:46:26):

That is awesome.

Ben Ogilvie (00:46:27):

I've really enjoyed that.

Aaron Page (00:46:28):

That is very cool. Excuse me. Uh, that is very cool to hear about, you know, accessibility and, and disability access being considered beyond just, let's make our website accessible. Let's make our, our mobile app accessible and starting to think about with the way we market, right? The way that we promote our products, organizational accessibility, um, that is also such a very important thing. So it, it's great to hear about a, a huge organization like Coca-Cola really embracing it beyond just that baseline level of accessibility, right? Your websites, your apps, your docs, that kind of thing. Um, well, let's move on. So we've got the EAA coming up this summer, so let's spend a little bit of our remaining time talking about global compliance trends. Um, so again, with EAA coming up, how is ArcTouch addressing global compliance obligations like the EAA or AODA different global requirements like that?

Ben Ogilvie (00:47:31):

Yeah, I mean, one of the, the, the best news is that in large part, most of the requirements of the ADA, the, uh, uh, AODA and now the EAA and, and other regulations, many of them in large part point back to that international standard of the web content accessibility guidelines. And yes, there's some interpretation that has to happen for how that applies to mobile, but many of our clients, because we've been working with them on the United States side of the house, um, uh, for how to make their US-based apps accessible, they're already, you know, well on their way for, um, for meeting the requirements of the EAA.

Ben Ogilvie (00:48:17):

Um, there are aspects of the EAA that go beyond, uh, WCAG that are more around, uh, opera operation operationalization, and how accessibility and disability inclusion are baked into, uh, in a sustainable way, the steps of the product development life cycle. Um, how do you kind of measure and have documentation and proof of conformance? And that's one of the things that, you know, we, we work with Allyant on, um, is the kind of proof of work around building accessible products. Um, and whether that takes the form of a, a VPAT Accessibility Conformance Report or, uh, a letter of conformance or

something like that, um, you know, there are aspects of the EAA that also are really the, the client's responsibility to own and operationalize and, and, um, kind of bake into their organization. And so we've gotten to kind of advise clients on what's, what's within the scope of the work that we're doing for them. But it doesn't end there, you know, they, they can't just think, okay, ArcTouch has accessibility handled, we don't need to worry about it. You know, we, we you know, it's important that they understand that everyone on their team has a role to play in both maintaining the accessibility of the products that we build, uh, for them or the content that comes through those digital, um, channels, but also more broadly within their organization. Um, what do they need to take ownership of, um, for being in, in line with those requirements?

Ben Ogilvie (00:49:59):

Uh, you know, I think that we've got, um, we see other agencies that I think ha have. We see other agencies that are advising clients right now on using things like, uh, web overlays as a shortcut to what they think is EAA compliance,

Aaron Page (00:50:21):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:50:22):

Um, and the, the EU Commission has actually put out a statement that that has said that's not gonna cut it. Um, and so we, I think we are fortunate that we've, we've done the work for enough years now that we, uh, have been able to put our, our clients into, uh, reasonably good position, uh, or at least a number of our clients, um, into reasonably good position. Um, and then that allows us to look at both the requirements as they evolve or, you know, work with that client's, uh, legal team to understand what are the nuances of the requirements in a given EU member state, um, or who's responsible for enforcing that, um, and who do they need to report to, um, and how do they need to report, you know, it's not, it doesn't feel like a fire drill, um, because, you know, we we're able to be in a position where there's the time and the bandwidth to look into those specific nuances. Um, uh, which I, I think is, is really helpful,

Aaron Page (00:51:31):

Such a good point that, uh, you know, one of the points that I always like to mention when talking about the EAA is, you know, it's up to each of those member states, right? Those individual nations within the EU to decide what the procedure is, what the penalties are, who the, who the governing body is, what's the process for filing grievances, all, all of that, right? And so, um, it's something you really have to be mindful of what all nations inside the EU do you do business in and understand those different requirements for each. Um, on that, on that point, um, apologies, <laugh>. So are you seeing more discussions about accessibility specifically with European customers? Are you hearing more from folks in Europe? Because of EAA,

Ben Ogilvie (00:52:17):

For sure, and, and I think one of the interesting things is, um, you know, I think there's a, for some companies, there's a misconception that, oh, we don't have headquarters in Europe, so it doesn't apply to us. And it's like, no. Do you do business with any, like, do you sell your product? Is your service

accessible or is your service available to anyone in the EU? If so, yes, this does apply if you're in one of the.

Aaron Page (00:52:42):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:52:43):

broad, broad industries that, uh, falls under the, the eu, um, requirements. Um, so we're having a, a number of conversations with, uh, clients who are based in the US or Canada or somewhere else, but have a presence in the EU. And, um, you know, again, fortunately in a lot of cases, it's good news, um, uh, that, uh, hey, yeah, your product that we built for you two years ago is available over there, but here's the small things we need to do to adjust or, or, uh, think about, uh, EAA compliance.

Ben Ogilvie (00:53:20):

But yeah for sure. We're definitely having more conversations. I think, I think some of that comes from while the, in the US, the ADA, um, the ADA was a lot more broad and less, um, less explicit,

Aaron Page (00:53:42):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:53:42):

In the ways that accessibility is required than the EAA is. And so, you know, for clients who have been dragging their feet, uh, in some ways, uh, because they weren't sure whether, you know, how much risk they were willing to take for the, uh, the trade off of making the products accessible under the ADA, um, there's certainly been con conversations kind of renewed conversations about, Hey, you remember that thing we talked about a number of years ago? Uh, it's time to talk about it again. Uh, but you, you've got a, a higher risk profile now. Um, so let's, let's, uh, work to prioritize it.

Aaron Page (00:54:17):

Yeah. EAA is a very different beast from the ADA, you know, the, the ADA is, you know, it's largely regulations and, and court precedents that have, that have kind of built that structure for digital accessibility around it. But EAA is much more explicit, right? They say who it applies to what the standard is. Um, so there's, there's far less ambiguity in that sense, <laugh>. Um, one last question kind of on the legal side of things is, are there any other legal trends that you are keeping an eye on or that are influencing your conversations right now about accessibility?

Ben Ogilvie (00:54:55):

You know, I mean, there are, uh, uh, here in the US there's a number of laws that, um, have not made it, uh, in various states. They haven't made it all the way to, um, being fully codified yet. But a number of things that we're keeping an eye on, there's, uh, a, a bill in California that's kind of been working its way through, uh, and a number of states have more stringent and explicit accessibility, um, uh, regulations that have come in and, and been passed, um, that are, that are more modern and specific than the ADA, uh, or section 508 or, or what have you. So, um, you know, when we're talking to clients who have a

presence or are based in those states, or if they're in government or education, um, there's definitely conversations happening there in parallel to the EAA conversations.

Ben Ogilvie (00:55:44):

Um, and, uh, you know, I think as, uh, a lot of the standards point to either WCAG 2.0 or 2.1 right now, but 2.2, uh, kind of became the, the current standard last year, so a number of those, um, products that were built to the older standards, you know, were, as those, uh, regulations are being updated to 2.2, or as we anticipate that's going to happen soon, we're having those conversations, those renewed conversations on, Hey, here's, here's the additional criteria that we need to take into account and consider, and what does that mean? Uh, how do we plan that in a, in a thoughtful way into the product roadmap going forward?

Aaron Page (00:56:30):

Yeah. Thankfully, the, it, it's so nice. One of the things I always like to mention about WCAG is how it's built upon itself, right? In the 2.0 version. So. Excuse me. It's not like those organizations who, whose app was built to 2.0 now have to go back to the drawing board. They're, they're most of the way already there.

Ben Ogilvie (00:56:49):

Right.

Aaron Page (00:56:51):

Awesome. Well, uh, let's move on now and talk about some tips and tricks that folks who are listening can, can take away from this conversation. Um, so for organizations who are just getting started with accessibility, what are three quick tips you would tell them to help them get on the road?

Ben Ogilvie (00:57:11):

Yeah. Uh, the, the first thing is, is just train your teams on the basics, right? Everybody's got a role to play. Accessibility doesn't live just in engineering, doesn't live just in design, doesn't live just in QA. Everyone has a responsibility in that handoff of building a product accessibly. So make sure everybody understands kind of the, the table stakes of what their, their roles and responsibilities are, and how accessibility touches and overlaps with what they're, uh, being held accountable to.

Ben Ogilvie (00:57:45):

The second thing is involve users with disabilities. Again, every step of the way, I, I keep coming back to it 'cause it's the highest return on investment you can make is a little bit of usability testing time with members of disability communities carry so much weight and carries people so far in understanding how their decisions impact the outcomes and the, the quality of the product that they've built. So second thing is involve users with disabilities as early and often as you can. Um, whether it's, you know, bringing people in, uh, from a usability testing platform, whether it's working with, uh, a team like Allyant, um, it's just making sure that you've got those voices in the mix makes so much difference in how people perceive accessibility and, and why it matters and how to prioritize.

Ben Ogilvie (00:58:36):

And then, uh, the third one, um, I I would say the thing that we did when we were first starting our journey is recognize that it is an extremely broad and deep topic. And it's, it's not something that, um, you know, you snap your fingers and learn in a weekend or, or in a, a few weeks or, or even a quarter,

Aaron Page (00:58:59):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (00:58:59):

So the only shortcut to having a high functioning accessibility team is bringing in high functioning accessibility experts to help upskill your team. Um, if you're just getting started, uh, there's the, the, the long way to learn the, the 10 year path to learning, or you can bring in people who have done that hard work already and can help, you know, signpost where the shortcuts are to, you know, not going too far down the wrong rabbit hole, uh, as you, as you learn the ins and outs of, of how to build products that work better for a broader use of, uh, uh, broader range of users and how assistive technologies work. So that'd be the third one is, is if you're just getting started, um, the, the best investment you can make is, um, not learning the long path, but, but bringing in people who, who really have been there and done it and can help your team, uh, get, get to, uh, a level of competence faster.

Aaron Page (00:59:59):

Love it. Couldn't agree with you more. I mean, I, it's funny you say 10 years, that's actually how long I've been working in accessibility. So maybe now I finally figured it out after after doing it for 10 years here.

Ben Ogilvie (01:00:09):

I mean, the thing that I've found, uh, absolutely to be true is everyone in this industry who does this work will never feel like they know what they're talking about.

Aaron Page (01:00:19):

Nope.

Ben Ogilvie (01:00:19):

Like we all feel like we learn something new every single day. Um, and I know people who have been doing this work for 20 or 30 years and look at back at something they did last year and go, oof, I would do that differently today, you know?

Aaron Page (01:00:32):

Yep.

Ben Ogilvie (01:00:32):

So that's, that's one of the other things that I love about doing this work is that it never gets old.

Aaron Page (01:00:37):

Um, that's so funny.

Ben Ogilvie (01:00:38):

You know, there's always something more to learn.

Aaron Page (01:00:40):

Couldn't agree with you more. Uh, alright, so we talked about kind of three tips and tricks for kind of folks who are new to accessibility. What about if you have a more mature accessibility program already, any tips or tricks or guidance you would have for organizations that are already more mature or more further down the road?

Ben Ogilvie (01:00:58):

Yeah, I, you know, I, I talked for, for teams that are newer to it, um, bringing in users with disabilities for user testing and, and learning how your product works. For more mature organizations, hire them. Get people with disabilities on your team who are able to share their lived experience alongside whatever their, in whatever role they work. Don't treat them as a monolith or representative of the entire world of users with disabilities. But having that voice in the product development lifecycle every day in the daily standups, in the designs in the QA, um, there's no substitute for that. So building a a, an inclusive hiring process and making sure your organization is set up to retain exceptional disabled talent, like, um, I is, is uh, really, uh, kind of the next key unlock I would say.

Ben Ogilvie (01:01:53):

Um, and then making accessibility part of your procurement requirements.

Aaron Page (01:01:58):

Yes.

Ben Ogilvie (01:01:59):

So when you are buying software that you are gonna use internally that your team members are gonna use, make sure that you are leaning on those vendors to make their products accessible too. 'cause, 'cause money talks.

Aaron Page (01:02:12):

Yep.

Ben Ogilvie (01:02:12):

And so the, the best way to enable the, the flywheel of more accessibility in the ecosystem is by voting with your dollars. And when you're an organization that's more mature and you're building things accessibly, if you also turn around and say, I'm not, I'm not buying your product. If you don't make it accessible, it, it makes a difference. And the more that companies hear that from their customers, the more they're gonna be incentivized to do the work. To, um,

Aaron Page (01:02:39):

I totally agree.

Ben Ogilvie (01:02:41):

And, and then I'd say the, the last one is, um, well, two others I would say like, get involved with the disability community, um, beyond just kind of the, the conformance, uh, WCAG checkbox. But, you know, finding ways to, uh, share best practices, share your wins, uh, as you're building products, more accessibly, share what you've learned. Share your failures. Um, you know,

Aaron Page (01:03:06):

Right.

Ben Ogilvie (01:03:07):

When you have a, an organization that is mature in accessibility, um, you realize that you're never gonna get it all the way, right. And you're always gonna have more to learn.

Ben Ogilvie (01:03:17):

Um, and then, uh, I, I really, the, the, the very mature organizations that create public GAAD events and, and open their communities up to, uh, open their organization up to sharing more broadly what they're doing, uh, in accessibility, how they're driving awareness, how they're, um, operationalizing dis disability inclusion within their organization. Um, I think those are all things that, that, uh, mature organizations can be doing to kind of pay it forward and, um, and enable the next, uh, cohort of organizations, the next generation of organizations to take another step along that maturity, uh, roadmap as well.

Aaron Page (01:03:57):

That's fantastic. I couldn't agree with you more. Uh, I might be a little bit biased, but definitely, definitely agree with the value of having persons with disabilities as part of that testing. There is just no substitute for it. And, you know, procurement accessibility is just such a, a, a tough topic. It's where I started in accessibility. Um, we could, we could do a one or two hour talk on that alone right here, right now. Right. It's, it is not an easy thing to do by any means.

Aaron Page (01:04:25):

Uh, alright. Well, one last question for you and then we can wrap this up. Uh, how can people keep in touch, how can people connect with you or learn more about ARC Touch's accessibility efforts moving forward?

Ben Ogilvie (01:04:36):

Yeah. Uh, anyone that's interested in having a conversation, I love talking about accessibility. Uh, it's, I mean, it, it, uh, there's, there's no, there's no, uh, dividing line between work and, and personal, uh, because of kind of how it affects my family personally. And so I, I'm happy to have a conversation with anybody and everybody about accessibility. So, you know, people can connect with me on LinkedIn. Um, I've got a, a a button right there that says, book an appointment, and they can grab some time with me to just talk about whatever. Um, you know, I'm, I'm thrilled to, to discuss it.

Ben Ogilvie (01:05:11):

Um, uh,on our blog on the ArcTouch website, we've got, uh, a number of articles, uh, that we've posted over the years, uh, on kind of accessibility learnings. Um, as we've kind of taken our steps forward in maturity. We've got, uh, a lot of content there. Um, we also have a newsletter people can sign up for. They can definitely go check out our state of mobile app accessibility report, uh, which is, uh, if they go to arctouch.com/soma arc touch.com/soma, state of mobile app accessibility. Um, they can grab the report there.

Ben Ogilvie (01:05:49):

Uh, and then lastly, um, you know, taking off my ArcTouch hat for a second and, and putting on my, um, kind of more broad community hat. Uh, I also run, um, uh, one of the co-organizers of the accessibility in New York City meetup. Once a month. We bring in great speakers from, uh, everywhere in, uh, accessibility. And they speak about, um, what they're working on or what they've learned. Um, and that's a free meetup that we run out of, uh, the, uh, soho space, uh, that our parent company AKQA, uh, has. And, um, we also live stream it on YouTube, uh, so they can go to, uh, meetup.com/a11YNYC, uh, to check out the meetup. So those are some of the many places that I am.

Aaron Page (01:06:36):

<laugh>. Awesome. Well, Ben, thank you again so much for spending time with us today. It's been a great conversation, been some great tips and things to learn and, and learning from somebody who is one of the best in the space. We really do appreciate it,

Ben Ogilvie (01:06:52):

Aaron, really appreciate it. Thanks a lot.

Aaron Page (01:06:54):

Of course. So, so on the screen, uh, we have Ben's contact information if you'd like to keep in touch with him and learn more about ArcTouch. We also have my information up there as well. Um, you can reach out to me on LinkedIn, uh, if you're interested in following me or if you want to learn more about Allyant and the services that we offer as well. Again, thanks Ben and thank you all for joining us today. I hope you have a great Global Accessibility Awareness Day and a great month. Thank you all.

Ben Ogilvie (01:07:24):

Thanks a lot.