

[Music] [Narelle] And over in Perth, well it's definitely still morning in Perth, in WA. Welcome to the latest episode of the Digital Access Show. What we do in the Digital Access Show... And by the way, I'm Narelle, I'm the person that does some of the talking, but not as much as I would like the guest to do. We look at communication. We look at accessibility. We look at usability. Because don't forget - websites, all the documentation, if your document is not usable, it's not accessible. You don't get the communication across. And, isn't that what a website's all about? Good communication, getting your message out there. So today, I'd like to introduce you to the go-to guy, for digital accessibility here in Australia. It's Scott Hollier. Scott Hollier is over in Perth. And he is the centre for Independent Studies. It's his area of expertise. Please meet Scott Hollier. Scott, thank you. Thanks for coming. [Scott] Thanks so much for having me, I really appreciate it. [Narelle] I actually met Scott, two or three years ago now, when Mark Muscat, one of the directors of Digital Access Solutions introduced me to Scott, Scott is my go to guy when I'm not sure about something, about the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). And that's what I wanted to discuss today. But first of all, Scott, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? [Scott] Yeah, no worries. [Narelle] What you do and why you got into WCAG? [Scott] I really appreciate the opportunity to be on the show. So, I guess just a little bit of an overview of myself. So probably a few different hats that I wear. So one is the CEO of the Centre for Accessibility Australia, which is an organisation dedicated to alleviating hardship caused by digital access issues. Also, as you mentioned, do some teaching. So I teach the professional Certificate in Web Accessibility course. Also we're a W3C [distortion] that produces the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and I'm involved in a task force that looks, um. Basically, we look a little bit over the horizon at what technologies are emerging and try to provide some international guidance from that. And I also have lived experience, being legally blind. Yeah, I think in terms of getting into WCAG, it's probably through some of my own studies. Initially that I got introduced to WCAG and started to learn about just how important it is that we have standards that can support people with disability and getting our content accessible. And that all kind of went from there. [Narelle] Yeah, I've got to admit, the more I learn about WCAG, the more fascinated I am with how WCAG does enhance everything. Can you give us a bit of a history of WCAG, Scott? Certainly. So the first version of WCAG was formed by a part of the Worldwide Web Consortium, W3C, called the web accessibility initiative. And the first version of WCAG, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines was released in 1999. And look, it was a great first effort, but the challenge was that the web evolved faster than the standards did. [laughs] So they needed to go back to the drawing board and create a new version which came out in 2008 as WCAG 2.0. And in Australia, we didn't really pick up too much on the first version of WCAG with the exception of Victoria. But there was a more formalised national strategy for WCAG 2.0. So that was more embraced in policy. And even now, in things like the Human Rights Commission, WCAG 2.0 is still the standard. But that is moving. So, excitedly, I think some of - perhaps even by the end of the year, we'll see updated processes and procedures around really embracing newer versions of WCAG. So then, in 2018, we got WCAG 2.1, which was everything in 2.0 plus a bit more mobile-based guidance. And then just in October last year, we got WCAG 2.2, which is really exciting to have, and gain a bit more guidance around other aspects like cognitive accessibility and 2.2 includes, for the most part, things in 2.1 and 2.0. So, it's been quite the evolution of the WCAG standard. But yeah, as of now, 2.2 is the current version from October last year. We're seeing a lot of policy movements at a

federal level and the state level. And that's really exciting. [Narelle] Yeah, just for people's knowledge, who develops the standard? Who's involved in developing the standards? [Scott] So the standard is created by W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium. And it's an international organization that features several hundred organizations that all come together to try to create web standards. So all the code that happens behind our web browser is based on coding standards. And most of those are created within W3C. But the challenge in the early days was that how do we code in a way to make visual things work with assistive technologies. And so that was really the big challenge as the web was so graphical with the World Wide Web. And hence, yeah, the web accessibility initiative was born and then WCAG after that. W3C is very well regarded in this space. And one of the nice things when we're having these conversations is that, whether we're talking about Australia or New Zealand or the US, EU, India, it's the same standard. And, yeah, we can draw a lot of confidence from that, that when we talk about accessibility and digital access, wherever we are in the world, that conversation is WCAG. So it's nice to have that consistency. [Narelle] It is. It makes a definite difference, particularly also with the way that you can have people in India doing the code for you or the Philippines or whatever country. You don't necessarily have to be using web developers here in Australia. [Scott] Mm, yeah, and it's all, as you say, the same requirements of the standard. And when we all work together, we can achieve great things. [Narelle] Yeah. What do you see as the biggest benefit of WCAG? [Scott] I think one of the really nice things about WCAG is that it endeavours to cater for a range of different disability groups. So, one of the challenges when it comes to this space is often people will say, well, we don't have someone with a disability in their organisation. So do we really need to do it? Or, you know, what's the definitive business case for doing this if we don't notice many people with disability? And I think what's not asked about WCAG is it says, well, we really take a technology neutral approach. And by following WCAG, you're not just catering for a very specific person or very specific disability. But you're really catering for a range of people with disability and really ensuring that accessibility is incorporated into work processes. I think on that basis, we can take a lot of comfort in understanding that if we do follow WCAG, we are maximising our reach to people with disability. And then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that if we implement the standards, then our things become more accessible, then more people with disability can participate in our processes and then in turn, you know, we see great improvements in this space, so. WCAG is a very powerful standard in terms of catering for people with low vision, people who are blind, people who perhaps have epilepsy and can have things flashing on the screen that might trigger epilepsy. And we're catering for people with mobility impairment and we're catering for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. We're catering for people who perhaps have difficulties with language. So, yeah, there's just to name a few, so. The standard covers all these things and as I said the more recent versions are looking also at cognitive guidance. It's a really good standard in terms of catering for a range of disability and there's great international guidance to support people in doing it. [Narelle] I think the interesting thing there is when you were talking about the people that it caters for, I think, and knowing the statistics myself, I think we've mentioned about over half the people of Australia. [Scott] Mm! Well, and that's the thing in terms of people specifically identifying as having a disability, you know, somewhere between one in five, one in six, but then when you look more broadly at that, about people who can benefit. You know, it's something as I'm sure

in your space that, you notice all the time that when we do make things accessible, it helps everyone, a good example of that is when we go to the airport or maybe to the GP, we'll often see captions on the TV. That's not because everyone's deaf, but because in those noisy environments those captions are so useful and WCAG specifically says you need to have captions on your video content, so. This is just one example of, you know, we do it for people with disability and it really helps everyone. So, I totally agree. I think the more we look at this space, the more everyone benefits. [Narelle] One of the interesting things - I was part of a panel last week, the week before last. And someone said, well, where's the case studies to say how it can benefit people? And I immediately said, well, what are the tools you guys use? Who uses Siri? And most people put their hands up and I said, well, what was one of the reasons for the development of Siri? And they said, oh, you know, so that people can voice control people with you know, quadriplegia, different things, use voice control. And now everyone uses it, like you mentioned the captions in the other one. I said, well, what about the typewriter? And they said, what do you mean? I said, well, one of the original reasons, not the only reason, but one of the original reasons was so that blind people can write legibly. Everyone uses a form of typewriter today. It's such a common tool. [Scott] One story that was shared with me when I was doing my PhD studies is, I met the accessibility director of Hewlett-Packard. And he said that in the early 2000s, they built a laptop that you could open the lid with one hand without the base flicking up. And they did that specifically to comply with the US legislation that was based on WCAG. And they found that that particular model sold so well because a whole variety of people found it incredibly useful. When you've got a small child tucked under one arm, then being able to lift up the lid of a laptop without the base flicking up really useful. And there's all these use cases they never thought of. And so they decided, well, yeah, I think for most of our models we need to make that happen. So even, to this day, most laptops do have a weighted base so you can open the lid with one hand. And so, yeah, as you say, another example which started as very disability-specific legislative compliance. But it just became so useful that it's something pretty common today. [Narelle] Yeah, talking about the legislation, and here in Australia, obviously I'm very aware of the... like the Disability Discrimination Act and Human Rights Commission. How... um.. Future-proof do you see the government being, with keeping, like putting digital accessibility as a standardized tool? We hear them talk the talk a lot and I know just from my own personal perspective how many federal and state and local, um, government departments, they're just not accessible. How, what's the better word? Are they being really, 'yeah let's get in and do it'? [Scott] Well, I think that up until now it has been a bit discouraging. I mean looking at the policy on the books. Yeah, we have the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 that has no reference to ICT at all, let alone accessibility. We do have the Human Rights Commission Advisory Note that provides some guidance, but it still points back to an old version of WCAG although there is a draft currently that has that updated. So hopefully that will come to pass. And we've seen some movement like with the federal digital service standard that has looked at WCAG 2.1. So that's encouraging. But again, there's a little bit of ambiguity around what level of the standard they're following. So, many states are in various states of WCAG 2 or WCAG 2.1. So, policy wise, it's all a bit messy, but I do draw a little bit of encouragement. cause I think we actually have an opportunity now to start to improve this space. Because, like you say, there's policy and then there's implementation and the practical implementation does seem to be lacking. I don't think it's personally

what we might view through intent, but I think that there's simply that awareness. As you know, all of us that work in this space continue to try to build awareness around what needs to be done, but this year might actually mark a year of change. You know, we are seeing that Human Rights Commission Note being updated. First time since 2014. And also the Disability Royal Commission does open the door a crack because one of the recommendations is to update the Disability Discrimination Act. And I know that for myself and yourself and lots of us that work in this space, it would be incredibly exciting if the DDA did get updated. There's a whole consortium of organizations which are really hoping that this is at last, you know, that opportunity. What is it, 32 years I think? And yeah, that's definitely overdue to have digital access properly in legislation, like we, you know, accept that we should have wheelchair ramps on buildings. This could be that wheelchair ramp moment where we can actually get some legislative change. I am a little excited, I must admit that after years of not a lot happening that maybe now is the time to see some improvements. [Narelle] I'd tend to agree with you. I think the biggest fear particularly in the small and medium sized business sector is how much it's going to cost. And my answer at the moment is always, well, how much is the cost of lost sales that you don't know you've lost? [Scott] Yep, and that's been a common argument throughout history that whatever, there is this kind of, oh we have to do everything we do now but bolt on this, then yes, you know, I can understand that cost issue. You know, there's, I think I saw a resource recently with the W3C's business case that said people with disability have six trillion US dollars - that's about nine trillion Australian dollars of spending power to engage in products and services. So, there might be a cost to implement but I think the more that it becomes commonplace then, that just becomes a part of our processes rather than an extra cost. And there is a huge spending power and opportunity if we provide these effective supports. So, um, I think sometimes that business case argument, we can turn it around and show, well, actually it can be a net positive if we make it happen. [Narellle] Yeah, one of the other interesting things that obviously, I haven't been in university for a long time. Is WCAG being taught in university now? Is it part of a developers' um, training that they do learn, in-depth, the WCAG and how to apply the WCAG? [Scott] It's a great question and we do have our very specific WCAG courses like the one that I teach but in terms of broader courses, most of the feedback we receive is no. I mean it could fit into ICT, it could fit into design, it could fit into computer science, there's lots of opportunity to put it into courses. Sometimes people do get asked to give guest lectures from time to time but in terms of having whole units dedicated to supporting this space, unfortunately the answer's mostly no. So there's a huge opportunity there and I'm hopeful that once we do get some of those legislative changes then perhaps we will start to see some growth in that space but I'd be really excited if we ever had university or any sort of tertiary institution knock on our door and say, hey we want to do a course on this. Yeah, that would be incredibly exciting. That said, I mean there are some, you know like the course I teach at UniSA, also University of the Sunshine Coast has micro credential digital access and there's others, so we are seeing some specific niche courses and that's wonderful but I'd certainly love to see it embedded in our regular courses as well. [Narelle] Yeah, that would be a brilliant way to go. What's the future for WCAG? [Scott] Well, that's an excellent question [muffled]. [Narelle] [laughs] [Scott] There is a draft version of the next iteration of WCAG, WCAG 3.0. It won't be out in any time soon, I think even, you know, optimistic estimates put it at about three to five years. But WCAG 3 completely changes the way the standard works, so up

until now it's largely been adding things to the existing standard but WCAG 3 is looking far beyond just the web. In fact, they're even changing the acronym from Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to just W3C Accessibility Guidelines because you can apply it to any number of things, you can apply it to driverless cars you can apply it to machine learning you can apply it to a variety of different things. So, there is already a draft of that out there but it's quite an early draft but the idea here is that whatever that content looks like, whether it's a website or app or document or anything at all, that we have guidance to make that accessible. So, it's a very ambitious project and understandably it's going to take some time but I think that it holds great potential. I mean, there's a lot of conversation at the moment about AI accessibility and other things and yeah, certainly I think there will be some important benefits as we do move forward in that space. But more broadly, there's lots of things that we do right now in addition to the things we'll do in the future. And the idea of having a standard that can encompass all of that, I think is really exciting but it's not here yet and I think it'll still be some time before that comes out. [Narelle] Yeah, I think so too. As you said, the AI, there's a lot of talk about AI particularly with the digital marketing people that I meet where they say, 'give us an app that will just do it!' And I keep saying there isn't. [Scott] No, if there was a magical app that solved all our problems I think we'd all install it immediately. Yeah, unfortunately we're not in that space yet but you know, who knows what the future might hold. [Narelle] Yeah, well that's it, I mean who would have thought of driverless cars even 40 years ago. [Scott] Mm. [Narelle] Yeah, that's what it is. Scott, what are two or three takeaways that you can provide to people listening about WCAG, it's usefulness and whether it's useful for them? [Scott] I think one takeaway I'd have is that WCAG can apply beyond just the web so when we look at websites and apps and documents. We have, you know, great applicability. So, making sure our images have alternative text is a part of WCAG. Making sure we have captions on our videos is a part of WCAG, making sure we have good color contrast is part of WCAG and we can apply these principles across all the content we create. So one takeaway would be, you know consider the content you're creating and you can look to WCAG, whatever type of content production you have. I think a second one is just its applicability. It does apply quite broadly across different disability groups so you know, you really are maximizing your reach if you apply it. And perhaps the third is that, you know while they're not perfect, there are a few automated tools out there that can help at least start the journey. So for example in Microsoft Word if you go to the review tab, a few icons along you'll find a checking accessibility button. Now that will not check all of WCAG and it does have its limitations, but there are some built-in things in your everyday tools that might just help start that journey and so I'd encourage you to, as a first port of call, have a look at some of those tools and see what those results are. So, I think that's just a few takeaways. You know, there's a lot of us that work in the space, there's a lot of depth to this standard and a lot of things that you can do. But you know, just a few practical tips like that. You know, check out the standard and make the most of it. [Narelle] Yeah. And I can only urge everyone, if you're in the digital marketing, ICT, computer science, web design, go and do the professional certification in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. It's University of South Australia. When does the next course start? [Scott] Ah, October, so yes, please reach out if you'd like to sign up. We've had over a thousand graduates since the course starting 2011 and um, yeah, very exciting to continue that journey. [Narelle] Excellent, and Scott how can people contact you if

they want to have more of a conversation with you? [Scott] Yeah, I would love to hear from your viewers. So probably the best thing is to check out our website at accessibility.org.au or flick an email to admin@accessibility.org.au And yeah, we'd love to connect with you and we have a lot of free information on our website. We have a free help desk on how to turn on the accessibility features in your devices. For information around how to get started with things like WCAG. So, yeah, please feel free to check out our website and get in touch. [Narelle] Yeah, excellent. Look, thanks, Scott for coming on I really appreciate it. I've been wanting to talk to you for a while. So this is Scott Hollier. Professor. Doctor Scott Hollier I should have said. Sorry Scott, I keep forgetting that. [Scott] [laughs] [Narelle] G'day, Scott, how are you going, haven't talked for a while. [Scott] Yeah, nah, just Scott's all good. [Narelle] Yeah. [Scott] No worries. [Narelle] And yeah, this is the Digital Access Show. If you really like what we do, please review. Like, subscribe, share and we will see you next time. Thank you.