



Webinar Transcript: Tuesday, May 28, 2024

Webinar #2: Getting Started with Accessible Communication and Marketing

Wendy Harrisko: I'm Wendy Harrisko, and I'm the Engagement and Communications Specialist for the Manitoba Accessibility Office.

So, if you're here today for the presentation, getting started with accessible communications and marketing, you're in the right place.

So, we'll just wait a couple more seconds before we move on.

I think the majority of people are in the session, so we'll get going here.

So, before we begin our presentation today, which will be about getting started with accessible communication and marketing, just a little bit about Manitoba Access Awareness Week.

So, it was first celebrated in 2010 by the Manitoba Government, and the province acknowledges both National Accessibility Week and Manitoba Access Awareness Week, and it's a time to raise awareness about the barriers faced by many Manitobans.

So almost every year, the Manitoba Accessibility Office takes this time to host some webinars in celebration of the week.

So, today's session is a little bit more focused on the Accessibility for Manitobans Act and the accompanying standards focusing mainly on the Information and Communication Standard, and I hope you get some valuable information out of today's session.

Wendy Harrisko: So, before we start the session, just a few housekeeping items. If you are having technical difficulties, please contact the Accessibility Office by email at mao@gov.mb.ca or you can call at 204 945 7613. And we do have people behind the scenes that can assist you and help out with any issues you're having with today's webinar.

So, you will notice that you were muted, and your microphone and video was turned off when you joined the call. This just keeps the background noise to a minimum and keeps the visuals to a minimum as well. It also provides for fewer distractions throughout the zoom presentation.

We have spotlighted and pinned the presenters and the ASL interpreters for your convenience.

There are a few accessibility features that we do have going on in the background in today's presentation, so we do have live closed captioning and if you want to access that, you can go to the bottom navigation and click on the "show captions" or the CC icon. For ASL interpretation, click on the globe icon also in the bottom navigation and click on American Sign Language to see the interpreters.

We do want to remind you that today's session is being recorded, and the recording and the transcript and questions and answers document will be posted on accessibilityMB.ca as soon as possible.

Wendy Harrisko: So, throughout the presentation, you are more than welcome to ask any questions and we will have a question-and-answer period at the end so you can either email them directly to our office at mao@gov.mb.ca or you could type them in the chat, and we will get to that later.

Wendy Harrisko: So now I would just like to acknowledge that on behalf of Manitoba Accessibility Office, we are presenting today from Treaty One territory and that Manitoba is located on the Treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk Nations. We do acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the homeland territories of the Red River Metis, and we acknowledge that northern Manitoba includes the lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the treaties and the intent of the treaties and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, Metis people as we walk a shared path of truth and reconciliation.

Wendy Harrisko: So, for the reason everybody's here today, let's move on to the main presentation. So, we do have Kelly here today from squarely accessible and she's going to present about getting started with accessible communications and marketing. So, I can share that you're in for a real treat today. I've attended many of Kelly's presentations and training sessions, and she has a great deal of knowledge to share on these topics. So, Kelly, without further ado, over to you.

Kelly Thibodeau: Great, thank you so much, Wendy. And thanks for everybody for having me here. I'm just going to get started with sharing my screen. And as I'm doing that, also just want to say thank you to the Manitoba Accessibility Office for having me

as part of Manitoba Access Awareness Week. And thanks to each and every one of you who have chosen to spend the next hour and a half with me, and I like to think that, together, we are part of an accessibility community of champions.

And so, I just want to thank you for being here, and to echo the land acknowledgment that Wendy gave. I also want to acknowledge that, at Squarely Accessible, we gratefully acknowledge that we live and work as uninvited guests on Treaty One territory, colonially known as Winnipeg, which is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene people and the homeland of the Red River Metis and the water we drink is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation. For me personally, I'm a settler on this land with ancestral lineage through England and Ireland. I also want to say that our active work towards accessibility is also committed to raising awareness for our colleagues towards appreciating and respecting reconciliation and community building.

Kelly Thibodeau: I'd also like to start these sessions with just some provocative thoughts around what inclusion means, and they have been really important to me in understanding my own personal journey and lens into the perspective that I bring into this work. So, I'd invite you to start take some things that sound like they resonate for you, connect with you, and invite you to also build on your own knowledge and understanding.

So first, content can't be conversational until it's inclusive.

And conversations are more meaningful and deeper by bringing diverse people and perspectives together.

Next, practice makes permanent.

So small starts are better than not starting at all.

And no single person has all the answers. Learning and unlearning are all part of our collective journeys which means there's no start, there's no finish.

As we know more, we keep taking action.

Next, at creating safe spaces where we can all thrive means including Black, Indigenous, people of colour, disabled people, Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asex and other sex and gender identities and all underrepresented communities. And I also believe that people with privilege are responsible for and capable of changing systems designed to benefit them, so they're designed to benefit everybody.

Kelly Thibodeau: I also really like to start a story around accessibility with my personal story. I've been working in marketing and communication for about 25 years and first started working in digital accessibility in 2007. The picture that you have in front of you is a picture of my mom. So, her name is Marlene Patricia Greenwood, although she would have insisted that you call her Marty.

My mom passed away in 2017 at the age of 77, and she was born and raised right here in Winnipeg and grew up with her two brothers. My mom actually wasn't born with a disability, so by the age of 35, she started showing symptoms of being shaky and a little unsteady on her feet, and her personality started to change. And we didn't really know what was happening and by the time, so the first symptoms started when I was about eight years old. By the time I was about 16, we found out that my mom had a rare neurological disease called Olivopontocerebellar Atrophy, or OPCA, Cerebellar Multiple System Atrophy, and over time, it affected her coordination, and she had signs of dementia, so this picture was taken on July 16th, 2016, and my mom was 71 years old.

So, you can see in this picture, I'll just describe it a little bit, she's sitting beside a raised garden bed on a sunny day. My mom is sitting in a wheelchair with her hands clasped and wearing a maroon top and beige pants. So, by the time my mom was about 49 years old, she needed a cane to walk. And at age 65, she started using a wheelchair full time. So, she went from needing help getting dressed to requiring assistance with every aspect of her life.

My mom loved to laugh, and she had a big heart. She accepted people for who they are, and made people feel comfortable around her. And she was proud, and she didn't complain. She rarely asked for help, and she was hesitant about accepting it. As her condition progressed, she didn't want to be a burden to her family. She felt ashamed and embarrassed. And she felt unworthy of having her needs met so she stopped asking for what she needed.

The reason that I'm sharing my mom's story with you is because, as I said earlier, accessibility is personal. And I know that I am not the only one in our virtual room here who knows or loves someone who has a disability, so I want you to think about that person in the session today, think about who you're bringing into the session, because you can help bring about change.

And I want you to become more curious about digital accessibility. Follow that curiosity and, together, we can help make the world a more inclusive place where everyone feels like they belong. And I also want to invite you to think differently about accessibility.

It's not about disability. Inclusive design benefits everyone. And we'll talk about that. So just think about who it is in your life that you know and love. Sometimes when you get

really overwhelmed in thinking about accessibility on a rules side and making sure you're following the rules, you have a tendency to forget the people. So, bring the people that you know and love into the session.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, like I said, accessibility is about people. The promise of the internet has not been fulfilled for people who have disabilities. Digital accessibility is mainly a people thing, it's about shifting mind sets and enabling people. So, I want you to imagine for a minute what your life might be like without the internet, not because it doesn't exist but because you can't access it in a way that works for you. Could you pay your bills or file your taxes? Could you apply for a job? How would you keep in touch with your colleagues, your peers, your employees, your friends, or your family?

Accessible communications and marketing ensures that all of your potential audience, including people with disabilities, have a consistent user experience and are able to easily access your information. It's a human obligation to all of us to think about how we uplift this. Accessibility is a human right. It has to be intentional, and it has to be something that we all do,

so, create it with people in mind. Make it personal for you and also larger than you, because you never know what's going to happen to you or your friends or your family members. So, start out by doing it for other people and know you're also doing it for yourself.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, let's look at some numbers to help you understand how big the problem is and how big the opportunity really is. So, in Canada, 27% of Canadians identify as having a disability, according to a 2022 Statistics Canada report. And that's more than 8 million people. So, if your audience is people within Canada, this is the potential percent of the population that you can access by creating accessible marketing and communication. And around the world, according to the U.N., that number is 16% of the world's population or over 1.3 billion people. Now, according to the Web Aim Million Report, in 2024, 95.9% of the top million home pages on the internet have detectable accessibility issues.

And that number just takes my breath away. And it gets better every year, just ever so slightly. So, in 2023, the number was 96.3%. So, we've moved a whole 0.4% towards more accessible internet. And when you think about the companies and the organizations that are part of those top million home pages, that stat becomes even more surprising, I think, because it's easy to, you know, think that the big brands have it all figured out and that's clearly not the case. So, an inaccessible web contributes to isolation and anxiety and exclusion and results in an increasingly marginalized population.

The other thing that I really want you to think differently, more broadly about, disability, and in our society, we're really conditioned to be able to see disability as something that's visible.

I showed you a picture of my mom in a wheelchair.

In fact, 80% of disabilities are invisible, which means that they're not visible from the outside, yet they can affect a person's movement or senses or activities. So, think about signage for accessible parking or accessible bathrooms? We often see a symbol of a person in a wheelchair.

But 80% of disabilities are actually considered invisible. I want you to also think about disability as we age. So, as you get older, the chances of disability increase. So, by age 65, 38% of working age adults identify as disabled.

Kelly Thibodeau: So now let's talk about why accessible marketing matters.

Again, I'm really inviting you to connect emotionally, connect personally, understand some of the bigger picture about the numbers, but also come back to the idea why it really matters. So, for clients and companies, it's about expanding your reach. Access to 27% more of your audience, never mind we're so attentioned to in our society, so by creating more accessible communications, you have potential to expand your reach. You can also create a positive impact. For all that work, that good, good work that organizations are doing around expressing their values and being creating programs and practises on diversity, equity, and inclusion, having accessible marketing communications creates a positive impact. It can give you peace of mind because, again, you know the test is not just what you believe but the actions that you're taking, show that you're taking that action. It can enhance your brand.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, from a brand reputation perspective, if you want to create your brand reputation, create more accessible content, save money from lawsuits and fines, especially in the U.S. Legislation there has been in place for a lot longer but that's the only way that people have to complain. And certainly, as the legislation in Manitoba becomes enforced, there is an enforcement side of that as well. And then for society, you know, everyone can access your content, right, with that similar experience. It removes those barriers that people might be experiencing and creates equal opportunity, and it allows people to engage independently, and I like to think about it as giving people agency over their choices, and when you give someone agency over their choices, you have the impact or the potential to change their lives.

So, to go from someone having to maybe disclose personal information, they don't want to, or taking longer or not being able to do it at all, to do that independently.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, what is web accessibility? Well, if you attended the webinar yesterday, the session touched on that a little bit, but I'll build off of that. Web accessibility as defined by the web accessibility initiative is means that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. And more specifically, people can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the web and contribute to the web. So digital accessibility includes web accessibility, but it's also broader than that. So, it includes Apps or documents or other web technologies.

In my view, it includes social media as well. So, although you don't see the words social media in this definition, it is again about coming back to all of the possibilities of how somebody might interact with a company digitally and making sure that those are accessible. And accessibility is everyone's job.

So, I think that accessibility gets a bit of a bad rap of being boring or complicated or too much work. Potentially, something a web developer does before they publish content online and within the web ecosystem, this is what it really looks like. So, they're accessible, you want to have an intersection between accessible content and design and code, and it's the intersection of all those three that defines an accessible user experience. So, you might have the most accessible content as possible but if the design isn't accessible, if the code isn't accessible, it's not an accessible user experience. If you have one inaccessible pdf on your website, it's not an accessible user experience. So, there are account abilities across all three disciplines and it's important to be talking about it in terms of how information gets published and the processes that you might be following internally in terms of creating accessible content. So, it's an intersection of all those three things.

I also so I'm on a mission to really connect to the ideas of accessibility and creativity. This is important, exciting, creative work, and you work within constraints every day, whether they are brand colours, fonts, logos, different constraints, so accessibility is a constraint that can help you fuel your creativity and unleash it. You are here because you're helping to create a more inclusive and accessible society and you're contributing to digital equity so thank you so much for being here. And I know that sometimes it gets overwhelming but, again, I'll come back to this idea of follow your curiosity, start doing one or two things differently and keep talking about it, but come back to this idea of accessibility and creativity that really go hand in hand.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, let's look at a few different parts of accessibility.

Changing what we might perceive what disability is or isn't. This comes from the Microsoft inclusive design methodology, and it categorizes disability into a few different

categories, so permanent, temporary, and situational and there's a couple that are probably missing off this diagram, too, but this is a really good working visual.

Across touch, see, here and speak. So, someone that might have a permanent disability might have missing an arm so only has one arm. That's something that either was the result of an accident or something, an injury or something that they were born with that doesn't change over time. Someone who might be experiencing a temporary disability may have a broken arm as an example so maybe an arm injury. Think about could you use your mouse for your keyboard in the same way normally probably depending which arm is broken or all the time. Or if you're a new parent with a child who's been up crying all night and you finally got them to sleep and now you need to pay your bills, how might you do that while you're holding that crying baby? So also thinking about episodic disability, things that come and go, and of the intersection of disabilities. So as an example, someone who is Deaf and blind, right, would intersect a few different areas here, so just reminding yourself to think differently about disability, about accessibility, about who actually benefits from accessible content and it's a much broader pool of people. You might be asking yourself. The short answer is whatever way that works best for them, just like you or I might, as someone not currently experiencing disabilities. So, one way that people with disabilities might experience the internet is with modified equipment or special devices called assistive technology so something like a screen reader as an example, which reads web content out loud to people who are blind.

But also, people who have cognitive or learning disabilities, may also use screen readers. People with disabilities also may experience the internet without assistive technology, so if it works best to not have assistive technology as an example, people who are neurodiverse may not be using specialized devices. They may simply need a different experience.

They may also use the same assistive technology in a different way, so two people with the same disability may use the same assistive technology in a different way in whatever way works for them. Or with different versions or variations of devices so just like you can upgrade your phone, you can upgrade your assistive technology and it may depend on whether you have the budget or if you are ready to just think about, you know, how it can be difficult to do the same thing on a new phone, it might be more difficult to do the same thing on a different version of the assistive technology. So again, there isn't really one way, right.

Like when it comes to accessibility, there's no checked box at the end. Remember, this is about people and finding ways for people to have an equivalent experience. So again, like a really expansive view of what is disability, who benefits from accessible content and how the people with disabilities experience the internet.

Kelly Thibodeau: So, I also want to talk about language.

Because disability can be a sensitive topic, and I know you might feel nervous about getting it wrong, some groups prefer identity first language or disabled people.

Other groups prefer person first language, “Person with a disability” or “person who has a disability.”

So, there isn't really a right or wrong although from a company perspective, it's good to standardize on something. The Government of Canada has standardized on person first language, so “person with a disability.” But it really depends on the group or the individual that you're working with and what their preference is. So, the best thing to do is ask.

So, for today's presentation, you may hear me use those two terms interchangeably, and that's intentional, to let you know that there isn't a right or wrong.

But do make sure you're asking the person or group that you're working with and know that their personal perspective may or may not reflect the preference of a larger group.

Kelly Thibodeau: Integrate accessibility everywhere. So, every marketing place needs to be accessible. I often get questions: Does it apply here, does it not apply there, really wanting to understand where accessibility needs to be, and the answer is everywhere, because it benefits everyone. So, this means website and apps, it means videos, it means print material, it means graphic design, it means social media and podcasts and events, and this isn't an exhaustive list.

So, in everything, every part of marketing, communications whether that's internal or external, thinking about ability is a good idea because accessible and inclusive designs just means that you're creating tools that everyone can use instead of a select few. So, removing those barriers, removing those fixes, and the cost of remediating something after can be up to ten times higher than it is to create accessible content from the beginning.

And in some cases, remediating after the fact is impossible depending on the technology that's been used to create it.

Wendy Harrisko: Okay. So now we have our first poll.

I'm curious to know, for those who are attending, how would you rate your digital accessibility knowledge? So, if you could launch the poll, that would be great. So, we have answers from one to five.

Number one, this is completely new for me.

Number two, I've started to hear more about it.

Number three, I'm actively looking to learn more.

Number four, I'm ready to be a change maker. Or number five, I'm an advocate.

So, pick which one best describes where you're at in your digital accessibility journey. Once we've got the votes in, if you want to share that poll back with everybody. Okay.

So, we've got 39% in the "I'm actively looking to learn more" so that's really exciting.

As well as some that are really honest about where you're at, so if it's completely new for you or you're just starting to hear a little more about it, again, really glad you've chosen to spend some time this afternoon in the webinar and asking some questions. And those ready to be a change maker and advocate, welcome.

Like there are not enough people doing this work and talking about it so I'm excited to know that there's more excitement and enthusiasm for digital accessibility. Great, thank you.

Kelly Thibodeau: So now The Accessibility for Manitobans Act.

Again, I'm not going to get into too much around legislation. I'm not the expert. But it is an important part of the conversation. So, The Accessibility for Manitobans Act became law in December of 2013, and the Information and Communication Standard came into effect on May 1st, 2024, to address barriers faced by people accessing information including print, in person, on websites, and other forms. So, Manitoba's actually the second province to get accessibility legislation which is really exciting. And although some of the regulations may feel a little complicated, it's a really good thing in terms of creating a more inclusive society. So, the standard, which is the Information and Communications Standard, here are some of the compliance deadlines. So, Manitoba Government went first by complying by May 1st, 2023. We just passed the second compliance deadline for public sector organizations, libraries, and educational institutions and that was May 1st, 2024. And then for everybody else, May 1st, 2025, so although that may seem like a long time, it's really not, just shy of a year, that private sector, non-profit organizations, and small municipalities must comply.

And remember that not complying does carry that financial, legal, and reputational risk. So, starting those conversations now is a really good idea, no matter where you are.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is WCAG, which is an acronym for the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or WCAG. And they are developed through the World Wide Web Consortium, Web Accessibility Initiative, as well as individuals and organizations around the world to define how to make web content accessible to disabled people. So, these are an international standard. And they are often cited in legislation around the world.

So, there are different versions and levels of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

So, version 2.1 Level AA is the common standard and that is what is defined under the Accessibility for Manitobans Act Information and Communication Standards.

Version 2.2 is actually the current version, just released in October last year, and version 3.0 is being worked on, although it has not been released.

And then the levels of compliance go from "A" to double "A" to triple "A" and so AA is the first functional level of accessibility.

If you can get to AA for some of those success criteria, that's great but not necessarily responsive.

Kelly Thibodeau: I'm curious to know what's holding you back from creating accessible marketing and creations. So, our option here is number one, I'm not sure how or what to do or where to start.

Number two, it's not top of mind. Number three, it's too complicated.

Number four, I do but it's not consistent across my team. Or number five, you're challenged to fit it into your deadlines. And if you feel like there's something else, I certainly would invite you to share that in the chat if you'd like.

Kelly Thibodeau: Okay. And then Kenny, once we have those answers, if you want to share those back with everybody. We'll just give you a couple minutes there. Okay. All right. So, number one, not sure where to start, and I totally get that.

I hope that in today's session, you find a starting point and just keep moving, keep building forward from there. For some, it's not top of mind, yes.

If it's something new, it can often get forgotten about or sort of an oh, yeah type of a moment and reminder so that's very natural. Some feel it's too complicated.

Again, you know, and I'd definitely be curious to hear more about that.

Where it's not consistent across the team or maybe challenge to fit it into deadlines so thanks, everybody, for your participation. All right.

Kelly Thibodeau: So now let's get into some tips to help you create more accessible marketing and communications, and we're going to start with plain language and writing. So first, is to think about how do people read online, and the answer is we don't.

So again, coming back to this idea, when you're creating content, how do people read it or experience it or understand it, and we don't read. So, we skim text after the first few lines. We skip entire lines and even paragraphs. We scan for key words. You look for the big, important words that are sort of catching your attention, jumping around from

one point to another, getting distracted or abandoning it entirely. Sometimes I know for me, I start with the best intentions in wanting to read something online and I almost have to coach myself through it and remind myself, especially if it's scrolling on a little bit long, and so it's important that when you're writing content for marketing and communications, the first step in plain language is understanding how people read online and I mean they don't and how you can accommodate that instead. So, remember, this is how your audience reads, too, and here's a hard truth, they don't care about your content as much as you do. So plain language is about saving busy people time. It is about using intentional, clear, concise language that can be skimmed and understood quickly. It also is about using straightforward language without metaphors or figurative expressions or idioms so writing clear things like from buttons or links or navigation or other elements as well as copy. So, use shorter, more familiar words, avoid jargon or overused words, and remove unnecessary wordiness.

So, a good test for this might be to have somebody read your content that maybe is new to your organization or hasn't read it before and help you flag where there are opportunities to improve the writing. So, remember that on the web and in social, people are in a hurry, and they skim and scan and look for quick answers to their questions. So, you can help your readers quickly find what they need by sticking to plain language. So, use short paragraphs and sentences, short lists, and bullets to organize information. Using headings and subheadings.

And really making good use of clear space so that pages are easy to scan. So, if you're curious about how you can start to do this, there's a great App online called Hemingway and you can take either like a screen shot of this slide or note it down in your notes, is hemingwayapp.com, there's a free version and a paid version. So, this is a screen shot of it. And it uses highlights to tell you where there's opportunities to improve the writing. And what the grade level is as well as the word count. So, if you're working within a space where you know you have to stick to a particular word count, Hemingway will give that to you. You do generally want to aim for a grade 8 reading level but that of course would be dependent on the audience, so this readability analyzer gives you general ideas, but it doesn't know anything about your audience or the context that content is written in. So, the goal isn't to get to zero highlights in Hemingway, it's to give you some clues about where you could simplify the writing. So, everything from where there's too many adverbs or passive voice or some sort of language, look at those highlights. So, take a sample of your content, copy, and paste it into Hemingway app and get some information about how you can start to simplify the writing.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is heading levels. So, this applies to word documents, it applies to PowerPoints, it applies to web content, it applies to anything that uses a heading

level or a hierarchy can help people understand how the content is structured on the page.

So, heading one is the main page title, and you should only use one heading line per page means per web page in this example.

Heading line is also the major signal to google what your page content is about. Next, for a subheading of heading lines, use heading 2 and for a subheading of that, heading 3. So sequentially it would follow that order. So it's important to look at the built-in styles that are either in maybe your brand templates or document templates or if you're publishing your own content, say, through word press or square space or something like that, change the heading level attributes to match what you want to use esthetically rather than breaking that page hierarchy. Because screen readers can give people the option to experience web content by traversing only the headings, and then giving people the option to where they want to dig in deeper to read. So, if that heading structure does not match how the page is organized, then it's a bit of a mess.

People don't really know where to start, and again, same thing for anything that's public facing and you want to get found in search, this is also really important to help those search engine bots understand how your page content is structured. All right.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is link text. So first I'm going to ask for a little bit of like I'll say hands up. I know I can't see you and we can't see each other, but maybe a little self disclosure. Who's a member of the click here club? By that, I mean if you have links that are on your website or anywhere else and you're used to either using the word "here" or "click here" as the underlying link text, hands up for that. First, I'm going to say let's strike that out of the "click here" club. Next, "learn more." Thanks for those who are sharing reactions because that's really helpful as well. So, if you're used to using "learn more" as link text, as that underlying text, it can often become a bit of a habit that when you scan that web content, it's "learn more, learn more, learn more." So, let's get out of that habit. And then the last one that in my view is the five most wasted words on the internet, "click here to learn more."

So let me tell you why those things become a bit of a problem from both a user experience and an accessibility perspective. So, let's all just jump out of the click here, learn more and click here to learn more club.

Kelly Thibodeau: So I'd like to come back to this idea of a link is a promise, and what that means is that when someone clicks a link or those underlined words, the link text should match the destination, so longer link text is actually easier for people with motor disabilities so a link doesn't have to just be a single word. It can be a short phrase; in some cases, it could be a full sentence but likely not paragraphs. You're balancing

where it's helpful and where it's too much information. Also, make sure to make links a different colour than regular text and make sure that there's enough differentiation between the colour of links and the colour of text. So, it should be a different colour. Avoid using too many colours. Each colour should have a purpose because even if text is just a colour, people will still try to click it. They may still think it's a link. Also, underline links. So somewhere along the line journey, we started to kind of drop underlines from especially web content, and underlines are important visual cues that tell people what is a link so it's that combination of changing the colour and using the underline. So don't underline text that is not a link, because people will still try to click on it and it's frustrating. So, kind of go back to those conventions. And it's important, for people, as an example, who are colour blind may not be able to see the colour, but they can tell that text is underlined, then they would know that that's a link. Also change the colour of visited links. So, this is again something that is very helpful from a search engine perspective as well as an accessibility perspective. So people have the choice to just read links and, you know, if you could envision, if you're not currently experiencing a visual disability, if you can envision going click here, click here, click here, click here, click here and only reading that link text on a page, it doesn't tell me anything about the content.

Kelly Thibodeau: Think about the last time you tried to search for something and what you clicked on and where you landed and if you felt like you landed where you expected or you didn't. So, if you're going to have it, using words like click here and learn more, make yourself work harder by thinking about what's going to happen when somebody clicks that link, where are they going to land? And how could I make that text that they clicked match where they land so deliver on the promise and remember, a link is a promise. So, it can if you've fallen into that habit, make your brain work a little bit harder and use more descriptive link text.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is alternative text. So alternative text or alt text is to communicate the context or purpose of an image to a person who may not be able to see it because they are using assistive technology. It maybe they have low or limited internet bandwidth, or they have high internet or email security settings. So, if that didn't load, how would someone know what that was trying to express if they didn't have the ability to see it, so alt text is something that is across the board. All of your documents, PowerPoints, excel, pdfs, web content, social media content all use alt text to describe something to someone who may not access it, and this is a really good resource in terms of how to write alt text and if you're not currently in the habit of writing alt text, it can just take some time and practice to build that habit.

If you're working as part of a team inside of an organization, have some standards for alt text and so make sure that that makes its way into your style guide. So, when do you need alt text?

Like I said, you need it for nearly every social media image and almost all website images as well as tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, and diagrams. You don't need it for decorative images on the web.

So, think about things like line work, anything that really doesn't have a purpose to communicate something, and you don't need alt text for emojis because they come with their own descriptive text.

Here's an example about how alt text is really tied to the purpose of what you're trying to communicate through the image. And that's why if you're the person creating or writing content, you are in the best place to determine how what you're trying to communicate through that image. So, in this picture of a cat, I might write alt text that is about the cat if that's the purpose of the content around it. So, I could say something like joey, an adorable black and orange calico cat with green eyes relaxing on a couch with one white front paw tucked under.

Or if the content is about the couch, I could instead say cat sitting on a custom made soft brown suede sofa with a green cushion slightly offset in the background. And if I wanted to talk about the wall, I could instead say cat sitting on a couch in front of a beige wall painted in our most popular warm neutral tone October mist, Benjamin Moore 2022 colour of the year. So, you're balancing being descriptive enough that someone could understand what it is you're trying to communicate. If the alt text for this image was simply cat, it doesn't really tell me enough about what the purpose of that image is. So, thinking about how you could communicate that same message to someone who can't see the image.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is colour contrast and fonts. And this is one of the biggest accessibility issues on the web today. It tends to be in the number one spot in that web aimed top million report that I referenced earlier. Colour contrast is the difference between colours and the light and the dark and an accessible colour pallet is an important design consideration. You need a 4.5:1 contrast ratio for normal text and if that's a new context, I'll talk about some tools, too. And 3:1 contrast ratio for large text described as 14 points or more. For example, on the slide, with a blue background and white, the word good written in white, that's good colour contrast and the bad in red over a green background is an example of a bad contrast. You might not at first glance see the difference between those two which is why it's important to check the colour contrast and understand what are the colour combinations within your brand palette that are

accessible and are not accessible. So, this also applies to links, icons, alerts, and other types of information that might be communicated visually.

And here's a chart, a couple of different charts, that are sort of high level but do the job. So, on the left side, there's a grid showing red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, black, white, and grey colours in columns. The chart then compares those colours against each other to give you an idea of good and poor colour contrast. Again, a little visually overwhelming, but it gives you a bit of a sense of what that means when we talk about colour contrast. And then on the right, we have a colour palette chart from Harvard business school that shows contrast ratios against different colour combinations. So, both of these tools are publicly accessible, if you're curious to look at them, but it provides that palette of contrasting colours and also filters them by the levels, by a, aa, and aaa and it's an example what you could do within your own brand style guide. So, for tools, one tool that I would recommend, there are lots of different colour contrast checker tools online, but one through Web Aim is a good one to use because you can use an eye dropper to pick the exact colour that you want to put into the tool. So, you enter either the hex codes or the colour of the foreground and the background and it calculates the ratio. So, in this example with a blue foreground and a white background, it's saying there's a contrast ratio of 8.1:1 with a green border around it meaning it's met those contrast ratios.

And an example of where it would pass at normal text and large text. So, this can be an interesting exercise to go in and put in your brand colours and see what the combinations are that meet those contrast ratio guidelines.

Kelly Thibodeau: Next is fonts and text size.

So, it's important to use plain fonts that are easy to read and have a high contrast or a black background. So, in the diagram or in the image on this slide, there is an example of two letter FS, capital letter FS, and one is a serif font, everything in the red circle shows the little tails around the font. And those are harder to read online where a font like the capital "F" without the little tails is easier to read, so choose the larger, more recognizable fonts.

Avoid scripty fonts like the ones underneath with the red line through them, the two examples of those fonts with letter "A."

Avoid all caps because it's harder to read so you can use all caps in certain spots but avoid it for large chunks of text because it makes it harder to read. And don't use those decorative or special fonts.

Kelly Thibodeau: Let's talk about A.I. Everybody wants to talk about A.I. These days, and it's important to bring it into the conversation around creating more accessible

marketing and communications. So, here's the scoop... A.I. Can help you create more accessible content.

Can you load an image into ChatGPT and have it give you alt text or a description?

Yes, you could do that. But remember that A.I. Analyzes those images in isolation, not in context. It doesn't understand who it's for, where it's being used, and even if you create the greatest ChatGPT prompt, remember it's only a human that understands that context and emphasis so it can be a good place to start.

If this is something new, writing alt text as an example, you could use a tool like ChatGPT to help you get a start, to break through some of that writer's block, but it's not a great place to finish.

Also, A.I. Logic and data sets are trained based on what's uploaded to them, so the machine is not thinking like a human. So again, it can give you a good starting point. Also, if you use automated alt text in social media platforms, they're less helpful. Instagram is quite famous for generating alt text that says may contain an image of two people and a dog. That's not very helpful.

Kelly Thibodeau: I also think something that's really important when it comes to AI. That we don't hear a lot of people talking about is you have to be aware of the lack of diversity among the people who shape and build those A.I. Language models. So again, what's being influenced in those large language models is coming from a pretty privileged point of view and not necessarily including those diverse voices and it's really important that when you're doing work to create accessible marketing and communications, that you work with people who have lived experience with disability. And accessibility benefits everyone.

Kelly Thibodeau: I've said this a few times and this diagram does a nice job illustrating what that means. So, in the top left, we have equality.

Three people watching a baseball game using the same size boxes to try to see over the fence. And then we move to equity so instead, we stack the boxes so that people with different heights have the same access to viewing the ballgame. In the lower left, how about liberation.

Why don't we just remove the barrier altogether so that everybody can see? And inclusion, including everybody, so everybody feels like they're part of it. So, remember, accessibility is not just for people with disabilities. It's for everyone. It will enhance your usability, it will improve innovation, it will improve the user experience, increase your reach, it will future proof your business, and it includes everyone.

So again, I come back to this idea of just challenging your own pre conceived ideas about what accessibility is, who it's for, what disability is, who that's for, and coming back to this isn't about adding a little bit more to connect to a far reaching fringe within your audience, there are people with disabilities and people who have accessed these within your audience today.

So as an example, someone who's sitting in a doctor's office and doesn't want to use audio and video benefits from those captions just as much as someone who has a hearing difficulty and can't listen to them.

So how to get started.

So, accessibility is more than your location. It's easy to think about physical accessibility in terms of maybe ramps or buttons or things like that. But everything that you do can and should be accessible. So, start by hiring people with disabilities.

And engage with the community. Train your in-house teams and apply those best practises.

So, understand what the requirements are under the legislation and then talk to people with lived experience because it will change your perspective. It absolutely will.

Ask online where are the forums? I'd say connect with me, I'd be more than happy to have a conversation about where you're at with accessible marketing and communications, and if I can't answer your question directly, I would connect you with someone who can.

Kelly Thibodeau: Take some courses. I'm going to talk about some courses I'm offering in a minute. Join some forums, invite people with disabilities into the conversation because it's really important that we include them. And how to champion accessibility. So, start talking about it and keep talking about it. Like I said, if you're the voice in your company who is constantly talking about accessibility, it can start to get really tiring, and you might feel like you're just saying the same thing over and over and over again, but it's important that you start talking about it and keep talking about it because you'll encourage other people to start talking about it as well.

Review your tool sets, so look at your style guides and brand guides and your marketing personas. Make sure that people with disabilities are represented within those tools.

Review your processes. If accessibility is, oh, yeah, we forgot to add captions at the end of a video project, see if you can back that up and start planning for captions at the start or some of those other accessibility features like described audio. Engage internal disability employee resource groups if you have them internally within your company, ask them what it's like to work with your organization to buy products and services from

your organization, listen to their feedback. Ask proactively and don't wait for people to complain first. And align accessibility with your company goals. So, where you can connect the dots and have accessibility be part of those strategic initiatives within your organization, that is going to make a stronger business case for accessibility and it will have accountability across the organization, not just with the people who are responsible for creating content.

Kelly Thibodeau: So now I'd like to play a little video just to help you imagine a world of possibility in terms of why accessibility and what's important. And I'm sharing my sound so I'm just going to set that up and have you take a listen.

[music]

Video: People think that having a disability is a barrier.

[music] but that's not the way I see it. You can catch up with friends. Ready? You can capture a moment with your family. (Small face). (Focus).

[music] and you can start the day bright and early. You can take a trip to somewhere new.

[music] Three miles to the summit. You can concentrate on every word of a story. A bird began to sing. Jack opens his eyes.

[music] You can take the long way home.

[breathing] [music] or edit a film, like this one.

[music] When technology is designed for everyone... It lets anyone do what they love. Including me.

Kelly Thibodeau: I hope that that video inspired you to think about accessibility in a different way than before you started this presentation. And like I said, remember this is about people, and it's important that we bring people back into this conversation. We start with this conversation. And practice makes permanent.

So, this is a picture of a letter board that hangs in my office, and it's a reminder to me, and I share it as a reminder to you, accessibility is a practice. And I'll tell you a little bit more about me. So as a former concert violinist, I can tell you that the idea of practice involves tearing things apart and studying small pieces and not expecting to play it all at once or getting it right the first time. So, remember, it's progress over perfection. And that small starts are better than not starting at all. And no single person has all the answers. That learning, unlearning and course correcting are all part of our collective journeys. So don't let perfection get in the way. Take action and keep taking action. And be willing to not get it right the first time and maybe even a second time. Start with your

personal social media accounts as a place to start, right? Don't wait until you feel like you've got it all perfect and sewed up. And I'll also say, just to connect back to my mom, so remember my mom, Marty? She loved doing simple things like playing solitaire on the computer or catching up with friends by email. And I imagine how she could have felt intentionally counted in instead of accidentally counted out. And you are part of the change that can help make that happen. So, thank you again for your time and attention.

Kelly Thibodeau: I also want to invite you to explore some courses that I have available so the accessible content classes starting in June 2024 so in the next couple of weeks. You can use the code MAAW15 to save 15% on your registration. By going to my website at squarelyaccessible.com/training or using the GR code on this slide. On June 10th, it's the accessible word documents class. On June 11th and 12th, the social media and website content accessibility class. So, it's over two half days and it's five hours in total. And then the last is accessible PowerPoint class on June 13th. And sign up for my newsletter, and I would be more than happy to continue the conversation, if you have questions, and just learn more about where you're at on your accessibility journey. So that's the end of the presentation. We've got some time for Q & A now, so I'll ask Wendy to help me out with that.

Wendy Harrisko: Yeah, thank you, Kelly. That was a very insightful presentation. I think everybody got some good take aways and there's some great reminders some of the tools you're sharing throughout there. So maria, do you have any questions for Kelly that came up in the chat?

Maria Ferraro: Yes. Great presentation, that was really informative. How do you make graphic design accessible?

Kelly Thibodeau: So, for graphic design, the first place is if you're starting from scratch, you can use accessible colour palette generators to decide what are your primary and secondary colours. If you're working within defined brand standards already, you can look at those colours, again understand what are the accessible colour combinations so whereas an example could you use white text over top of that colour or black text over top of that colour or what's the contrast between two different colours. There may be some colours that need to just be either darkened slightly or lightened up a little bit. Orange is particularly problematic, believe it or not. There is a whole website dedicated to why orange is not an accessible colour, even though it's very popular for brands. So again, there's no right or wrong, there's no "yes" or "no," it's a matter of testing and finding out what are the right colour combinations and including that information in your brand style guide so that everybody has access to it. I hope that answers the question.

Participant: Great, yes, it does.

Maria Ferraro: The next question is I am hearing the word "exceptionalities" used of disabilities, I'm sure it is only a matter of time that the jargon will change. What are your thoughts?

Kelly Thibodeau: Yeah, so the thing I've heard is that disability is not a bad word and so often things like exceptionalities, special needs, differently abled, some other terms come in because I think maybe people feel like they're conscious of word choice.

But I either intentionally follow content creators with lived experience with disability and I hear that over and over and over again, that disability is not a bad word, so use disability or disabled and, like I said, ask someone their personal preference about whether they like to be referred to as a disabled person or a person with a disability.

Participant: Great, thank you.

Maria Ferraro: And someone is asking if arial is the preferred font?

Kelly Thibodeau: It's not so much a specific font, it's the choice between sans-serif and serif. There are distinctions between some accessible fonts, so it's called I think it's like maybe Open Accessible, I'll have to look up the exact name, but where you have if all of those things end up looking the same, like a capital "I," a small "i", and a number 1. If they all look like a single stroke, then that's where it can start to get confusing and be problematic. So, I would look at fonts that have a better range within those similar letters. It doesn't always have to be arial but if that's the only choice, I would go with arial.

Participant: Okay, thank you.

Maria Ferraro: There are a few hands up. Sara Gallant, do you have a question?

Sarah: No, I don't, sorry.

Maria Ferraro: Okay. Lesia, do you have a question?

Lesia: No, I didn't think my hand was up.

Maria Ferraro: Yeah, your hand was up. Okay, I'll just remove that. How about Darlene Hedgecock?

Darlene Hedgecock: No, I didn't have a question either.

Maria Ferraro: Okay. Sorry about that. And Heather Smith, do you have a question or just your hand's up?

Heather Smith: I don't have a question.

Maria Ferraro: Okay. Strange. Maybe hands are just going up. And Maddie, did you have a question?

Maddie: I don't but thank you.

Maria Ferraro: Okay. Then that's it. I also see there's some things being shared in the chat. I know not all the attendees can see, so we can definitely take a copy of those and distribute them after the webinar. Thank you for those that shared them. And there's a few questions about the PowerPoint and the video recording. Those will be on the accessibilityMB.ca website, shortly after the webinar, and if you can't find it, you can just email us at mao@gov.mb.ca.

And I don't think there's any other questions.

Wendy Harrisko: Great. Thanks Maria and thanks, Kelly. I'd also like to add, too, if you want to sign up for our newsletter *Accessibility News*, we will have an article in there saying when this webinar is posted on our website and where you can go to find that. So that just about wraps up today's presentation. Thank you to everybody for joining us today for this presentation. I'd like to thank Kelly, the interpreters, and our captioners for doing such a wonderful job today. And I hope everybody enjoyed the presentation and got some great take aways. So, the celebrations do continue for the rest of the week for Manitoba Access Awareness Week. So, we do have an exciting presentation tomorrow which will take place from 1:00 to 2:30, and that will be presented by Andrew Boardman of Man Overboard, and he will talk about the WCAG requirements and working with web developers to create web accessibility and accessible websites. And then on Thursday, to wrap up the week, we do have another presentation, again from 1:00 to 2:30, and this one will be presented by Lisa Snider from Access Changes Everything and she will be talking about digital accessibility audits and why they're important and how to keep your website updated once you have that audit done.

So, with that, thank you for joining us. And we value your participation in these, and thanks for making this Manitoba Access Awareness Week a success.

Thanks for joining us. Thank you.