

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning, □
good afternoon. Ciao. □

Buonasera if □
you're over in Italy. □

And welcome to another version □
of The Digital Access Show. □

Today's guest is a very □
important guest for me. □

I've known Chris for, it's □
about 18 months now, Chris? □

[Chris] Two years, Narelle, □
but yes, we get along great. □

[Narelle] Yeah. And I've □
learnt so much from Chris □

and his wonderful partner □
in life and business, Vic. □

Just about things that I've □
never thought about as well. □

I'd like to introduce□
you all to Chris Kerrisk,□

and he has a company□
called Cérge Consulting.□

Chris, can you tell us□
a bit about what you do,□

and why you do it?□

[Chris] Narelle, thanks,□

firstly for inviting me on□
The Digital Access Show,□

and also for our relationship□
over the past two years,□

I think closer to.□

Cérge, short for concierge.□

We're all about□
improving participation□

for people with□

disability in the real world,□

whether that's□

through sport, tourism,□

everyday grocery shopping,□

whether it's going to airports,□

hotels, going to schools.□

And we use advanced technology□

to enable or□

encourage participation.□

And I will certainly go through□

that in a follow up question,□

but that's what we do,□

is delivering tools,□

digital tools to people□

to increase confidence to□

participate in the real world.□

[Narelle] What made you□

get into that area?□

[Chris] Combination of things.□

Victoria has lived□

experience of disability,□

and I love building□

digital technologies,□

and so you add the two together.□

We've worked□

together our entire lives.□

We met in a working environment,□

we were working□

on private luxury□

boats overseas in□

the Mediterranean.□

It was a remarkable□

experience of two young,□

two young kids at the time,□

and we've been□

working ever since.□

And we're married□

and have two children.□

And we combine those□

two life experiences,□

of Victoria's lived□

experience with disability,□

and my experience of□

building technologies, and...□

we end up trying to build a□

global technology business□

to support people□

with disability.□

[Narelle] We met when...□

you actually wanted□

to look at implementing□

digital accessibility□

into your work.□

Why did you want to do that?□

What was the reason?□

[Chris] Oh well, two,□

two main reasons.□

The first one is, we□

want our products□

to be utilised by all people.□

And in, in that,□

there's the obvious scenario of...□

the simpler and□

easier it is to use,□

the more engaging□

it is as a product.□

And we all know,□

or certainly the□

industry that we're in,□

it's clear that if you...□

don't just try and meet
the accessibility guidelines,

but aim to exceed them,

then that means that your,

by default, your product
will be very simple,

very intuitive to use,

so all people will use it.

Or there's not going
to be any barriers to anyone.

You're not going to some

usability problem
preventing adoption.

You look at Steve Jobs

and what they did
with the iPad invention,

there's a lot of that which was

designed around accessibility,□

for people with□

disability in mind,□

and it turned out to be□

outrageously successful platform.□

And so there's,□

there's that element,□

which is just making□

it easier to use,□

so every customer can use it.□

But then, at the same time,□

from a brand differentiation,□

we are saying that□

our business is about□

improving participation□

for people with disability,□

and we're selling our products□

to clients, to businesses,□

and so, therefore□

making sure that our□

product meets guidelines□

and is compliant,□

just as a business health check,□

is an essential element of why□

we wanted to enthusiastically□

go down this path.□

[Narelle] One of the□

things when we first met,□

was you'd said□

you had been asked□

whether it was digitally accessible.□

Did you understand what□

that meant at the time?□

[Chris] Yes, I understood□

what it meant to a level.□

Certainly, our sophistication□

or maturity about what that□

means working with you, Narelle,□

has changed significantly.□

You know,□

I would imagine most people□

would have that answer.□

If you said, What does□

digital accessibility mean?□

Everyone can use your□

website or your app, I suppose.□

But translate that□

and okay, well, let's talk about□

how that works with alt text,□

how that works□

through tab through.□

How that works with□

contrast resolutions,□

quick ways to test whether□

your new product is going to...□

have the right ratios□

or all sorts of elements.□

Didn't have any of that.□

So, and I'm sure there's still□

a lot that I can do better,□

and improve and learn.□

So I would imagine,□

yes, I had an awareness,□

but geez, that's evolved□

over the past 18 months.□

[Narelle] So,□

when we did the initial audit,□

I remember sitting down with you□

and going through the report.□

How did you feel when you
looked at that initial report?

Was it overwhelming for you?

Or were you with your very,

because you are a very
analytical and logical person,

able to say, okay,
let's break this down.

And we have had
disagreements over things.

And I've come around
to your point of view,

on a few things, actually.

And what was your feeling?

[Chris] Well, as a
small business owner,

business can be tough,

like I was alluding to in an
earlier conversation today.

And there's ups and downs,
there's resource constraints,

and so,

going through a list of items
to further improve our products

I guess it was comforting
working with you to realise,

well, let's just go
through and prioritise,

and start just
chipping away at it,

one by one

versus trying to take on every
single improvement in one go,

just like you do with any
other aspect of business.

Business owners have this vision□
of what they'd like to achieve,□

across so many□
different aspects,□

whether it's marketing,□
whether it's product development,□

whether it's□
digital accessibility.□

And it's a matter□
of working with you,□

with your philosophy□
around educating,□

teaching, supporting,□

and guiding business owners,□

to improve their sophistication□
around web content accessibility,□

and having the confidence□
in the backing of yourself□

and your organisation.□

So all right. Let's prioritise□

what we can do right now.□

What are things that are gonna□

make a material difference...□

to the accessibility?□

And let's, let's□

just chip away at it,□

and prioritise the□

list of features,□

and also taking into□

account what we've got...□

on our development□

pipeline for innovations.□

And you know what makes□

sense to do now versus tomorrow?□

So that was probably the best□

awareness or learning going up.□

It's not overwhelming.□

It's just like any other□

aspect of business,□

but just having awareness,□

you need to have this as a...□

development line,□

just like you have□

with anything else,□

whether it's your□

sales and marketing,□

whether it's working□

with your accountant,□

or you're working□

through your P&L.□

This is just another element□

to continually improve□

and innovate on your business.□

[Narelle] So have you
you incorporated this

as part of your standard
operating procedure

when you do development now?

Is it just part of the process?

[Chris] It certainly is.
I know it can be better.

Certainly...

when it comes
to the initial brief,

it's just a standard.

This has to be, you
know, meet guidelines,

which I had probably
just assumed...

that our technology
team were doing before.

Now they know that when it comes
to user acceptance testing...

of anything that we build,

they know that myself,

Victoria and others
in our team will be...

straight away asking
those questions,

or checking, using the tools
that you've shared with us,

how to quickly validate and
check whether it's meeting WCAG,

that they'll know that
we'll be all over them.

There's probably an increased
sophistication in our team,

both...

to make sure it's developed
correctly from day one,

but also when it
comes to testing it,

we're not getting told
by our customers...

three months later
after we deploy it,

that they go, we've got gaps in
our web content accessibility,

that we've actually tested
it on the way through,

which, as you know and a
lot of your audience will know,

that's the cheapest way of doing
anything that you develop

and besides
universally acceptable,

universally accessible, sorry,

in the development process□
and not retrofitting it later.□

[Narelle] Did you have much□
push back from the developers□

when you were starting to□
introduce this? [Chris] Nothing.□

[Narelle] Wow, that's fantastic.□
[Chris] Not at all.□

[Narelle] Did they□
know about it?□

[Chris] They did,□

but probably, what's the□
right way of saying this?□

With the appropriate□
kind of respect,□

if you're not...□

I'll just say it,□
if the boss isn't over it,□

and the boss isn't □
questioning what's going on □

or putting the finger on gaps, □

then they'll potentially get □
a bit complacent in that field. □

And so previously, □

there was just this expectation, □

as a business supporting □
the community with disability, □

my expectations is that the □
development would then... □

therefore have to □
be following all Web □

Content Accessibility Guidelines, □

where, clearly, there were gaps □
and opportunities to improve. □

And now they know that, □

I'd like to think that I've
got my finger on the pulse...

a little bit better.

And so they know that,

and we'll be developing
it accordingly.

But certainly, if the
instructions are...

this is not an option.

It has to be an
accessible product.

It's just built correctly
from day one.

So certainly no push back.

[Narelle] Now has...

the product...

being accessible benefited...□

you in the sales and marketing,□

and in the other□

areas of the business?□

Has it benefited?□

[Chris] Yeah. Certainly...□

And while we're continue with□

your organisation, Narelle,□

and to keep improving□

and to always be accessible,□

to us, it's important to also□

be certified as accessible.□

And that's important to us,□

because we...□

promote our business□

around creating accessibility,□

and so having that badge to□

say, yes, we are accessible,□

gives our clients...□

peace of mind that we are a...□

viable, verified and□

trustworthy brand.□

So that's important.□

Yeah. So,□

we'll keep pushing and□

excelling in this space.□

And as you know, there's a□

couple of elements from our...□

how we position in our products.□

There's some elements around□

the web content accessibility,□

which kind of□

doesn't make sense.□

And as a challenger brand,□

happy to and want to challenge□

some of those guidelines,□

not to, not to just be□

provocative or disruptive,□

but genuinely taking the end□

intent for the consumer□

or the customer,□

to get the value□

out of our product,□

to improve participation□

in the real world.□

We have a genuine□

argument to put forward,□

and...□

because we don't think that that□

position has been taken into account□

when developing web content□

accessibility guidelines,□

and enjoy our relationship□

to have that robust debate□

and conversation about it,□

to explore the why's, how's,□

and is there a compromise,□

or do we change?□

[Narelle] And to be honest,□

and I will admit to that,□

I am a user of the product.□

So what the product does for me,□

for those don't know,□

I actually have a severe□

vision impairment,□

so I actually can't see Chris.□

I can see an outline now.□

So when I first met Chris, □
I actually could see him. □

I have a □
deteriorating condition. □

And where I use □
the Cérge product □

is if I want to ... □

go somewhere, I think QPAC was □

one of the ones □
at one stage, Chris. □

And I love going to play. □

Yeah, and I will □
go and I will use it. □

And I think, okay, so □
I'm going to QPAC. □

I don't have my □
support worker with me. □

I've gotta do it by□
myself, because...□

I'm like a lot of people, I□
don't have the support hours.□

But what the product□
does is it tells me,□

okay, the taxi is□
going to drop you here.□

This is what you're□
going to hear.□

This is what□
you're going to feel,□

this is what you're□
going to smell,□

and it gives me an idea□
of where I've got to walk.□

And I know there are going to□
be a lot of crowds around me,□

but it keeps me centred...□

in the fact that I've
done the research.

I know what to expect
when I get to QPAC.

The other part to it, and
this is the part I really love,

and I haven't
tested this part yet,

is through the product,

I can send a message
to QPAC saying, look,

I'm a vision impaired person.

I'm coming to listen to
an audio described play,

which is one of my
favourite things to do,

and I will need
someone to meet me,

to get me to my seat,□

and they work with you.□

They actually are□

aware that you're coming.□

They have the preparation□

and the knowledge now, right,□

we are having a person□

with disability coming.□

They will get to this place.□

This is how we recognise them.□

We can talk to each other.□

It creates a communication□

link that wasn't there before.□

And that's so important,□

because even though, yeah,□

Chris, you give the visual□

for those that have sight,□

and say no sound,□

or you know,□

where they're overwhelmed□

through sensory overload,□

or whatever it is,□

we are prepared to□

go into a situation.□

But having that communication□

link is an extra step...□

that gives the confidence□

to know I can do it.□

And the best way to describe it,□

as I went to Sydney a□

couple of weeks ago,□

three weeks ago.□

And I actually...□

I got myself around Sydney□

with no support worker.□

A bit difficult, I got there.□

However, going back to□
the airport, I started to panic,□

because I knew Cérge wasn't...□

at Sydney Airport,□

and I knew BindiMaps,□
which is another app,□

wasn't at Sydney Airport either,□

so I had to get□
myself from the taxi.□

I think it's all glass doors.□

Don't quote me on that.□

[Chris] Yes, I think□
they're all glass.□

[Narelle] Yeah, and not□
being able to find the door,□

not being able to, and it□
was just white light for me,□

because it was in the dark, so□
I was just seeing white light.□

I panicked,□

where, if there was□
something like Cérge to...□

say, look,□

you are having a person with□
a vision impairment come in□

to talk to the airport staff.□

It would have made□
such a difference.□

And that's, you know, you□
can't say, yeah, to the airport,□

you know, to whoever you fly□
with, your sister, your in-laws,□

they only take over□
once you get to them.□

There's that area in between,□

and that's where I think what□
you're doing, it has such value...□

for me.□

Chris, how long□
did the project take?□

From go to woe.□

I know we're just finishing off,□

but like, all the□
updating of all the pages,□

and implementing,□
how long did it take?□

[Chris] That's a good question,□

because if you talk about□
actual hours of effort,□

where I've turned
around and briefed...

the tech team to
actually do something,

so here are the specific
instructions of do this,

ABC.

That was actually really minor.

The changes required
to our actual products...

were...

in total hours of effort of, of

developer changing
code was minimal,

that you're talking about,

whether it's the tab from
first landing on the page,

bypassing the menu,□

whether it's changing the□

resolution of the images,□

or the, you know,□

a lot of the brass,□

there was the contrast□

of our action buttons.□

There was a contrast resolution,□

but we didn't have that.□

The text of the white font...□

on the light blue□

background was insufficient.□

So actually changing that,□

you have that same button font□

style across different web pages.□

And the actual change in the□

technology when you brief it in,□

which is change the resolution□

of the font from this to this,□

or the background□

from this to this,□

is universally applied□

across our platform.□

So it might have, you know,□

the report might have spun up,□

you know, 100 errors□

because we had 100 buttons□

but with the same problem.□

But since it's a default coding,□

it was five minutes□

worth of work...□

to change it across□

the entire platform.□

And so a lot of the changes that□

we had were along those lines□

whether it's the menu hierarchy,□

to make sure, from a
tab through perspective,

it made logical sense to understand
where you are on the page.

Again,

it only takes a
matter of minutes,

or a couple of hours here and
there of the coding required.

It's the time...

of, I guess, really me
understanding what does this mean,

and what do we
actually have to do?

And briefing that into the team.

Because the purpose is for me,

as you know, the co founder,

or the person in□

charge of the product,□

to understand so that when□

we build it the next time,□

I'm checking for it,□

I'm looking for it,□

and I know, I now know□

I've now got the vocabulary...□

to articulate that to□

my tech team, saying...□

you haven't actually□

done this in this instance.□

Please explain why. This is now□

a standard that we need to do.□

Because there's no point,□

as you rightly highlighted,□

why you partner with us to help□

us mature as an organisation,□

versus just getting in□

and doing it yourself,□

is so that, because we know that□

we're going to issue new code□

with the new release□

in three months time,□

six months time, 12 months time.□

And there's no point□

making it compliant today,□

if in three months time,□

we go and break all the□

good work we've just done.□

So it's the time,□

the real time is getting□

my head around it.□

And that took...□

a month or two to bite into□
what we need to do differently,□

but once my mindset□
had changed and locked in,□

going, this is just a...□

a new conversation or vocabulary□
that I need to understand,□

and genuinely adopt,□

versus lip service.□

Once that's done and I□
can just brief my team,□

just like any other□
aspect of my business,□

the actual implementation is really,□

really light from where we were.□

I don't know what other□
businesses are like.□

But it's not like a whole
rebuild of our website.

It wasn't, you know,
months of development.

It was, there's the contrast
ratio. Okay. Let's do that today.

There is an hours worth of work.
Well, that issue is now gone.

And then it's just the standard,

these are the colour ratios that
we now use moving forward.

So no long should,

theoretically no
longer ever be an issue.

So I don't have an
exact answer for you,

but hopefully that...

long-winded,

twisted answer helps...□

appreciate the actual technology□

work, from us, was minimal.□

It was understanding□

what we're doing wrong,□

and what the terminology□

is to be able to then,□

I, I guess the change,□

the internal change□

management that I had to go through.□

[Narelle] So, you've taken a lot of□

learnings away with this, Chris.□

What takeaways or pieces□

of advice can you give,□

whether it's the cafe□

down the street, or,□

I mean, my best example□

is there's a pub downstairs.□

Now, I go to it all the time because I can order...

food from there myself.

I don't need, or a glass of wine.

I don't need someone to do it for me.

What takeaways can you give any business?

[Chris] The key takeaway is the impact...

that your product will have on a individual person...

if it's not accessible.

I don't think focusing on the,

this is how many people there are in

the world with

blind or low vision,

and trying to do a

consistent scientific analysis.

The thing that's

more relevant to us is...

if you've got a

product or service,

and actually

finding that person...

who can't use your product,

who can't use your

product or service,

and speaking to them,

and getting them to explain

the impact on their life,

that our entire society is

increasingly digitally focused.

And if you, if you...

sit down with that person,□

and they were to□

explain, in their words,□

the impact on their life,□

they can't use your□

product or service.□

It really changes your opinion□

of,□

oh well, it's good□

enough. It's okay.□

Well no, it's not,□

because this has□

actually a material impact□

on that person's world.□

And...□

that's why this is□

a compliance piece□

around the Web Content□

Accessibility Guidelines.□

It shouldn't be.□

But instead of□

looking at the numbers□

and just hiding□

behind the numbers,□

go and find the person who's□

saying they can't access it,□

and get them to show□

you what it's like for them...□

using your website or□

your digital product today,□

when it's in its current state.□

And you'll walk away going, wow.□

We are really doing a□

disservice for our own brand,□

our own reputation,□

based on look at how we're
making that person, you know,

feel completely excluded,

because we've designed an
inaccessible digital platform.

[Narelle] You know,
Chris, you're right.

You know, as you and I
have had a conversation,

because we've just gone
through Tropical Cyclone Alfred.

And I rang you the other
day, absolutely frustrated.

And thank gosh you listened.

I was really
appreciative of that,

because, as you
said, it's the impacts.

And that makes a difference.□

Chris, how can people get in□
contact with you? Because...□

what you've got to□
say is so important.□

[Chris] Well,□

we've got a website,□

cerge.app.□

C-E-R-G-E.app.□

There's no dot com because□
we've got app as a distribution.□

So cerge.app.□

We've also got an□
email, so info@cerge.app.□

So if you do a Google□
search, you'll find us.□

You can leave my contact
details at the end of the show,

when you post it
as well, Narelle.

But anyone who wants
to reach out and chat,

if you want to know
about our experience

working with the amazing Narelle,

please reach out.

Or if you want to
just know what we do

or how we can work together...

to improve the participation of
people living with disability...

across any aspect of life.

Or you just want to chat,
please reach out, and happy to...

discuss any element of how we
can make society a bit better.

[Narelle] Look, Chris.
Thank you.

Because, as a
person disability myself

you are making a difference,

As I said, for me,

and I think I use the words
I've got to challenge myself,

I think were the words I use the
other day, I can't remember now,

in to broaden my horizons, and
Cérge is going to help me do that.

Number one.

Thank you for being
a friend as well,

that you listened the other day□
when I was extremely frustrated,□

and trying to manage□
the impacts of the storm.□

So,□

as I said,□

Cérge is also available□
as a download,□

as an app on your□
iPhone and your Android.□

I encourage everyone to go and□
have a look at what Chris does,□

and how he's made it accessible,□

because Chris did all the work,□

Chris and his team□

All I did was a□
bit of education,□

and being there to help them.□

I didn't do the work.□

And that's the important factor.□

Okay? It's I can□

educate everyone.□

But if they don't do the work,□

you're not going to have the...□

admirable success on your part.□

This is The Digital Access Show□

signing off for another week.□

And if you like what we do,□

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