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Accessibility, Accessibility, Accessibility!

How a for-purpose organisation embeds digital accessibility from the beginning.

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Summary:
1. Accessibility starts at the procurement stage – set expectations early on
2. Embed accessibility into the full software development lifecycle – it's everyone's responsibility
3. Ongoing accessibility monitoring needs to be factored in – do not set and forget!

TTC (The Testing Consultancy) is proud to partner with Australian Network on Disability in relation to the digital accessibility of Australian Network on Disability's website rebuild. It's been a beneficial journey so far, a journey that's highlighted how an organisation can approach accessibility with good practice front of mind.

When starting out on the website project, accessibility was one of the top priorities for Australian Network on Disability. It was a key consideration and a non-negotiable in relation to go-live. An inclusive experience, and that includes people with disability was a priority for them to ensure that all their members and clients, candidates and employees, could interact with their website.

> **It was important for us that not only our members could access the website, but that our employees could use and update the website too.**
> **– Amy Whalley, Former Deputy CEO, AND**

Australian Network on Disability's requirements were that the website met the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA level of compliance, and that the user experience was inclusive and accessible. To ensure TTC met these requirements, digital accessibility was factored in from the procurement stage. "Sometimes accessibility is talked about like it's an add on requirement, this wasn't the case for us."

– Amy Whalley, Former Deputy CEO, AND.

TTC understood from the beginning that we needed to support Australian Network on Disability to achieve accessibility against the WCAG and that the user experience was crucial. It was also identified early on that ongoing accessibility needed to be factored in, not just for the website launch. As the accessibility partner, we worked closely with Australian Network on Disability to ensure requirements were clearly articulated to us and included in statements of work. These requirements were also expected of the website developer engaged to build the website.

Tip: Achieving AA level of compliance is good practice and is a recommended goal for all organisations to work towards.

Consider the questions that your organisation asks of its vendors and partners. Do you factor in accessibility from this stage? Australian Network on Disability has a freely available accessible ICT procurement tool that can guide with procuring accessible technology and partnering with suppliers.

Therefore, TTC engaged with Australian Network on Disability's website developer to understand how we could best support them to meet the accessibility requirements. This consultation was on-going during the project and translated into provision of workshops, training, de-briefs, and remediation guidance.

> **"You need to consider the diversity of all users, including potential users. If you don't, you are missing out."**
> **– Amy Whalley, Former Deputy CEO, AND**

For this website rebuild project, part of our supplier support process included providing the supplier with our unique accessibility testing tool called AQA (Automated Quality Assurance). This is a testing tool which designers, developers, testers (and anyone involved in the design and development of websites and systems) can use.

Teams embed this tool into 'how they do things' to ensure accessibility has been factored in from the beginning. AQA highlights all automated and manual testing through user journeys.

Did You Know: TTC enhances our client's suppliers understanding of digital accessibility, issues, impacts and remediations to support the quality of their future work and to reduce pitfalls. Supporting our client's suppliers with remediation continues the education process and means that the appropriate fixes are made in a timely way.

It also points to both the visual elements and the underlying code, making it flexible and understandable by both technical and not technical people. AQA provides solutions to issues, integrates with ticketing systems to enable teams to share 'fixes' with the appropriate person and provides user friendly but detailed reporting to support tracking and understanding – all in one place! Most importantly, AQA was designed with and by people with disability, so it also operates well with assistive technology. AQA's reporting functionality has been described as 'world leading' and always receives great feedback from clients.

Embedding an accessibility testing tool into the software development lifecycle from the start meant that we were able to support Australian Network on Disability's web designers and developers to factor in accessibility prior to getting the audit stage.

An accessibility audit, or review, means that key components and templates of a website or system are tested for accessibility, typically against the WCAG, and good practice is to also test usability. This is an important stage of the project but shouldn't be the only stage undertaken.

Did You Know: A user journey helps us to understand how a person would interact with a site or system. It is the pathway a person would take, navigating their way through a website.

Did You Know: Designing a website with accessibility and usability in mind means there will be less retrofitting, and changes required post development. It's the efficient way to design a website!

The purpose of the audit is to understand where the website meets the WCAG criteria, and where it fails at a point in time. Any defects are then remediated to bring the site to the desired standard. It's a fantastic way to check that what you have developed is accessible.

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We audited parts of Australian Network on Disability's staging environment, ran de-briefs of the audit results with the developers and assisted with remediation as needed. As accessibility was considered from the design phase, the site which was developed had already factored in many WCAG criteria. There were just a few areas that required further remediation support post audit.

We will continue to support Australian Network on Disability with ongoing monitoring of their website. Once you have developed your website to be as accessible and usable as possible, it is important to ensure ongoing monitoring and maintenance. Remember, an audit is a point in time review and remediation activity. To keep the level of accessibility you desire, and to continue to include people with disability, you will need to continually monitor the accessibility of your website.

Did You Know: Accessibility should be an ongoing project and should be treated as such. This means factoring into your processes how you will maintain the accessibility of your website.

Australia Network on Disability has our badge of compliance on their website to promote their ongoing commitment to digital accessibility and inclusion. We will monitor the site across the year and provide regular reporting to Australian Network on Disability about the website's accessibility.

> **"We are thrilled to work with TTC and UsableNet to hit our key objective which is accessibility."**
> **– Amy Whalley, Former Deputy CEO, AND**

TTC has a partnership with UsableNet, a global technology leader in digital inclusion and usability, to further expand disability services and market-leading accessibility solutions to our clients in the AU and NZ regions. Our combined offerings will include automated testing tools, accessibility certification, accessibility training, design consulting, and additional technology solutions. By combining UsableNet's best-in-class accessibility practices alongside TTC's digital enablement expertise, organizations will have the ability to seamlessly implement digital accessibility functionality for an improved, intuitive customer experience across the board.

Let's Talk

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About the Author

Samantha Dancey is TTC's Global Accessibility Practice Lead. Previously, Sam worked on the leadership team at Australian Network on Disability for nearly 8 years consulting with and supporting organisations to include people with disability across the whole of business.