

The Digital Access Show – Season 3 Episode 15

Accessible Events and Digital Accessibility with Vanessa Norman

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Narelle:

Hello. Welcome to this week's episode of The Digital Access Show.

Over the last six weeks or so, we've been examining events and how to organise events so that they are accessible physically, digitally, and emotionally. We previously spoke with Sue Wickham from Sue Wickham Consulting and Rosie Putland from Modality Co.

We also explored live events and the communication needs that need to be considered there. Guests included Belinda Vesey-Brown from Brio Group and Meet Aandi, Shannon Kettleton, who is deaf, Shari Indriani Irwin from Vantagepoint AD, and Megan Bytheway, an Auslan interpreter.

Today, we are continuing the discussion by focusing on NDIS providers and the organisation of in-person events. We will explore what needs to be considered to ensure accessibility.

Interview with Vanessa Norman

Narelle:

To discuss this topic, I've invited Vanessa Norman from the Vanessa Norman Network. Vanessa is currently running a series of in-person events across Australia.

Vanessa, thank you so much for joining me.

Vanessa:

Thanks for having me, Narelle. It's a pleasure to be here.

About Vanessa Norman

Narelle:

Vanessa, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Vanessa:

Firstly, I'm a mum of four children, and my three younger children are all on the NDIS, so I'm a carer first and foremost.

I'm also a former provider. I started my own NDIS business back in 2019 and ran it for five years. Over the last two years, I've transitioned into helping providers all over Australia through NDIS business coaching and consulting.

I support providers by helping them understand what works and what doesn't, sharing my own experiences, mistakes, and lessons learned to help them achieve success more efficiently.

Planning Accessible Events

Narelle:

When you plan these conference-style events, how do you approach physical accessibility, digital accessibility, and sensory accessibility?

Vanessa:

I started by educating myself and identifying what was missing from many events.

One of the first things we implemented was asking attendees during ticket registration whether they had any accessibility requirements. That simple question helps us prepare appropriately.

For example:

- In Sydney, we organised Auslan interpreters.

- On the Gold Coast, we arranged facilities for a guide dog, including water access.
- We ensured ramps and accessible pathways for wheelchairs and mobility aids.
- We checked bathrooms, doorways, seating arrangements, and signage.

We also considered presentation accessibility by providing guidance to speakers about accessible slide design and making presentation materials available after the event.

We now have standard operating procedures in place for accessibility. When contacting venues, we ask accessibility-related questions before even requesting quotes. If a venue does not meet accessibility requirements, we do not proceed with it.

We also provided a quiet space for attendees who needed a calm environment away from noise and sensory overload.

Supporting Attendees During Events

Narelle:

How do you support attendees who may feel uncomfortable asking for help?

Vanessa:

It starts with having a conversation and offering support respectfully.

If someone appears lost or overwhelmed, we ask if there is anything we can do to assist them. If something hasn't been considered, we learn from the experience and improve future events.

Communication and Inclusion

Narelle:

One thing I appreciated was how your team introduced themselves by name when speaking with me. As someone with low vision, that made communication much easier.

Vanessa:

That came from conversations with the team beforehand. We discussed your needs, including your guide dog and ensuring you knew where everything was located.

It's about open communication and helping educate others about accessibility.

Accessible Presentations and Materials

Narelle:

How did you ensure speakers created accessible slide presentations and documents?

Vanessa:

I learned a lot from you about digital accessibility and implemented those lessons in my business.

We gave presenters guidelines covering:

- Font sizes
- Colour contrast
- Use of headings
- Readability

We also gave presenters deadlines early enough for our team to review their materials. If changes were needed, we sent the presentations back for updates.

It's really about education and awareness.

Digital Accessibility in Business

Narelle:

In your broader business operations, what accessibility practices have you implemented?

Vanessa:

I've worked with clients who are blind and clients who are deaf, so I needed to

ensure my training videos had captions and that my Word documents and templates worked with screen readers and assistive technology.

These are small changes that make a significant difference in allowing everyone equal access.

Addressing Concerns About Accessibility Costs

Narelle:

I often hear people say accessibility is too expensive or too difficult. What would you say to them?

Vanessa:

For many accessibility improvements, there is little or no additional cost.

Businesses already pay professionals to create websites, so it makes sense to ensure those websites are accessible.

Formatting emails, PDFs, and Word documents correctly costs nothing extra and can easily become part of standard business practice.

Accessible Website Redevelopment

Narelle:

You recently rebuilt your website. What changes did you make?

Vanessa:

I moved my website to WordPress and rebuilt it with accessibility in mind.

We reviewed:

- Colour contrast
- Fonts
- Heading structures
- Readability

The process wasn't difficult because I worked with a website designer who understood accessibility requirements.

The result is a website that is both visually appealing and accessible to everyone.

Advice for Businesses and Providers

Narelle:

What advice would you give to businesses, coaches, and NDIS providers?

Vanessa:

Educate yourself and consider accessibility from other people's perspectives.

Think about the barriers people may face and what simple adjustments you can make to ensure your communication and services are accessible to everyone.

Many accessibility improvements are easy to implement and make a huge difference.

Closing Remarks

Narelle:

That's excellent advice.

As people age, many experience reduced vision, hearing, or mobility, so accessibility benefits everyone.

Thank you so much for joining us today, Vanessa.

Vanessa:

Thank you for having me.

Narelle:

If you would like to connect with Vanessa, visit her website at vanessanorman.com.au or find her on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

Thank you for listening to The Digital Access Show.

If you enjoyed this episode, please share, subscribe, and leave a review.

We appreciate feedback because it helps us improve accessibility and continue learning.

Have a great week, and we'll see you next time on The Digital Access Show.

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