

LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #4 *e-Learning Accessibility For Training Managers and Human Resource Professionals, Part 1*

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Mary Kay Lofurno: Welcome to the fourth edition of the SyberWorks e-Learning Podcast Series. My name is Mary Kay Lofurno and I am the Director of Marketing here at SyberWorks and I am your host today. In this mini series, we will be providing an overview on e-learning accessibility with some background on The Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 508, W3C accessibility guidelines and their priority (1), (2) and (3) checklists, Flash accessibility, accessibility testing and various free accessibility test tools available on the Internet.

This mini series is meant to be a basic primer for training managers and Human Resource professionals not familiar with the subject of e-learning accessibility. It is in no way meant to be comprehensive. While many companies use a combination of subject matter experts, instructional designers, Web developers and others to construct their online training courses, we felt that it is also important that training managers and human resource professionals have some understanding of these concepts so they know the right questions to ask as they manage their training programs.

We will only provide information or discuss the ADA and Section 508 as it relates to e-learning accessibility. Since we are not experts on federal law nor have any specific knowledge of your company's business parameters, we ask you to talk with your legal department in terms of any requirements you or your company may or may not be under as a result of the American Disabilities Act, Section 508 or any other guidelines we discuss in this mini series. Of course, there are a lot of great detailed resources out there on the Web for you on this subject and we will do our best to provide some of those for you throughout this series.

The first segment will cover some background on the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 508 and the introduction to the W3C accessibility guidelines. The second segment will cover W3C's priority (1) checklist. The third installment will focus on W3C's priority (2) checklist. The fourth segment will cover W3C's priority (3) checklist. The fifth installment will look at flash accessibility and the final segment will talk about accessibility testing with some of the tools available on the Internet for accessibility testing.

Throughout this mini series, I will be talking with Al Lemieux, senior e-learning developer here at SyberWorks and frequent contributor to the Online Training Content Journal Blog about e-learning accessibility. Good Afternoon Al.

Al Lemieux: Hello Mary Kay.

Mary Kay: I'm glad to have you here for this series on e-learning accessibility.

Al: Good to be here.

Mary Kay: OK let's get started. So Al, how did all this accessibility stuff get started?

Al: Well, Mary Kay, before the days of the Internet, the ADA was passed and took effect back in 1992. With the advent of the Internet and the outgrowth of all the legislation passed to enforce the ADA, the federal government also passed something called Section 508 in 1998.

Mary Kay: OK Al, what is Section 508?

AI: It requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. It applies to Web applications and any Internet technology used by federal agencies. In this category, Section 508 follows the W3C priority one accessibility standards.

Mary Kay: Wow. That's a pretty tall order.

AI: Yeah, you bet.

Mary Kay: There is a lot of good information out there about the ADA. Here is the official website, www.ada.gov and for Section 508 the URL is www.section508.gov. So I guess what you are saying is, this all leads to a focus on accessibility and the W3C accessibility standards.

AI: Yes, it may become even more important in the years to come especially with the recent ruling by the federal courts in Target v. The National Federation of the Blind, requiring the Target Corporation to make its e-commerce website accessible to the blind.

Mary Kay: Yes, I read about that on the Online Training Content Journal Blog. For those of you who don't know, Dave Boggs, the CEO of SyberWorks, authors the Online Training Content Journal Blog. It is a great source of information on all things having to do with developing online training content, so check it out sometime.

AI: all right, no one has a crystal ball so there is no way of knowing if the ruling would be unilaterally applied to a company's online training development in the future, but you can bet that the demand for accessible e-learning will only grow over time, given all the other factors that are happening in the marketplace.

Mary Kay: Yes, I agree, but there have been other things going on in the world of accessibility.

AI: Yes, don't forget that back in March of this year, the UK's Disability Rights Commission released the PAS 78 Guide to Good Practice and Commissioning Accessible Websites. Then, there are the benefits of better usability, lower bandwidth usage, and the ability for people with mobile devices to use your site.

Mary Kay: Yes, all that is true. OK you made your point, let's move on What does WC3 stand for?

AI: W3C stands for the World Wide Web Consortium, an international consortium of companies involved with the Internet and the Web. The W3C was founded in 1994 by Tim Berners-Lee from MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the original architect of the World Wide Web. The organization's purpose is to develop open standards so that the Web evolves in a single direction rather than being splintered among many factions. The W3C is the chief standards body for Http and HTML.

Mary Kay: all right then. What are the W3C's content accessibility guidelines?

AI: The W3C Web content accessibility guidelines are a set of parameters or if you will, best practices for developing content that is accessible to individuals with disabilities. Of course, in a nutshell, they outline three priorities of accessibility, priority 1, two and 3. Priority 1, or as we will call it Level 1, are the things that must be done in order to satisfy the standard set for priority one and is considered the basic requirement for online content accessibility. Level 2, or priority 2, covers the things that should be done. Level 3, or priority 3, are the parameters that are the nice to haves when you develop online content. It's like required, better and then say optimal, but there is big caveat here.

Mary Kay: What is that AI?

AI: It is important to understand that these are guidelines. Just because one may follow the guidelines exactly does not guarantee that online content will work seamlessly with every screen reader or assistive technology on the market.

Mary Kay: OK AI, let's back up here. What is a screen reader and what is assistive technology?

AI: In this case, the term screen reader refers to a device or software that enables a visually-impaired user to read sites on the Web. Jaws, which is made by Freedom Scientific, for Windows, is one of the most popular screen readers out there but it is by no means the only one. There are also different types of screen readers or assistive technology devices or software that are used with all kinds of disabilities. In essence, assistive technology or assisted technology as it is sometimes called, is more often than not specific to a user's specific disability.

Mary Kay: So what you are saying here it is a pretty big moving target.

AI: Precisely, even if you follow all the best practices, test your content on several different screen readers and assistive technology devices, the usability tested with users that are blind or what ever type of disability that you are serving, there are no guarantees that it will work seamlessly every time.

Mary Kay: AI, I know you have to run but I think we made a good start today talking about e-learning accessibility. Thanks so much for coming today.

AI: It was my pleasure.

Mary Kay: All the sites that we talked about in this podcast series will be available un the transcript for the respective podcast series episode located at www.Syberworks.com/elearning_podcast.htm in the media center of the SyberWorks website. Next month, we will be talking about W3C's priority one accessibility checkpoints. Until then have a great one.

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