[music playing]

[Narelle] Hi and welcome to…

a new episode of The
Digital Access Show.

Now, over the…

the last little period,

we've been looking
at, individually,

each of the principles,

perceivability,

operability,
understandability and robust.

So that's the four
principles of WCAG,

and the acronym for
that is POUR, P-O-U-R.

Today we want to
look at conformance.

How do you actually ensure…

that you do conform and meet
the accessibility guidelines?

What's involved in that process?

And to do that, I've brought
along again, Mark Muscat,

CEO of Digital Access Solutions
and Assistive Technology.

Morning, Mark.

[Mark] Good morning,
Narelle. It's actually…

well, hello to everyone,
whatever time you may be.

[Mark] Yes.
[Narelle] Okay.

[Mark] And I'm not CEO, I'm just a
person that works at DASAT.

That's why I'm here

[Narelle] He has CEO in his
name. Please disregard that.

[Mark] Yes.
[Narelle] And he's…

[Narelle] As we point
out, he's the boss,

the ultimate decision maker.

[Mark] I'm not the boss.
[Narelle] So Mark, seriously,

as a digital, and you are a digital
accessibility auditor yourself,

how long have you been
doing the auditing side of…

digital accessibility?

[Mark] On and off,

I've probably been involved
with web accessibility for…

over 15 years.

So, when I was a…

When I was a web developer,
I was doing some accessibility.

And probably more
so just recently,

but yeah, on and off, yeah,
it would be around 15 years.

[Narelle] So you've been
involved in a lot of the changes

that have happened with the web
content accessibility guidelines,

seeing the improvements.

[Mark] I think I started off…
[Narelle] Testing and the criteria.

Yeah, I definitely
remember WCAG 1.0,

when I was doing my post grad.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Mark] And then,

just goes to see long I was
doing my undergrad.

But that was still pretty
much a white paper.

It was still…

kicked around as a…

as an interest thing,

rather than an actual
conformance or standard.

I don't think it was attached
to any standards that time.

I think the…

standards were applied
when 2.0 came out.

I might be wrong, but it certainly
would have been around 2.0…

that things started
to get more formal,

which is what we're
talking about today.

[Narelle] It is.
[Mark] Formalities.

[Mark] So yeah, there's
a bit of history there.

And…

Yeah, as I said, I
was a web developer,

so I didn't really care
about accessibility, sorry.

I have to say that,

because when you develop, you
just want to get things built.

And so,

even a blind person like
myself could fall for the…

the trick of not caring
about accessibility.

It's so easy to do

[Narelle] So sad, too.

[Mark] Yeah. I could be,

but you gotta keep things done,

and projects need to be
delivered and all that stuff.

So, yeah.

[Narelle] I agree with that,

when you're in the
middle of projects,

because I've been
involved in many as well.

Like, meeting deadlines
and not considering the user.

Cause you've got the specs,

and you build to specs.

[Mark] And that's right. This is
what we've all been saying for…

for years and years
and years and years.

If you put specs, accessibility
specs, into your spec…

documents, or your…

sets of specifications,

it certainly makes
that accessibility,

you know,

straightforward.

So with, you know, with
software engineering…

practices and development
phases and so forth,

you could, you could

actually make that more…

You can make
accessibility more prominent,

by just putting
it in little parts.

Because, you know, you'll just
makethat whole system work.

But yeah, I think now it's
becoming more like that.

It's more streamlined.

But, but, yeah,
when I was doing my…

post grad, and…

even as a commercial…

developer, we certainly…

certainly didn't really look at
that

as a big, big, it

wasn't a high priority,

which is, I'm sorry
to say that, but yeah.

I don't know.
I've been on both sides.

[Mark] of things.
-[Narelle] Yeah. That's it.

[Narelle] Mark,
everyone's talking about AI,

and they think that you
can conform using AI.

What's your opinion on that?

[Mark] That's a good
question, because…

AI is just basically
a learning model,

a series of learning models.

So if you could teach AI how to…

how to access it,

I think AI, in a way,
is as blind as we are.

So you know,
when you look at it,

if AI is blind like we are,

albeit that you can actually
pick up a graphic file,

and go through it, you
know, pixel by pixel,

and work out what
it's meant to be,

just through
pattern recognition.

You know, that's,
that's possible, but

you know, it still is blind.

And again, it needs to learn.

So if you could teach it,

if you can teach those models,

what is accessible
and what isn't,

I think it could be…

ultimately helpful.

But when it, when it
comes down to it, though,

you need to have somebody with
those expertise to actually teach…

those AI models
how to, to, to actually…

work out what conforms
and what doesn't,

and that that still
takes quite a lot to do.

But no.

I mean, the, the, the other

side to the coin is that,

as you know, different
people have different…

needs in the
realms of disability.

So my, my particular way of

using a computer is
completely different

to what you would do.

So I don't know if AI
can actually do that.

It's a hard one, because…

there are so many
variations of the colour white,

which is not true,
it's always one white.

But there's so many
colours that make that.

And…

But, if you know what I mean,

there's so many variations
to what's required.

So, look,

it's a hard one.

Will it work?

Possibly?

Will it do what
we want it to do?

Don't know.

Yeah. I know there's some people
looking into the research,

and that's something like
Dr Scott Holier would be…

worth having a
chat too about that.

But it, it certainly would be…

an interesting project for
somebody in the AI sphere,

and accessibility sphere.

But no, when it comes
to testing, definitely not.

The only way to
test is to actually get…

people of different
required, you know, uses,

to actually test the system.

So,

Yeah. What's your
thoughts on that, Narelle?

[Narelle] No. Not
at the present time.

I'm not saying in
the future it can't.

[Narelle] Currently, no.
[Mark] I'm an optimist.

[Narelle] Yeah.
[Mark] And Narelle's…

[Narelle] I'm a
realist is what I say.

Okay. I'm not saying it won't.

What I'm saying is it
can't at the present time.

Mark, when we're
talking conformance,

which is ultimately what
we're talking about today,

what has to be done?

Or what, what is the…

methodology behind ensuring
that a site or a document,

an app, whatever it is,

conforms to the Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines?

[Mark] Well, it's actually all

throughout the four
principles, isn't it?

When you read the actual
WCAG document itself,

it actually tells you.

So, you're testing for
three levels of conformance.

So at this stage,
it's A, AA, AAA.

Could be something different
in the future, I suspect.

But…

So, each of the clauses
within the principles have…

what is required to meet
those particular levels.

So when you read the
actual document itself,

a rather technical document,

but when you read it, it
actually makes a lot of sense.

So it actually outlines what,
what's required for A,

what's required for AA,
what's required for AAA.

Some clauses…

have all three, and some
causes will have a minimum.

So, that's the way I read it,

a minimum of what's required.

And…

and basically you just,
if you wanted to,

if you wanted to look at a
level that you wanted to reach,

for instance, you would
need to have all the clauses…

that, that, that fit in
for that particular level.

So if you're looking at,
the normal is AA.

So that's pretty much most of
the clauses in the principles.

There might be a couple that
you don't need to worry about,

but you know,
the majority have to be reached.

And if you want AAA,

then there are certain
other, you know,

that you need to
conform with AA first,

but you have additional clauses
that needs to be reached,

and tested and met,

so that becomes AAA.

But, yeah, I, I, I…

it sometimes can
be a bit difficult to,

to know if you haven't seen
a particular site, you know,

that's where you need an auditor
to actually say, yep, okay.

This is…

We know what the benchmark is,

because we've seen the
sites that meet these criteria.

Yep. This is what
we need to test for.

So sometimes it's a

bit hard when you try to…

test yourself, which is
okay to test yourself, but…

if you don't know or
haven't got a comparison,

it, it sometimes can be tricky

to work out what
conforms and what doesn't.

[Narelle] So what does the
auditor actually do then, Mark?

[Mark] Well, that's a question that
I'm going to ask you, Narelle,

because you're the auditor.

I mean, I can tell you
what the auditor should do,

but you can tell me, and I'll…

Yeah.

I'll let you, because you do the

auditing a lot more than I do.

So I'll let you…

sort of work out what, how
you want to answer that.

But I'll chime in if I need to.

[Narelle] Yeah. The auditor…

has, there's two
audits that you do.

So if you're building a website,

which is what we
recommend everyone

incorporates the Web Content
Accessibility Guideline into,

once the website's built, or
once the document or the app,

it doesn't matter what digital
content we're talking about.

The auditor will go

and look at the content,

and test the content,
test the structure of the site,

test everything related
to that site against…

the criteria, what we
call success criteria.

And there are tests that can be
run. There's hundreds of them.

And an auditor is very good to…

The auditor could
quickly look at a site,

and recognise where
probable issues are.

However, the auditor must go
through every success criteria,

and different
auditors use different…

levels.

I'm quite black and white.
I say you either pass,

or you fail.

Others say…

somewhat, no, somewhat, or yes.

The reason I never do
no, somewhat or yes,

I don't have the somewhat,

is because,

if it fails, it's adding
a barrier to someone.

So it might work
for some people,

but it might not
work for other people.

It won't work for other
people, so it's yes or no.

Then the auditor should produce…

a very detailed
report, actually,

and this is why
auditors should be an IT…

based auditor,

so someone that's got
the IT knowledge, coded,

a lot of experience in it,

because they don't
just say yes or no.

I always like to provide
why it's a barrier,

which gives the reason
why it's yes or no.

You could add, if you
wanted, how you tested this,

but the barrier
should be enough.

And I also like to
give a possible…

means to resolve the issue.

And if I do that,

then the report is
quite a detailed report.

But the important
thing for auditors,

and it doesn't matter whether
it's myself or someone else,

that audit should be
representative of the site.

So in other words,

if the site's
building, built using

templates, which is fantastic,

because you fix the template,

and then the changes
flow through everywhere,

then you might only have four
or five templates for that site,

which is, that's
all you're auditing.

That's all you need to audit.

If the site, every page is

customised and
built differently,

then every page on that
site has to be audited.

That's where the
expense comes in.

Once the audit reports done,

it is the auditor's
responsibility

to meet with the developers,

meet with the website owners,
and go through and explain…

what the issues are
and why they're the barrier.

Once that one's done,

then it gets handed
over to the developers,

because in IT, one
of your golden rules is,

you never do a final
test of your own work.

You can code.

You test it to what
we call the system test.

Does it all link together?

Does it do what
you want it to do?

Yes.

Then you hand it over to what
we call the user testing phase.

The user testing phase is
that phase where the user,

in this case, the auditor,

goes in and does
very thorough checks.

Any bugs that get handed back to
the developers to be resolved,

and then it's tested
again, pass, and go on.

So, I'm working the user testing

area of the
development life cycle.

Once the developer
has fixed everything,

and there is
always a consultant,

a digital accessibility

consultant,

which in our case
is always you, Mark,

to do the tech,

and talk to the developers if
they've got any tech questions,

anything like that,

that gets resolved,

then it gets handed back
to me to do the final audit.

And again, the
final audit is exactly

the same as the initial audit.

I go through and I test
against every success criteria.

At the end of that,

you will have a website…

that meets the Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines.

And that's when we can
provide you with a certificate,

it's a W3C certificate,

that you can attach to your
website as a HTML page,

that says we meet this.

I think…

the one thing
that people forget,

websites and documentation
is updated continually,

so that certification
only lasts a year.

Have I covered it all?

[Mark] Yes, pretty much.
[Narelle] Wonderful.

[Mark] I, and different
auditors do it differently too.

Like I tend to use a lot
of scripting, in terms of…

scripting the tests to do
different things at the start,

which is quite a
classic model, really.

A lot, a lot of the
accessibility consultants

and auditors will do
exactly the same thing.

But yeah, these days,
it's a, it's a streamlined…

process.

I mean,

auditing is pretty much…

something you do right at the
end when you are fairly sure…

that your internal
testing has been done.

And…

we, we, I mean, I
tend to, as a consultant,

will show the types
of testing that…

is required.

So whether you apply
that in your testing phases,

most people should, but
sometimes it doesn't happen,

because the site
may not be public,

or ready enough for, for, …

for people to look at
in a, in a public context.

So it's sort of,

with web applications,

it's more when
it's ready to test.

Yeah, but everything
you said regarding the…

criteria is, is pretty much same.

You know, you apply that…

those tests whilst,
whilst, whilst you can.

And I suggest you always
do it in order at the end,

just to be…

hope that everything's
pretty much finalised…

by that time.

What's that?

[Narelle] One of the issues
that we always come across,

is a lot of websites today use…

a variety of plugins to
do different activities,

functions, like with WPForms
to act as a forms page.

Contact us, whatever
you'd like to call it.

Now,

a lot of those don't
necessarily meet

all the Web Content
Accessiblity Guidelines.

The rules say
for a site to meet…

all the guide, to
be certified at, say,

the current level
is 2.2 level AA,

all pages in the
site must meet it.

How do you deal
with those cases,

where they're using a plug
in that doesn't meet the rules?

[Mark] That's the
thing with those…

web content management systems.

You really are…

You really are at the…

the mercy of the, of
the actual developers

who do develop the plugins.

Look, to be honest,

I know WordPress
is trying to make…

a big inroad into making their…

accessibility a better
environment so that,

across the board
when you put in…

put in a plugin, it should be,
you know, conforming.

But they, the WordPress
organisation themselves can't…

control what developers
do for their plugins.

So, it's a case of just
trying to work out…

what plugins to get,

and that's a bit
tricky, because you…

you might want to plugin, it's
like horses for courses really.

So you might want
to get a plugin for…

a particular
requirement of your…

of your site.

And that could be a
carousel, for instance.

It could be…

something like WooCommerce
is actually quite accessible.

So, if you stick to
the common ones,

they should be okay.

But as you've pointed out,

it's not always the case.

There are some times where…

people don't update their
plugins, and that's because…

if you're like me,

you go and play with the plugin,

and you don't want
to update the plugin,

because you've made some
changes to the actual code.

[Narelle] Mark,

I mean there is a…

place where we can say
in the certification that, look,

other than this plugin or
this particular functionality,

the website does meet
the guidelines. Is that okay?

[Mark] Well, you, you could,

but it certainly would tarnish
the integrity of the actual…

web…

certainly the accessibility

of that particular website.

And it's…

I don't feel comfortable
doing that too often.

In fact, I don't feel
comfortable at all because…

to me, an excuse that,

you know, when you're
dealing with a formal…

type structure like…

the WCAG is,

it really needs to be…

you know, it needs to be upheld.

So look,

I'm sure you'll get different
views on this question.

As a person who uses

assistive technology,

and it actually does what we do,

you know, I don't agree with it.

No. I think…

I would try to work…

with the developer to, to see
what solutions can be reached,

before putting that stamp on it.

There's no,

and I know probably
we're shooting

ourselves in the foot
business wise, but…

I stand by, you
know, accessibility,

more than I stand
by that, you know.

So, if that doesn't
indicate how,

you know, how, how important
accessibility is to me,

I don't know what will.

But it would be very rare

where I would actually put that
stamp on a document to say that,

yes, this is beyond
a person's control.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Mark] Most, most systems,
Squarespace, WordPress,

if you're going to use
that kind of platform,

yeah, unless you're
using some really old code,

there will be a way
where you can fix it,

and go to some new plugins,

and that's really up to
the developers to do that.

So, if we knew somebody
was using a plugin that was…

six, seven years old,

and it was totally inaccessible,
well we can just say,

yeah, you really need
to update that plugin,

and you need to
use that version,

because it's got the
accessibility requirements met.

If they say no, we're
not going to do it, well,

why should we put a stamp on it?

Because it's in their control

to actually make that happen.

[Narelle] Mark, what's
some advice you can give,

in regards to conformance?

To anyone that's listening?

Should someone do it?

[Mark] Should…

they audit? Yes.

Absolutely, an
independent auditor.

All the projects
I've worked with,

and I've done some projects with
some major commercial companies,

where I was a consultant,

and I, I've anways learnt from
that point that you should always…

yeah, hand it over to
somebody independent.

I did, I learnt that when I started
doing some web accessibility…

consulting 12
years, 13 years ago,

where, even longer, that was
probably 15 years now,

where…

Yeah, I just said to the CIO of
the company I was contracted to,

I said, I don't
care how you do it.

Don't tell me.
I don't want to know,

But you might want
to get this audited,

just for everyone's, you know,

safe, for their own mind.

And they did.

They went in, they got
it audited, and paid for it.

Yeah, it was bang on
the nail in its accessibility.

We got no comments back
to say anything needed to be,

I think there was
one spelling mistake,

which was marketing' problem.

Typical, typical advertisement.

But that was it.

But obviously that was 2.0 then,

so would be different now.

Yeah, honestly,
independence from…

trying to keep things

as independent.

It's like building really,
you build a structure,

and before you pass
it on to the buyer,

you certainly want to get an
engineer to check the structure,

and all that sort of stuff,
so this is very similar to that.

And, you know, that's
the way that I look at it.

It's a good thing to have,

in the context of
making sure that,

if people say, I've got a
problem using this website.

There's two reasons why they
have problems using the website.

One, they don't

have the sufficient…

understanding of the assistive
technologies that they're using.

Or the website
itself is inaccessible.

And sometimes it can
be a combination of both.

So it's a case of,

you know, if you were to
have somebody who's audited,

and it conforms to the criteria,

well, you could say,

well, okay, that person…

probably needs some training
in assistive technology…

to actually use this website.

And by doing that,

it's probably going to help them to
understand how to use other websites.

[Narelle] Mark, how can
people get in contact you,

if they want to catch up?

[Narelle] Talk to you about
getting their website done?

[Mark] They can
contact you, Narelle.

[Narelle] You're
a stirrer today.

In other words,
for everyone that's listening,

Mark actually leaves tomorrow,

in two days time,

to go to Japan for
four weeks of leave, so,

Yeah.

[Mark] Not four weeks.

You gonna give me four
weeks, boss? That's good.

I'll take four weeks.

No, it's two weeks.

[Narelle] Two weeks.
[Mark] Two weeks.

[Narelle] Yep.

Yep.

[Mark] They can contact us,

looking at, probably go to our
website, dasat.com.au.

And all our details are there.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Mark] And yeah, they
can talk to you, Narelle.

[Narelle] Okay.

[Mark] You're probably
a better person to talk to.

Dasat.com.au. Thank you.

[Narelle] Yeah, as I said,

he's like that, in that mood,

you know, the mood just
before you go on leave.

And… thank you.

Thanks Mark for coming on.

Thanks for talking about
conformance with us.

If you like what
we do, please like,

share, subscribe, review.

We love any feedback,
any comments.

We'd absolutely love to

know your thoughts about…

whether a website
should be tested for the…

digital accessibility,

and meeting the Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines.

See you next time on
The Digital Access Show.

And have a good week.
See you later.

[music playing]