

# Ramping Up Your Web Accessibility - Accessible Web Breakout Session Transcript

*Peter Jewett*

All right. I'm going to get this started.

All right. Hi, everyone. I am Peter Jewett and the Founder and CEO of Accessible Web.com. So we are a web accessibility software services and educational resources company located in Burlington, Vermont. And we've got team members all over the US and Canada. We work with companies all over the globe. so I work, with a wide variety of companies intentionally.

It's one of our big goals to make web accessibility accessible. to us, that means making it affordable, making it easy to understand. I dare say maybe even making it fun. and we're really trying to focus on, you know, we know a lot of folks are doing this. A lot of companies are doing this because of compliance reasons.

ADA lawsuits, AODA lawsuits. but we always try to really focus on the positive side. At the end of the day, what we're doing is making websites, web experiences better for folks with disabilities. And really, if we approach this from a standpoint of universal design, we can make digital experiences and the web better for everyone. so even if you don't have a disability, you might someday, if you get older and, when you do web accessibility correctly, it it has so many different impacts.

it might help folks that, you know, our lower vision, folks that use screen readers, various assistive technologies and, it's just a lot of meaningful impacts. and doing it with an approach of universal design. So today, the presentation we're doing is ramping up your web accessibility. And this is going to be nine things that we do as we work with clients to improve their web accessibility.

the first five things are items you can do on your own. So, you know, we understand that sometimes accessibility comes out of the blue. you might get a demand letter for the first time. Or, you know, you might have just learned about this from a colleague, and maybe you don't necessarily have the budget available to get it.

get up and running with a company quickly. But, we do offer services here where we can help you on a monthly basis to get rolling and we're hoping to deliver some information here today so that you can take off. we'd love it if you call us, but you can take off after this webinar and, hopefully have some actionable things you can do to start improving web accessibility, at no or low cost.

So the five things we're going to focus on today. again, these align with how we would engage with clients as part of our ally partner program support services. but the first thing we're going to go into is creating an accessibility statement. Next, we'll talk about assigning an accessibility advocate at your organization. Third, we'll talk about doing an initial scan, getting a baseline with automated tools for assembling your team, and then working to hit 100 of 100 automated accessibility score.

So one of the big things that we focus on here is progress over perfection. a lot of companies we talked to our initially overwhelmed by all the work they have to do. This is a, this is a big climb. there's there's a lot to learn. and you have to allocate resources. Time. you know, get training and education.

So because so much of this industry is focused around Ada lawsuits, it tends to be this really big focus on it has to be perfect. before I want to talk about it, I have to get perfect as soon as I can get there. And, you know, by all means, you can upgrade a website to be 82.1 conforming.

and you can, you can put in the time and get to a spot where I would call a website fully Ada compliant, but, it's more about the journey than it's about the destination. And so we'd encourage you to just get started. There's, it's never going to be fully, fully perfect. There's an, infinite amount of different abilities, disabilities, assistive technologies, browsers, devices.

So the same way you would never say you UX is perfect. You never say your accessibility is perfect, but you can start making really incremental changes immediately that are going to have positive impacts on your users and produce a better experience, especially for folks that are, have disabilities. So so let's focus on the positive here. And, you know, one thing I always say is, you know, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago.

Second best time is today. So, let's get it started. So first thing we always recommend to do first is creating an accessibility statement on your website. So usually this would be a page on the, link in the footer, maybe next to your, privacy policy terms and conditions is where you usually see it. We'd recommend making it something that can be found multiple ways.

So, you know, ideally you would use the term accessibility accessibility statement so that folks can easily do a find on the page and find this link. And, the statement should be transparent, public facing honest. We see a lot of companies that have accessibility statements that are maybe, overly optimistic, embellishing maybe the levels of, of accessibility that have been implemented a bit.

But it's okay to be honest on this. It's okay to say you're working on it. You don't need to say you're 100% perfect, or not have an accessibility statement because you're not perfect. So usually, you can browse the web, find a variety of these. We have an accessibility statement generator on our website that you can input some, some, fields and get a starting point.

But the first part of your statement should be an organizational commitment to inclusion, and, to making accessible experiences for users. So be honest. you know, say it's part of your mission. and make sure folks know that you want them to be heard, that you want them to be using, your website and interacting with your company digitally.

Second, I would recommend putting, the details of the accessibility features and the standards that you're going after. right. A bit of a technical synopsis on what parts of your website you've worked on. this is where you probably want to say that you're focusing on WCAG 2.1 or 2.2 as your target. Again, don't overstate it. It's okay to say you're working on improving based on WCAG guidelines.

Third thing you really want to put in here is and this is really, really important, you want to put the contact information or reporting accessibility issues. So this is a big part of Ada compliance and Aoda compliance. And and it's a big part of just having a mechanism by which your users, if they're experiencing barriers on your website, can, can get around them and ideally get them resolved for future users.

So you should put contact information. some folks set up an email address like accessibility at accessible Web.com and, definitely you should put a phone number. So there's an alternative way, an immediate way to get in touch. And some folks put mailing addresses. I don't think that you know, many people are going to mail a letter, but, I have seen that before.

And make sure that the contact email address, the phone number, make sure these are monitored. We see so many websites that have email addresses, that someone put up, and they've long been abandoned. No one's monitoring them. And, if there's anything more aggravating for users and hitting a barrier that they can't get past on a website that's preventing them from accessing your goods or services.

it's reporting that issue and and never hearing back. So provide contact information, make sure it's up to date. Make sure. I'll get into this on the next slide. Make sure someone's responding to it. And then you can update your accessibility statement over time. Like use this as a place to celebrate the work you've been doing. you know, as you're improving, you can put different milestones.

You could put third party partners you're working with, like accessible web, so, you know, trainings that you're doing. So use it as a spot to let people know that you're really working on this on an ongoing basis. It's something you should be celebrating and proud of. It isn't something you should be keeping in a closet until it's perfect.

Okay, assigning an accessibility advocate. So this gets into that person at your organization that's going to respond to those requests for accommodation. so number one, you should make sure that this person is trained up, that they understand their responsibility, that they know they have to, reply, answer the phone immediately. And, sometimes this is, owner of the company.

You know, this is small and medium businesses here today. So, and might be the owner. It might be, you know, for bigger company, it might be customer service, having a person or multiple people trained up to handle this. just make sure that whoever is responding, knows what their responsibilities are. And what those responsibilities are is if someone reports a barrier that they're experiencing, the first thing you want to do is provide them with an accommodation.

Provide them with an alternative way to access your goods or services. So it might be helping them to set up a tee time at your golf course via the phone, or helping them to place an order on the phone or, you know, get that restaurant reservation that they couldn't sign up for. Additionally. So the first thing you should do is make sure you're providing accommodation, make them know that they are heard and that you are wanting to do business, and that you're going to go out of your way to make that happen.

This is a digital barrier. that's not ideal, but let's still make sure they can get access, to whatever they're trying to do with your organization. And then second is to have a discussion. you know, you might want to ask first before you start diving into the details of what barrier they experience. But in our experience, most folks are happy to discuss the barrier they encountered.

happy to work with you to eliminate it for future users. And so ask if they're willing to discuss the barrier, and then you can get into things like what assistive technology they might be using, what, what page they found it on, what process? On that page they were running into issues with. And you want to try to get as much detail as possible so that your web team can replicate the issue in the future.

And so that, you know, you can you can show them that you're providing the accommodation and eliminating the barrier for future users. And if you really want to go above and beyond, you know, let them know after it's been remediated. Let them know, give them a call back and say, hey, thank you. I don't know, give them a gift card or something.

let them know that you appreciate them bringing it to your attention. And this just goes a really, really long way. So this accessibility advocate and this accessibility statement are a big part of Ada compliance. the premise of these lawsuits that are happening and, you know, they're they're legitimate and they are that people cannot access your goods or services.

and that because they have no ability to report the issue, they are filing a demand letter. They're going to sue you. so if you have the mechanisms in place to allow them to request an accommodation, if you are providing that accommodation and you are eliminating the barrier, and if you can use a tool to, you know, keep that paper trail centralized.

that's, that's part of what Accessible Web Ramp does. you're going to be in a really, really good spot in a really good defensible position. So the next thing, is scanning your website with an automated tool. So there's automated tools out there. Ax Corps way for probably the big ones. Our systems use Ax Corps. we use that because, it's open source and it's really widely used

and other tools so you can apples to apples comparison with things like Google lighthouse and the automated tools.

You can hit a button on the extension and any browser scan page and they're going to find automated issues. you know, find accessibility failures that a computer can detect. So it's really important to note that these automated scanners can only catch about 35% of the WCAG success criteria failures that exist on a web page. they are not an end all, be all, but they are very handy tool for identifying quickly, identifying efficiently, identifying accessibility issues that you can start to fix.

so they can look for things like, alt tags on an image, but they're shortcomings because they can't necessarily detect whether an image is information or decorative and therefore should have an alt tag. They're also not quite in a spot where they can tell. Is the alt tag, sufficient to accurately describe the image? So they're a good starting point.

they can help you really identify, a baseline of where your website's at so that you can start to make the case for other folks in your organization if this is something you need to work on. And, they're super efficient way to to start making meaningful progress. So what we'd recommend here is scan your website. accessible web branch will allow you to scan your entire website.

We have 14 day free trials of our software, and in just your website will crawl through it or monitor a site map dot XML file. We'll scan every single page on your website, and we will then provide you with the accessibility, the automated accessibility score for each page. And we'll even provide you with a list of exactly what needs to be done.

our system basically finds the failures and element combinations on each page, and then it looks across all the pages, and it creates a prioritized list based on how frequent an element failure pairing is and how critical it is. So, with accessible web ramp, I'm sure our other tools might be able to do it as well.

You can get a really quick baseline that can help drive the conversation. as you talk to other folks in your organization. Which gets us to assembling your team. All right, there's there's going to be work to be done. There's no such thing as an accessibility solution that you can just install, and it's going to upgrade your website in five minutes.

you know, I or whatever other companies are selling. it's it's borderline snake oil. Someone needs to do the upgrades on your website. So we'd recommend, depending on your the size of your organization, you might talk to your web design agency. You might talk to your web design team. but we'd recommend trying to get together a group of folks that are interested in working to upgrade, the website.

And this is going to require designers, content creators, maybe QA developers, for sure. so, so find those folks and what we found is, especially as we get into larger organizations, but really,

in any organization, it's likely you have someone that is just going to be drawn to this or a group of people that are just going to be drawn to this work.

So you might have some, you know, negative nancys that this is just another thing they don't want to deal with. You know, this is an annoying, thing. Why do we have to deal with these frivolous lawsuits? But, every time we've worked with an organization, we find at least one and typically a handful of folks that are drawn to this work.

And it might be because they had a family member with a disability. it might, you know, maybe a friend with a disability, maybe have a disability themselves. And, you know, oftentimes it's folks that just are curious about learning a new skill set, have that level of empathy, and want to improve user experiences for everyone.

So, have some meetings, have some discussions, maybe set up a slack channel, and, and see if you can find those folks that are going to help to work to upgrade, the website and really get, you know, this off the ground and up and running. And then you should also try to find an executive sponsor. So this is going to take some resources.

And you know we're talking to small and medium businesses. And executive sponsor might be the owner might be the marketing director. But try to find someone that's got some sort of control over the purse strings so that they can allocate some budget allocation resources to this. because it is going to take some time. It's going to take some work to do this properly.

so you need to have some, support from the top if it's going to be something that you can do well and do on a sustained basis. All right. So then you've got your team assembled. Then we'd recommend trying to achieve a 100 of 100 automated score and again, 100 of 100 automated score. It's about 35% of WCAG success criteria.

In order to be fully Ada compliant and WCAG conforming, you need to do manual audits and some testing. Do that other 65%. But we found that achieving 100 of 100 automated score across your entire website is an excellent milestone, to hit for a variety of reasons. one reason is that starting to work on these automated issues is going to give you a really good idea of who's your team capable of working on this?

Is your agency capable of upgrading the website? do you have the technical skills that are required to do this work? The second thing you might discover is that there are some foundational decisions that were made, as you started building this website. So maybe it's on a drag and drop website builder that doesn't provide you with the necessary controls to do things like, you know, change colors or, put all tags on images, put transcripts on video.

So sometimes there can be some, you know, core decisions that were made when a website was built that are going to cause some headaches throughout the process. the other thing is, if you're successful in hitting 100 or 100 score. And again, ramp makes this really easy. Most

websites, they might have hundreds of pages, but if you can distill those errors down, a lot of the issues are going to be in the header in the footer.

And, maybe a product details page for a Shopify e-commerce site. So there's a lot of issues that if you fix them once in one place, in the template files that that's going to cascade across the whole website. So, using ramp, we found that even large medium to large websites, that can look really intimidating at first.

Turns out there's only, you know, 40 to maybe a less than 100 issues that you need to solve. And we put it right in a prioritized list so that you can make the biggest impact updates first and then cascade into, issues. That might be a single problem on a single page. So get to 100 of 100. and and the other thing with this benchmark is that 100 of 100 automated accessibility score, again, is going to go a long way towards putting you in a defensible position, against lawsuits.

So, 100 of 100 score on your website does not happen automatically. It shows that you are putting in work that you have, that you have dedicated time and resources to making it accessible experience. And, a lot of the lawyers that are cruising around, maybe filing some of these frivolous lawsuits, they're just looking for soft targets.

And if they find a website with an accessibility statement, 100 of 100 score their. You know, I can't guarantee this, but there's a good chance they're going to go elsewhere, and try to find a company that is just blindly unaware or intentionally ignoring these accessibility requirements. So getting to a 100 100 score, something that's going to help you legally, it's going to tell you a lot about the state of your website and your team's ability to take the next steps.

And, the other pieces, it's going to help you monitor your website. So using ramp, if you get to 100 of 100 score, our system scans your website automatically every week. And when issues get introduced, we ping the different team members that are in ramp or send them a notification via email and we'll say, hey, we found some problems, and you can get in and you can go and, fix those issues and maintain that score over time.

So if you get to that milestone, it's really easy milestone to maintain. So past that, though, what happens next? this is where I would definitely recommend engaging with an accessibility services company like Accessible Web. once you get past that, 35% automated tools can identify things start to get, considerably more expensive. The reason for this is that where initially we had a computer that scanning a website and, automatically finding problems, Ramp has a library of solutions built into it.

Your team just gets in and fixes stuff, verifies it's fixed with a a quick re scan of that page when you get into the next steps to cover that final 65%, it's going to require manual WCAG auditing. and usability testing are typically the two next things we would recommend in that order. So manual audits you know, we try to keep them as affordable as we can.

By no means are they like huge moneymakers for us. but we need to go through every single success criteria that's relevant on a representative sample of your website's pages. And so there's situations, like an e-commerce site, on Shopify, you'd want to audit the header and footer. You'd want to audit the home page. You want to audit your collections page.

maybe that's the same as search results. You'd want to audit your product details page. Then check out my account. Maybe your store locator, your blog, your newsletter page. So, so every one of those audits, whether you do it with an accessibility company or whether you do it in-house, it's going to take time. It takes us about 3 to 5 hours to audit a full page and thoroughly cover every WCAG success criteria and come up with remediation tasks, for each failure that we find.

So what you want to do at this point is you want to start making some decisions. depending on the lifecycle of your website and depending on how well that first, sprint to 100 of 100 automated score went, it might make sense to think about rebuilding a website from scratch. maybe you don't want to keep that old legacy code, because it was a struggle to get to 100 of 100.

so there's a lot of situations we found where doing an audit and remediating the issues that are uncovered from the audit, it's makes more sense just to, like, start from scratch. it could be like a third to a half of a total website rebuild with accessibility baked in from the ground up. one of my real world analogies for this is, we're in Burlington, Vermont, in the northeast.

I love historic buildings, but, if you have a historic building and you're trying to make it accessible, you've got to figure out how to get an elevator bolted on. You've got to figure out how to get a ramp out front and get the hallways widened and have some Ada accessible bathrooms, get rid of the stairs or have alternatives to all the stairs.

There's just a lot of things that are going to go into upgrading a building, and oftentimes it just makes sense to build a building from the ground up to be a lot more cost effective. It's going to be a lot better product if you just build it from the ground up with accessibility built in from the start. So so as you get to this point, you're really going to need to make some decisions.

and you know, accessible web can certainly help you with this. So, the next four steps that we would do, as part of our services, after or, you know, we can help guide you through these first four, our first five, items that I went through previously. But we always try to start with, like, a two year accessibility plan.

figure out where you're at, take an inventory of where your website's at. where's your team at? How are people feeling about this? What do budgets look like? Let's come up with a plan to get you across the finish line. get you, you know, fully compliant, fully conforming, within as quickly as possible. But at least within two years, we'll start to train your team.

So we have accessible Web Academy, we have webinars, we'll do office hours. And, you want to get your team comfortable with web accessibility? a lot of times, coming up with all sorts of analogies, but, it's just like, you know, if you don't train your team to write accessible code and give them the tools they need to create accessible code and designs, and you start trying to fix issues.

You, you basically have a boat that's full of holes, and it's great that you're bailing the water out of it, but, the the errors are just going to keep on coming in. So we always try to train first, or train while we're auditing so that we can eliminate the new issues being introduced. while we are fixing the issues that already exist.

And then the next thing we would do is a manual audit. Like I said, we'll find a representative sample of pages on the website. We have a process where we'll go through and do, you know, check for every single success criteria and complete remediation tasks for your team. Normally folks, when they sign up with us, they have us do the initial audit.

it gives you a level of confidence that all the issues were uncovered properly. and it also, you get the benefit that our team will write remediation instructions for you. So we'll cover detailed, instructions with screenshots, code snippets on how to fix the issues that we find. And then, we'll work alongside your team to verify that they fix the issues correctly.

So. So it's difficult to beat the value that we provide when you get to the manual auditing step. just because our team, our specialists, are doing it all day long, we can do it quickly. We can do it efficiently. it's the main thing that that team is doing. And then finally, we do some UX testing, and we recommend UX testing after auditing, because if you do it too early, if you just throw a screen reader user on your website and start to try to address the barriers that they find, you start, treating the symptoms and not the underlying illness.

So WCAG is intentionally built as a broad based standard. the assistive technologies are using it. The browsers are using it. If we can make your website, your web app, use it. following those best practices, things should communicate with each other really well. And then the UX testing becomes a polishing step. It becomes, okay, how can we make some, nuanced upgrades to the UX so that assistive technology users are having a really awesome experience?

But generally, if you've done the manual auditing, well, they're going to have an experience where they can get through a website. So we have a couple of, you know, tools, services, educational resources. And we're going to send this out, you know, after the, after the event today, it might be tomorrow or making sure that the, PDF is, accessible before we send it out, you'll also get an email from us today.

feel free to set up a meeting with me. It'll have a link right in there. I'm happy to talk to anyone attending today or anyone watching the the recording. to help you figure out what a plan looks like. But basically, we have our ally center that's part of ramp that can help you create an accessibility statement.

it has a place to assign accessibility, advocate those issues, flow right into, ramp. We have our automated platform ramp, our ally partner program, where we can start to, get your whole team together, and support them as you're moving through that two year plan of how to upgrade. And then I'm running out of time, so I'm going to breeze through this, but feel free to check it out.

we also have a variety of different, services and academy offerings, so, yeah, for free to check this out when you get the deck from us and, keep an eye in inboxes, you'll get an email, like I said. And I'd be happy to talk to any one of you, following up on this event today, but I want to say thank you to [accessibility.com](https://accessibility.com).

Mark and Lori and the whole team. and you know, just want to really reiterate this. This is a process, but it shouldn't be something that you're overwhelmed by. Just got to get started. And, you know, with the right partner like accessible web, we can we can get you up and running and get you going. All right. Thank you.