

PO Box 2421
Toowong QLD 4066

The Digital Access Show Transcript: Website Accessibility and Inclusive Design

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Introduction

Narelle: Hello, good afternoon and welcome to yeah, it's another rainy day here in parts of Australia. David, is it raining there?

David: Actually, surprisingly, it's not. It's a fine day, although it is quite cold here in Melbourne.

Narelle: Yeah, so this is The Digital Access Show. And we're coming from two different parts of Australia. I'm in Brisbane, where it's been raining pretty solid for two days now. And David is in Melbourne. Melbourne's always seen as a very cold part of Australia, sorry, David. And Brisbane's seen as a hot part of Australia. And David is the founder of Atomic Web Strategy. And the reason I've brought David on, it's a bit of a techo talk. So Digital Accessibility Show today, we really are looking at the tech stuff. Some of the in-depth stuff, which people that use the assistive technology, that cannot use a mouse, what else, David? There's a few things there, isn't it? But, if we don't have this stuff in our websites, we can't access the information. And if I go and look for a particular resource and I can't use the information, I can't access the information. I can't use the resource. So David Oram from Atomic Web Strategy is here to help us. Thanks, David, for coming on.

David: That's all right. Thanks for having me, Narelle.

About David Oram and Atomic Web Strategy

Narelle: Ah, it's always fun having you on, David. David, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

David: Okay, so as you mentioned, Narelle, I'm David Oram, the director of Atomic Web Strategy. I've been in the digital space for, well over 10 years, primarily building websites in WordPress and WooCommerce. I've become more involved in

accessibility, over the years, which started with clients that needed to add accessibility to their websites and more I got involved in it, the more I learned about the barriers that people face with websites and how important accessible, accessibility really is. A lot of things that we take for granted can be big problems for people with disabilities.

Narelle: You've got it right. It's, I think, as a person that, that uses digit, requires digital accessibility, it's got to be the most frustrating thing when you cannot get a piece of information. You can't read a piece of information. And I always feel like saying to someone, how about I write it in some really, Egyptian hieroglyphics? Would you understand it? And people look at you with a, well, why would you do that? And I think so, that's what you do to us.

David: That's a good analogy.

Narelle: It's a big problem, isn't it?

David: Yeah, that's right.

Digital Accessibility Is Broader Than Vision Impairment

Narelle: And it's, I think the other thing too, David, I do want to mention this because we've been doing a lot about autism lately. It's not just about vision impairment. It's not just about hearing impairment. David, you said dyslexia. It's another one, isn't it? It's the physical... where people might not have fine motor skills. They can't use a mouse or they can't use a keyboard or neurodivergence. It's even down to structure of the content, isn't it, David?

David: Yes, it's not always about the actual code of the website either. Sometimes it can be as simple as the language that's being used, is not clear.

Keyboard Accessibility

Narelle: Yeah. So what I did, I was auditing a website a couple of days ago and I found all these issues and I said to David, we need to talk more about it. Now, just so you know, David's got the eyes and I don't. So if I miss something, David's going to say, oh, we're going to talk about this next. But the first thing I really want to talk about, and it's a problem on many websites is keyboard accessibility, isn't it, David?

David: Yes. Not all websites are accessible with a keyboard. That's, that's for sure. Most people tend to use a mouse, but aren't disabled. So websites tend to cater for that mostly. But it can be a bit of a shock when you put the mouse aside and attempt to use a website with the keyboard only. All of a sudden you realize that there's aspects that you can't get to.

Narelle: And is that a good test, David, to see if your website's accessible by a keyboard?

David: Oh, absolutely. That's probably one of the first tests we would do to check accessibility is put the mouse aside and then try to access everything from the keyboard only. Going through using the tab and enter keys. See if we can access sub menus, that's a common problem with menus. And also other functionality like accordions. They can be a little bit tricky sometimes. Being able to open the accordion and close it again. And also getting through a form.

Narelle: One of the things I've really hate about accordions is, sometimes, it's even really hard just to get onto each individual item in the accordion. Because I'm a keyboard only user. And I can't do it, David.

David: Yeah, yeah, that is a common issue with accordions. So luckily with WordPress, we use some good software that solves those problems, which is great.

WordPress Themes, Plugins and Accessibility

Narelle: Does WordPress come with plugins that help solve the keyboard accessibility problems?

David: Yes, it does. But a lot of those issues arise in a theme. So we would always look to choose a theme that is as close to accessible as possible out of the box. And then we would then fine tune to get it to an accessible point. So that's the best way to do it is to start with something that's pretty close out of the box and then move forward. It's the most cost effective way to do it.

Narelle: The interesting thing with that though is the theme that this website used. It says it's accessible. That, the one I was auditing. But, it's not keyboard accessible

David. How is the person to judge whether a theme is accessible when they say it is? And then you go and spend money, build it and it's not.

David: Well, I guess accessibility is, just claiming that it's accessible is a little bit subjective. That's like saying that a, you know, a musical instrument is easy to play. It might be for some people, but it doesn't mean it is for everyone. The only way to know if it's truly accessible is to get it audited.

Narelle: Yeah. What themes are good and what ones would you say if you've got to consider accessibility avoid? Is there any?

David: I would always suggest going with something like the Astra theme. So the Astra theme, they have put quite a lot of thought into accessibility and out of the box it's pretty good. So that's an excellent starting point to move forward from.

Narelle: One of the ones I keep hearing about is it Divi or Divi Builder? Something like that?

David: Yeah, that's right. That's one of the big page builders and also has its own theme. So that one's not too bad. I've moved away from that in recent years and moved across to Elementor. So that page builder is just a little bit more intuitive and combining that, the Elementor page builder with the Astra theme is a really good combination.

Narelle: And the other page builder, I think it's a page builder, it's Gutenberg.

David: Yes, that's the inbuilt native page builder that comes with WordPress.

Narelle: Okay.

David: Yeah, that's not too bad either. It just doesn't have as much of the functionality as Elementor. And it's not really as intuitive in my opinion as what Elementor is. It takes a little bit of getting used to with Gutenberg.

Accessible Menus

Narelle: Okay. So when you're looking at a menu, which you said, that's a very common problem. We can't access a lot of things in the menu. Is there any particular things that you could suggest that people do to make it accessible quickly

and easily?

David: There are some plugins that can add a menu. So that could be a good starting point if you're finding that the theme is having issues out of the box.

Narelle: Yep. Any, any particular ones that you would suggest? Or is it a case of bit of a, have a play around and see what you can find?

David: A little bit. It's not really something that I've used. We tend to use the inbuilt menu from Astra. So we haven't really come across that too much. But there is one called, Mega Menu, I think it's called. That could be an option worth looking at. Sure.

Sliders, Hover Effects and Mouse-Only Content

Narelle: Okay. So that's that. The next one on the list. I think we talked accessibility. What was it, David? We've got a list there, haven't we? Oh, the sliders, on that page that I was showing you? And it's a common problem. There's an image. And there is more information displayed only if the mouse is used. Is that a styling issue? Is it a design issue? Is it a, what is it?

David: I would say that's a, a design issue that, that's something that is really difficult to make accessible. I would have thought. To have that just sliding up based on a mouse hover over event. It's not really going to be keyboard accessible.

Narelle: So it can never be keyboard accessible? What would you do instead?

David: If I was working on that, I would probably convert it to something a little different. So that you can easily tab through it with a keyboard.

Narelle: Okay, cause when I was actually auditing it, it actually confused me because I've still got a bit of sight. But because I use a keyboard only, I could see that there was an image there and I could hear all this wording. And it actually confused me quite a lot.

David: It could be that, you know, it's possible that it might be able to met, be made as accessible by hacking away at it using ARIA attributes. But my preference

would be to convert it to something where we could you know, lean on native HTML because that's always the preferred way to make something accessible.

Understanding ARIA Attributes

Narelle: Yeah. Just quickly. What's an ARIA attribute?

David: Well, ARIA attributes provide guidance to assist assistive technology.

Narelle: Yeah.

David: Like screen readers. So yeah, that's, that's what ARIA does. It helps to provide extra context and information. Especially when the HTML hasn't relied on native HTML, like using a div to create a button and things like that. So in that sort of instance, if you're remediating it, you're likely to need an. ARIA attribute to help the screen readers.

Narelle: Okay. What was the next one on our list, David?

David: Let's see. Are you going to ask about, aah audio feedback by go live?

Forms, Error Messages and ARIA Live Regions

Narelle: Well, not even go live. That was the typo there. But one of the things I found when I was testing this page. So we had a "Contact Us" page. And info and relationships as well. So we had a "Contact Us" section on the page, right? And there was a few problems with it. It took me a long time to find the actual. error messages, because they actually faded in against the background. So there was a contrast issue for a start. And it's because the background, to me, appeared busy and there wasn't enough difference between the colour of the background and the colour of the error message to make it obvious. But the other thing that, when a person that uses a screen reader or a braille device or, you know, any of those texts to speech tools, it never tells us where the error message goes to or what field the error message belongs to. What are, what are things you can do to fix that?

David: Okay, so when you mentioned go live, I assume that you've meant the ARIA live attributes.

Narelle: Yeah, that's what I meant, yeah.

David: Yeah, so what that's referring to is a good example would be if you're on an e-commerce website and you add something to your cart. And there's a little area that might say cart updated. So we would use an ARIA live attribute to assist the screen reader to know that this section is potentially going to update. It's dynamic content. And so if it detects the change, it reads out the update that comes through, which would be "Cart updated" or it could be a search where you perform a search that might say, "14 results found". Or it could be submitting a form. So you submit a form and then the form disappears and is replaced with the text forms of submitting successfully. So it needs to read that out, otherwise you lose context of where you're up to.

Narelle: Yeah, that's true, good point. So in the case of error messages, so how do you handle them? Because that was a really bad issue there because I couldn't see the error messages. I could hear the error messages and I didn't know where, to what they applied to.

David: Well, there's two ways that you can go about that. So using the ARIA live attribute. So if it's something that's not that important, then you can use the polite attribute to allow, let the user know when it gets a chance. Or if it's something that's super important, you can use the assertive value which then prompts it to interrupt immediately and read out the error message.

Connecting Error Messages to Form Fields

Narelle: Okay, and how do I know what field has the error? What's the best way that people should be doing that as well? Because I think there were three or four fields on that form from memory. And I deliberately, one of my tests is that I enter nothing and see what happens.

David: Okay, well the best way to do that would be to use native HTML. And then you can actually provide a relationship to those elements through the native HTML. But failing that, then you'd need to use some ARIA attributes to create that relationship between various elements.

Programmatic Relationships in Forms

Narelle: Okay, and the, the other part really with it is, and it is, It's relationships because every part of the informational screen is related, isn't it?

David: Yeah, yeah, particularly with forms. There's relationships between say the label and the text field next to it. So that's obvious with sight, for sighted people, but for the disabled and blind, that needs to be done programmatically.

Narelle: And it's not hard to do? Or really hard to do.

David: No, not particularly hard. It's just a little bit of code. So.

Narelle: And is it, because a lot of websites that I, even just when I go, like I bought some dog food for my guide dog the other day. And it has the same problems as well. And how, you know, it's a common issue, isn't it? The relationships, not there.

David: Yeah, that's true. It's, it's obvious when you've got vision. But when you don't, then it's, it's not that obvious. So it's quite important to put that in there. So, like I said, it's just a little bit of code. It's not really that difficult. It just requires a bit of thought.

Narelle: Yeah. Does it just become habit, David after a while? That you just do it?

David: Yeah, once you've, once you're thinking about these things, then, yeah, it's always in the back of your mind.

Colour Contrast

Narelle: Yeah. What about, and I suppose for me, and again, colour makes no difference to me. As you very well know, because I think you look at my website at times, I go, Narelle But I don't have a relationship with colour anymore, but on websites, it's really important and you work in that area all the time, don't you?

David: Yeah. Colour contrast is obviously one of the big things with accessibility. So, we always use a colour contrast tool when we're choosing the colour palette for a website to make sure that it works.

Narelle: Yeah. It's not hard again, is it?

David: No. No, for double A, just need to make it with 4.5 to 1. There's the ratio.

Narelle: But David, everything you're saying is it actually just, it's, it's a little bit more thought. It's not hard. It just has to be done. Does that sum it up?

David: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. It just needs to be in the back of your mind. So that you're thinking about these things as you're building.

Advice for Building Accessible Websites

Narelle: What is... any, is it. What pieces of advice do you have to give people? I mean, you and I talk all the time. And I will be honest when I'm auditing. If I can't get the CEO of Digital Access. Solutions, David's one of the people I ring straight away. David is much more techo than I am. I'm not a website builder. I don't profess to be. But I understand how tech's put together. So David is a person that I always go to for advice. What is some advice you can give people, David?

David: I'd always say that it's better to do it from the outset rather than after thought. It's much more cost effective to build accessibility in from the start rather than trying to remediate at the end.

Narelle: Is there any place where you think, aah probably not necessary?

David: Not really. It's when you can guess what the audience might be for a website. But that's not really something I would, would want to do. I think accessibility is something that we should build into all websites.

Contact Details and Closing Remarks

Narelle: Yeah. I'm, well, obviously, I'm of the same opinion. David, how can people get in contact with you? Because I think you are a person that does have the knowledge that a lot of people need.

David: Well, best way would be to visit our website at AtomicWebStrategy.com.au And you can send us an email from there or give us a call.

Narelle: Fantastic. Thanks, David. Thanks so much. And also, David, thank you for putting up with me these few years. Because you've been very patient at times. And seriously, if you do need a good accessible website, David and David knows of

another website developer that is good. And they, they work together. And they do better access. Which is the campaign that you're involved with, with me, David. So it is about giving everyone access to the information. Thank you. And we will, should say this because I'll get in trouble. If you like what we do, please like, share, subscribe, review and feedback. We really love feedback. And we look forward to seeing you next week on The Digital Access Show. Thank you so much.

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