

Judy Brewer

The web is a great place to share strategies with each other, so the lack of access to such a core resource is very appropriately identified in the convention as a form of discrimination. One of the things that we try to do at the World Wide Web Consortium is to develop the technical solutions so that eventually the web will be accessible for everyone, and particularly within the web accessibility initiative, we've been focusing on accessibility for people with disabilities.

The World Wide Web Consortium, W3C, is the vendor-neutral industry consortium which promotes the evolution, interoperability and universality of the web. Before the web accessibility even came along, there was some harmony with the goals of the W3C. The web accessibility initiative has been going for about ten years now, and we address cross-disability user requirements. That means looking at the needs of people with visual disabilities, auditory disabilities, physical, speech, cognitive disabilities and also the needs of the people who are aging and have conditions which create functional barriers to accessing the web as well. The particular way that we work is to develop multi-stakeholder consensus solutions. We like to bring all of the different parties to the table.

How do you get an accessible web? What are the ingredients for that? On the one hand, if you're a web developer, you may be using authoring tools, some kind of software that helps you create websites, when you're designing the web content, or the website, or managing the content within that. You also may be using some kind of evaluation tools to assess the accessibility of the content as you're creating it. We hope that you're using evaluation tools as you're doing that because that's the best way to do it rather than coming on afterwards and finding out what you missed. Therefore, the goal of what you're doing there is to create content, and again hopefully accessible web content. Now on the users' side, users are sometimes using a kind of assistive technology to access the web depending on their specific need, something that voices the text. They might need something that highlights certain sections so that they are not distracted by other sections, and then they also might use a browser and media player. The browser and media players need to be accessible, and in addition, they need to work well with the assistive

technologies. If the things don't work well together, if they don't inter-operate, then you have a problem as well.

We develop guidelines that inform the developers' side, the authoring tools, the browsers and media players and also the content, and I will be explaining those guidelines. All of that sits on top of different technical specifications. What's a technical specification? Well HTML, XML, and the things you use every time you access the web. If you're using technical specifications from W3C, you know that it has been reviewed from the earliest stages of development to ensure that it supports accessibility, and that it can carry accessibility information as needed.

I mentioned that we have 3 different guidelines. The set of guidelines that most people are familiar with if you have heard about accessibility guidelines for the web, is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, and that explains how to make websites, web content and web based applications accessible. In addition, we have two other guidelines which are very important to complete this picture of how to make the web accessible, one being the Authoring Tool Accessibility Guidelines, and those address the accessibility of software use to develop web content, because of course we want to make sure people with disabilities can build websites and add content to the web as well as anybody else. They also support production of accessible content, and if we have more tools that automatically support the production of web content, we wouldn't have to sit down and read the web content guidelines every time we are developing a site. The third one is the User Agent Accessibility Guidelines which address the accessibility of browsers and media players, and also their interoperability with assistive technology.

You may have heard that we have 1.0 versions and 2.0 versions. What's the difference, and what's available? For 1.0 versions of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG, or ATAG, that's the Authoring Tool one, or UAAG, and that's the User Agent one, those are existing standards from the W3C that were each completed at least several years ago. We're developing 2.0 versions of each of these guidelines, and the web content and authoring tool ones are already fairly well along those provide accessibility

for more advanced web technologies. They provide increased accessibility for persons with disability. They will be more precisely testable, which is a requirement that we have gotten from many different directions. We also believe that they will be more understandable and usable, and we're still working on that part with supporting materials that we're developing.

In addition, W3C does ongoing review of technology; we are reviewing all the W3C technical specifications while under development. We review some external ones as well, and we also develop technical solutions for specific needs such as dynamic HTML, AJAX and so forth are covered by the accessible rich internet application document we are working on otherwise known as WAI-ARIA. We like to bring together different stakeholders. We really feel this is the only way to effectively come up with the right technology solutions, so we need industry as the table with disability organizations, accessibility researchers, government, and education to develop the consensus solutions.

Concerning the role of accessibility standards, if everyone is using essentially the same definitions of what web accessibility is, then you get a great advantage, and you can accelerate the progress of web accessibility because it provides a unified market for improved authoring evaluation tools and enables re-use of training resources. It eliminates the conflicting requirements which can be very difficult for developers, and also allows consistent monitoring of conformants and reliable assessment of progress. If you looking for how to promote web accessibility through any of the networks that you have, start with multi-stakeholder involvement, build awareness, assess your current level of accessibility, establish an updatable policy framework, which is important because the technology is going to continue to advance. You want policies that can point to more advanced specifications, with advanced guidelines, when they become available. Train your developers, implement the guidelines, and then evaluate outcomes and monitor progress.

For more information you can visit our homepage at w3.org/wai.

Press Conference

Judy Brewer, W3C, Director of the Web Accessibility Initiative

I am very pleased to be participating in the G3ict Forum, and we find the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to be addressing important issues for accessibility for people with disabilities. Speaking of behalf of the World Wide Web Consortium, which is the leading industry technology standards organization for web technologies, we're very pleased to be able to participate and to contribute our experience from the web accessibility initiative. The web is one of the core resources in many countries around the world for people to participate in different aspects of society, and this includes participation in education, employment opportunity, news information, health care information, civic participation, social networking and so forth. If people cannot access the web, this becomes a great barrier. The web, however has the ability to be even more accessible than many other parts of society, and so what we have done at the web accessibility initiative, part of the worldwide web consortium, is to bring together all of these different stakeholders groups, industry, people from the disability community government, accessibility researchers, universities, to come up with consensus solutions for how to make the web accessible and we develop guidelines for accessible websites, guidelines for browsers and media players, and guidelines for the software that is used to produce accessible content. We also review all of the technologies, the new advanced technologies for the web. First you have had HTML, but now it's XML. You have dynamic web content, and we have accessible rich internet application guidelines to ensure that this is accessible.

In conclusion, we also produce educational material that I think might be of interest to many people looking at how to make the web accessible in their countries, and this includes information on how to increase public awareness of the need for web accessibility, and how to develop adaptable policy frameworks because the technology continues to advance all the time. It's important to be able to keep up to keep the policy frameworks updated with the technology. We are very encouraged to see this collaborative effort to bring harmonized standards throughout the world to support more access to information technology for people with disabilities.

