MARK WALKER:  Hello everyone.

So as you know he it is global accessibility awareness day.  If, like me, you've been tracking what is going on, you've seen there are lots of events going on around the world today, and we're joining in with that.  We've got an hour-long session of talks, what we've done is, Robin and I, Robin is the head of digital inclusion at AbilityNet.

We've chatted to people, we'll have a little intro in a moment.  We've chatted to people, got some feedback from experts, and we've put them together as sound files which we're then going to play, but we'll have some chat in there as well, and there is a little bit of video.

That’s just a quick explanation so that you know what to expect.

We think we’ll take about an hour to get through, with some questions and answers at the end.  Some of the panellists will be joining us at the end for questions and answers for a bit more live chat and interaction.

So, we are AbilityNet, and we provide services, access the services, and we provide them to lots of different organisations, so when we looked at the global accessibility awareness day, we decided to do some interviews with people, so Robin is here, he is the head of digital inclusion.  Can you hear me Robin?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  I certainly can - loud and clear. Good afternoon everyone.

MARK WALKER:  So Robin and I came up with a list of people and got out and talked to some people, and we've got a great panel of people who have agreed to speak to us.

I'm going to show you their names now, but we're going to introduce them as we go through.

So Robin, I think you knew some of these people already.  I don't know how many of them you already knew when we put the list together.  Are these people you work with regularly or that you know of?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON: A real mixture really.

Some of them I have had the privilege to know for a long time like Ricardo in Spain there, other people I have been a familiar of for a long time, like David Woodbridge who is over in Australia, because of the many pod casts that he does on different assistive technologies, so a real mixture.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you.  Well, we'll come to that in a moment.

Just for those that don't know AbilityNet and in particular accessibility in as far as global accessibility awareness day goes, we're a charity based in the UK, we provide all sorts of services relating to accessibility for a wide range of clients and customers that include BT, Samsung, Lloyds Banking group, Barclays, Microsoft, IBM and we're also proud to have done all the testing for the Olympics and Paralympics websites a couple of years ago when they were in London.

So what we've got planned today is a series of talks.  We've done the interviews separately so that we know that we had them here, particularly to deal with all of the different time zones, we've put them into chunks, they are about seven to eight minutes for each conversation, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to play those as audio files.

We'll possibly do a little bit of talking between the conversations, but they actually are set up just to go back-to-back, so for the next 30 minutes or so, you should be just following a series of conversations with different people on screen will just be the name of the person that you are hearing, the rest of it is done through audio, and as I say, do remember that if you are trying to use captions, then you need to do that separately on another browser window, and the information will remain on screen all the way through in case you want to check that.

So I'm going to start by really a scene setting.  I spoke to Shadi Abou-Zahra who is on this session as well, I can see that he is signed in here, from the web accessibility initiative at the Worldwide Web Consortium and really he helped set the scene for what we're going to talk about afterwards, so let's start with him.

I'm pleased to say that we have with us today Shadi Abou-Zhara.  Can you tell us a little bit about the work that you do there?

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA:  Thanks a lot.  It is a great opportunity to participate in this webinar.  My name is Shadi Abou-Zahra.  I work with the web access the initiative, the activity lead for the international programme office, which includes education and outreach and also International Standard harmonisation for that, the big areas of my work.  I'm based in Europe, and so that's a primary part of my work, is to coordinate development and the needs in Europe, in co-ordination with the rest of the colleagues at the W 3C web initiative.  We're at a very exciting point in time right now.

This year we celebrate 25 years since the invention of the worldwide web in 1989, and it is really great to see how it evolved from a static and document-oriented medium really to a highly interactive application and mobile oriented medium, and it is continuing to evolve as technologies converge on to the web, like television, like mobiles, like devices, but also the so-called web of things where individual sensors and actuators and all kinds of devices and applications are converging on to the web, and so the web has evolved to a comprehensive type of different technologies that work together to provide this functionality, be it the data format, also known as the semantic web, to make sure that information is schematically and systematically processable.

On the other hand, it also has APIs and functions to allow interactivity with the data and events that we experience on the web as we know it today.

So it is a very rapid movement these days, and it is a fascinating time for people with disabilities and accessibility in general. The web really provides an unprecedented opportunity to participate equally, but of course only if those technologies and if those services that are being developed using those web technologies are created in a way that makes them accessible for people with disabilities.

Otherwise they have the counter effect of actually locking out people rather than enabling them with the potential that the web has.

MARK WALKER:  And that, presumably, is the role of the guidelines in the sense of what W3C does and how you actually use guidelines.  Can you tell me a little bit about how you see that changing over the next few years, as the web of things becomes more commonplace?

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA:  Exactly.  So at the Web Accessibility Initiative we have multiple layers and multiple activities that we focus on, and some of them are fairly transparent and sometimes even unknown to the outside, but are really crucial.

For instance, building in accessibility support into the core W3C technology - into HTML, into CSS, into all the other W3C technologies as they are being developed, to ensure that they support accessibility.  For instance, it means that you can carry out the events in different ways, you can operate the information in different ways, the information can be perceived in different ways, and so on.  So building this accessibility support into the core technologies is really essential, and is the enabler to having accessible products and services.

MARK WALKER:  Of course, with the web of things then, the guidelines need to be flexible enough and I assume that they take core principles which you will be able to translate into any range of different infrastructure relationships - when your fridge starts talking to your TV for example?  Presumably the guidelines need to be fit for purpose at that point?

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA: Yes.  Absolutely.  Very good point.

So with the creation of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), there has been a huge leap between version 1 and 2, in making the requirement, the accessibility requirements more technology agnostic, and really focusing on the user needs, on the user requirements.

What does a user need in order to be able to perceive, operate, understand, and have robust content?  Those are the four principles of work AG 2, perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.

And beneath them the guidelines and the success criteria are technology agnostic, and they really focus on the user requirement.

To allow the so-called WCAG technique, which are informative and can change with time and actually do change with time. They take care of the details of how to actually apply those requirements, those user needs, in a particular situation, in a particular context, in the mobile, on TV, you know, on the fridge, or microwave or whatever, so those techniques are evolving with time, and change with time.

Currently the WCAG Working Group has increased its updating of those techniques from once a year to twice every year, so they have increased the frequency.  We always welcome more help and contribution in developing such techniques, which guide the developers on how to meet those requirements in different contexts.

But the guidelines themselves have shown to be very stable, especially as we saw how applications and mobiles have evolved over the years since December 2008, when the second version of the web content accessibility guidelines were developed.

So five years later and, you know, we see the stability and the robustness of those guidelines, because they have been designed to be less dependent on the underlying technology. That means they allow us to provide those techniques for the different technologies as they evolve and as they emerge.

All that is wrapped up with educational resources that we are always updating and developing relating to all the different aspects of accessibility - from introductory materials to tutorials that we're working on right now. Those resources are all available freely from the web accessibility initiative home page, to help developers really understand accessibility and implement that in a variety of situations.

MARK WALKER:  Thank you Shadi.  That's a fantastic overview.  Clearly, in terms of looking ahead, we can see that the guidelines will be tested in terms of whether they can provide this platform and technology agnostic set of principles, and thank you very much for participating in the webinar today.

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA:  Thank you very much and happy global accessibility awareness day.

MARK WALKER:  Thank you.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you everyone.  I have just stopped the interviews there just to explain, you know, that's what we're going to hear.  On the dashboard that you have, for the go to webinar, you can ask questions.  We're going to have questions at the end, clearly Shadi has presented a really valuable overview there to kick us off, there is going to be lots of other topics as we go through.

If you ask questions as we go along I will make a note of them and at the end we can either patch you in on an audio or depending how many questions we've got I will ask the questions and some of the other people will be here to join in.  Shadi is one of the people who is on the call so do bear that in mind.

The next person is in David Woodbridge.  He is in Australia.  He has not joined us.  But we'll get back to that interview now.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  So, I'm here this afternoon, but it is this evening for David Woodbridge who is senior adaptive technology consultant for Vision Australia, a very important organisation in terms of technology and vision impairment over there in Australia, and also he is accessibility Ambassador for Apple Australia as well.  So David, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to speak with us today.

DAVID WOODBRIDGE:  All right, my pleasure.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  What is going on?  What is your particular interest with regards to accessibility or inclusive design, digital inclusion, over where you are?

DAVID WOODBRIDGE:  I probably think there are a couple of areas.

At the moment, the one that jumps to my mind straight away is of course access to digital television, because people may know that Australia in general, we've now switched over to digital TV for free to air television, and we've now got, you know, talking set top box, it has low vision access as well, and when the ABC which is our national broadcaster, did a trial for audio descriptions on one of their channels, we also had audio description for the first time in Australia free to air, so that is probably one of the big things at the moment.

But the other thing that's becoming increasingly, I guess amazingly important, particularly on the technology help desk, which is what I'm part of as well, is we're getting more and more calls now about.

And this is putting my Apple head on, I guess, iPhones, iPods and iPod Touches and iPads, and also to Apple TVs and Macs, so about 20% of our phone calls now are to do with IOS and Apple stuff in general, which far out does your good old friend JAWS which used to be our top call beforehand, and now it seems to be Apple now.

So going from that is probably the third thing which is the mobile platforms, and that's both for Android and IOS.  And of course, that's to do with developers, hopefully, producing accessible apps, and one of the things that we're looking at is trying to maintain accessibility in apps, so when people produce apps, and you know we may have to talk to them about accessibility across the whole disability range, or, in fact, remind people that they might want to include accessibility in their apps, because sometimes they don't realise it or they completely forget or they have got no idea, and we can just have a bit of a chat to them about it.

So I guess the main things that I'm probably working on at the moment is the digital TV, the increasing growth of Apple in the accessibility space for blind and low vision in particular, and the growing expansion of apps on the mobile platform for Android and iPhones.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  What would you sees as the main challenge?  Is it around the mobile space and making sure that people develop accessible apps?

David Woodbridge It is, yes.  I think that's our main focus at the moment.

I get a lot of calls on the help desk or from companies asking Vision Australia through our digital access service to talk to developers, and I guess this includes web as well, about access the, and what access the means on, you know, desktop and mobile platforms, but one of the other things that I'm I mentioned briefly is trying to maintain accessibility.

So there is -- one of our major cable companies here in Australia, previously it was accessible, and then of course they updated it to the brand new sparkling one, it wasn't accessible.  So there are examples like that.

You say ‘Jeez guys, you've just broken every rule in the book as far as access will software is concerned’.

It is almost like you say why did you change?  You had such a great app before and now it is completely useless as far as, you know, people that rely on low vision or braille or speech access in general, so we tend to assume, I think, sometimes from our own little pond, I guess, that accessibility is well known, and I still think it is not well known.

So I still get major providers ringing me up, shops ringing me up absolutely staggered that this person has come into the shop and asked about an access will computer and an accessible smartphone or an access will whatever, and it is like well, you know, as we all know mate, there is no point me selling this product to this person because it is not accessible, is it.

Well, actually, it is accessible.  So I think raising awareness, not only just amongst the developers in the tech world but just the general community, and also people in general that need this stuff, because there is still a lot of information that's not been sort of, I guess, received by people that he wouldn't necessarily see the fact that this stuff is truly accessible.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  And so the A D A, the Australians with Disabilities Act, how long has that been in force in Australia?

David Woodbridge:  I think it just got to its 20th year recently.

So it has been a while, but it is probably not so much sort of the litigation side of things, it is more, I guess, the lack of knowledge that, you know, things are moving towards - I tend to call them universal design, or personalisation of a device. So I would like to get away from the fact that we talk about accessibility, we just talk about personalising the product now, and to me, that's very powerful, because I think sometimes it is almost seen as oh, well, look, it is accessibility, it is not a real feature, you only use it when you need to, versus it is a very powerful feature set for anybody at any particular time that might need to use it.

So again I would urge people that if you are going to buy a certain thing that you absolutely love, feed back to the developer, the manufacturer, and say look I'm really impressed that you actually got this device out because my grandmother or I can use it now.  Please keep it in if you do any more versions of this product, please try and maintain this feature set because I think it is really fantastic and I will share it with other people.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  What, future issues are you particularly interested in at the moment.

David Woodbridge:  I think it is mobile and wearables.

I mean, my whole house is basically an Apple house.  I have got iPhones and Apple TVs and goodness knows what else and I have also got a fit bit now that I use all the time with my iPhone, so mobile for me is very exciting, particularly in relation to the I beacon technology from Apple.

So I can see the great benefit of that in, say, indoor navigation because as we all know with GPS, GPS can get you within five metres of a spot, whereas iBeacon technology can transmit from, you know, in inches and feet, one foot to a hundred feet, and I think that would be absolutely amazing to see how that would be implemented in different organisations to give you very precise indoor navigation, so the next 12-18 months I'm really looking forward to seeing what the iBeacon technology can do for indoor navigation.  That's one of my little pet project to have a look at in the next 12-18 months.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  That's really a perfect example of a technology which has the potential to be very inclusive and, you know, was arguably he a mainstream product to help who knows sell more products within a shopping centre, a shopping mall, as other people call it, but has undoubted and obvious benefits for people with different disabilities, with regards being able to get around, know where they are and have useful information provided for them at all times.

David Woodbridge:  That's right.  I mean, there is one challenge coming up for us in August, and we're moving away from -- when you go down to a shop and buy something, you sign something for your credit card on the receipt.  We're moving towards pin only, which means the question then arises is the electronic funds transferred terminal accessible by somebody who is blind or visually impaired?

So after August this year it is going to be interesting to see how the industry copes with accessibility to those electronic transferred terminals if someone has to put their pin number in independently without telling the shop person what your pin is.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Well good luck with that because we've had two years of that over in the UK and I can tell you that it is a mixed experience.  Some of the keypad things are nice and clearly marked, and others are just a sort of a flat kind of touch pad scenario.

David, thank you very much indeed for joining us for this global accessibility awareness day webinar and we very much look forward to hearing more from you and your excellent Vision Australia pod casts on all things accessibility and inclusion and thank you very much indeed again for joining us.

David Woodbridge:  My pleasure.

MARK WALKER:  The next person I'm going to interview is Thomas Richter from Samsung.  Hi Thomas.  Could you introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about what your role is at Samsung?

Thomas Richter:  Thank you Mark.  My name is Thomas Richter and I'm the head of portfolio and product strategy for the European telecom organisation, so I'm acting as a regional interface towards our head core organisation, mainly product planning.

MARK WALKER:  Right.  Thank you.  In terms of what your role is, or the work that Samsung is doing, what particular interest is going on with your work with regards to accessibility and inclusive design?

Thomas Richter:  Right.  So as you know, the consumer electronics industry moves very quickly, with new product being brought to the market regularly, so this speed brings both challenges and opportunities for businesses to innovate, and meet the needs of consumers, including those with accessibility needs.

Samsung makes a wide range of products with an ever-increasing number of features that help to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, particularly on our latest, most popular devices, such as our galaxy smartphones, tablets, and our smart TVs.

MARK WALKER:  Thanks for that Thomas.  That's great.  Are there any particular challenges that you think, that you face with regard to accessibility or inclusion in your part of the world?

Thomas Richter:  Right.  So accessibility is global in nature.  It should be really handled that way.  Many European countries fail to see accessibility as a global issue, but as a national one.  And we are afraid that this is leading to fragmentation of rules and approaches.  Samsung could use accessibility product globally, improving the lives of people wherever they may live.  That is why we promote the use of international standards and harmonisation as much as possible.  This enables us to further increase the quality and the speed of accessibility features found on our devices.

MARK WALKER:  In terms of maybe relating to that harmonisation or the global take on it or any other issues, where do you think that accessibility is headed next?

Thomas Richter:  So first of all it is great to see how quickly ICT is contributing to social inclusion around the world.  We can only hope this will increase even further.  Accessibility in Europe has come a long way yet still remains fragmented nationally and often by group - for example hearing or vision.  New rules on accessibility are expected soon from the European Commission, in the form of the European accessibility Act.  We hope these rules will bring Europeans together to work for the common cause, and allow our industry to move quickly, and easily bring our accessibility products to all consumers.

MARK WALKER:  Well thank you.  That's really interesting, and of course in terms of legislation we've also got some feed he-back about what is happening in states on this webinar, and some of the changes there, so yes, certainly see that as a big opportunity for change.

So finally, what are you most excited about regarding accessibility and inclusion for the near future?

Thomas Richter:  So while we should not forget that social exclusion is still very much a part of our society, we are seeing great strides to reduce this.  So certainly we believe ICT is a key here.  We are excited to see how our products are positively affecting accessibility and inclusion, and we dearly hope to be able to continue to do so also in the future.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you Thomas.  That's really useful insight into the near future in terms of how Samsung sees its technologies developing, but I think you've got a video that you use to show people even what is possible already using Samsung technology.  Could you tell us a bit about that and then we'll play the video?

Thomas Richter:  Exactly.  So we bought a little video and this is already showing how people can already use and improve their accessibility with today's products very easily.  This is showcase on an old device, so why not run the video right away?

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you.

[captioned video played]

Mark Walker That's great.  Thank you Thomas.  That's a really powerful insight into how technology already is being used to help people in terms of accessibility.  Thank you very much for your input to today's webinar celebrating global accessibility awareness day, and particularly thank you to your colleagues at Samsung for helping to set this up.

Thomas Richter:  Thank you very much Mark.  It has been really my sincere pleasure.  Thank you very much.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  We are now talking to Ricardo of Technosite in Spain in sunny Madrid.  Ricardo, would you like to introduce yourself?

RICARDO GARCIA:  My name is RICARDO GARCIA, and I work with Technosite which is part of the Once Foundation in Spain with a very strong focus on the international Business Development in the accessibility area, universal accessibility and disability accessibility as well.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Great.  So can you give us your take on what is particularly of interest in your area, either geographically or the area in which you are working at the moment?

RICARDO GARCIA:  For several years I have been working in this space trying to raise awareness on the fact that accessible or inclusive design, or design for all, anyway you want to call it.  On top of that you can add many other messages that are absolutely founded on logic, for example.  We have public administrations, of course, our message has always been that if you are a public administration you cannot spend taxpayer's money on creating services that cannot be used by and enjoy by all citizens because basically you cannot put up barriers, right, with everybody's tax, right?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  So what about areas where things are progressing in your part of the world with regard to disability, or digital inclusion?

RICARDO GARCIA:  Talking about specific areas that we can see, things that are on the move, yeah, of course we can talk about healthcare, we can talk about tourism, again, very, very focused on ageing population with, of course with high spending capacity in many cases.

In the case of Spain, obviously it is a country where we receive many, many tourists and many of them are from an aged segment, which is becoming, obviously, more of a key element in the analysis, towards making, obviously, all sorts of resource and services more accessible, more, obviously, more key to this segment.  There is still a long way to go, regarding making their services more accessible.

Normally it would be due to a mixture of ignorance, and also due to not considering accessibility a priority as well.  It may be important to a certain degree at some point, but not now, we've got more critical, more relevant things on which to focus, and then obviously, the public administrations have also suffered from the prices and the budgets, have got cut, so therefore they have a spending and access the measures is lower than they used to be some years ago, and that's one of the things that is our biggest concern, right?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  And lastly, what are you working on, or what developments are there in your area that you are particularly excited about?

So ?????Mark Sid he canny, the W 3C?????, he came to me a little while back:  Companies are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that trying to make their product and services more accessible to all users, it is not only a matter of corporate social responsibility, but it is rather becoming a matter of acquiring a larger client base, right?

Because we're talking about -- always talking about ageing population, and obviously the client base is going to be more and more focused on that segment, we can say.  So therefore, there is one more initiative, focusing on that, not only making, let's say, the actual shops or high street premises more accessible, but also making their physical products designed in a way that can be better used and enjoyed by everyone, obviously online shopping is increasing, bit by bit that we can see there has been progress in that respect.

Well, we can see that in some of the sectors that we've already mentioned, obviously healthcare and tourism, of course, but also entertainment, public transport, anything that has to do with public terminals, of course, that's a very, very exciting arena where we can see that there is very, very interesting developments taking place and that's what we are focusing on to a very great extent.

I mean everybody is talking, for example, about mobile apps, but we always say that these apps have to be not only accessible, they must have accessibility to the main operating systems. But these mobile apps have to have something else.

They must make life easier for all users, right?  So that's why we were focused on designing and development, and developing inclusive apps, apps that resolve problems, not only resolve, but make, as mentioned, life easier for all citizens, and in different contexts, different situations, accessing different kinds of services, the user experiences, making it much more enjoyable, of course, so that's basically what we're working on right now.

And obviously, anything that we design, anything that we want to develop, has to include during the co-design phase, has to include the opinion, obviously, and the needs and preferences of all the people who may use it.

Robin Christopherson Thank you Ricardo, and Ricardo is going to be joining us a little bit later on for the Q&A.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Well, I'm now joined by Dennis Lembree in sunny California thank you very much today for joining this global accessibility awareness day, it is eight hours earlier in the day for Dennis

Dennis created the EasyChirp browser based Twitter client, created when Twitter was horrendously inaccessible and it is still very, very challenging, and he was podcaster and blogger of web axe, which is a brilliant online resource, we would recommend people check that out, and he is also a web developer on the accessibility team at PayPal, so thanks for joining us Dennis.

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Thank you for having me Robin.  It is a great introduction.

Robin Christopherson: Great.  So what is going on in your area, either geographically or in your area of expertise that is of particular interest in the areas of accessibility or inclusive design at the moment?

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Well, I guess you would have to say social media.  You know, I wrote easychirp, so that's the web-based accessibility Twitter application that you mentioned, but I am, you know, in Silicon Valley, and so it is exciting to live here, and of course Facebook is based here, and, you know, Twitter is up in the city, in San Francisco, and of course our friend Jennison is now at LinkedIn, and so I know, you know, I know a lot of folks that are working at these companies, and I have been following them for a while and I have been using social media for a long time.

S o I enjoy using the products and it is exciting to live in that area, but it is also exciting that, you know, these companies are, you know, finally giving accessibility, you know, value in creating and hiring specific folks to address accessibility, so that has been nice to see.  Yeah.

But about Twitter, yeah, so today clues???? has been the main guy over there, he has been doing some great work improving accessibility of Twitter.com, and so I think he is doing a great job, but there are other areas that easy chip, you know, kind of enhances for different folks, and I think easy is maybe a key word, because the easy chip is just -- it is good for, you know, beginners, or maybe people with cognitive impairments, or people who just want something simple, you know, to use.  And so, you know, the layout and everything is much more simple, or easy than Twitter.com.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Absolutely.  It is very clean, and we would definitely recommend people go to easy chip.com to have a look and to have a play.

One trend that, you know, we're increasingly seeing is, you know, every second tweet are or post to a social media site is a photograph these days, or even a video clip.  There is something that you are doing a little project with easy chip that is of particular exciting -- excitement in this area to try and overcome or bridge the gap in what someone like myself who cannot see would lose when it comes to all the content that's being posted.

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Yes.  So -- yeah.  Especially with like info graphics, what is missing from all that, right, is the proper alternative text, or alternative text to attribute for like a long description of graphical charts or info graphics, or --

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Animated gifs?

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Yeah, animated gifs and photographs that need to be described, and so this has been a problem for a long time, and the solution for a long time, which didn't get much support or wasn't very popular was the long desk attribute on the image when you are doing, like, web development, and there is other ways, like with RE and stuff to code for that but the problem is, you know, that alternative text is provided most of the time, which is just unfortunate.

So ?????Mark Sid he canny, the W 3C?????, he came to me a little while back, and said hey Dennis, you know, maybe we could, maybe in easychirp we could, you know, create some kind of solution for, you know, to provide, you know, long textual descriptions for images that are posted to Twitter.  I said yeah, that's a great idea.

So we brainstormed, and we came up with the -- a plausible solution, and I created a little prototype that he reviewed, and then I went ahead and just, over a matter of a couple of weeks I just worked pretty hard on it, and went ahead, and implemented it, and so it seems to be working fine, and I think global accessibility awareness day is a great day to make this announcement.

And you know, to ask folks to go to easychirp, and if you write a tweet there is an area to add an image, and so you can up load he an image from your computer, or your mobile device, and then you add a title, or a short description, or alternative text for that image, and if needed, there is a big text area where you could write a long description for that image, and then you just submit it, and the URL gets inserted into the tweet that you are writing, and then you do just tweet it out.

And then when somebody clicks that link, a page will -- an easychirp branded page will open with that image, and then they will have the long description and the title on the page.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  That is unique, as far as I'm aware.  I'm not even aware of another Twitter client that allows you to add the alternative text attribute let alone a longer text description, so that is absolutely brilliant because there is just so much content that I haven't a clue what it is, and I'm sure a lot of it is not worth following up on, but there is a lot of good stuff out there.

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Yeah.  For the things that are worth it, you know, it would be nice to have it, right?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  Absolutely.  That's what accessibility and digital inclusion is all about.

DENNIS LEMBREE:  That's right.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  So brilliant.  Well, keep up the good work Dennis and thank you very much indeed for agreeing to feature on this G AA D's webinar, and once again, Dennis Lembree, thank you very much indeed.

DENNIS LEMBREE:  Thanks for having me.

MARK WALKER:  I'm joined by Ken Nakata from Hi Software, and he’s based in Seattle.  Hi Ken.  I wonder if you could just say hello and say who you are and what you do?

KEN NAKATA:  Sure.  Hi Mark.  My name is Ken Nakata and I'm the director of accessibility consulting practices at Hi Software.  I used to work at the justice department, and I work on the legal policy side of things here at Hi Software.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Thank you.  And in terms of what you are working on at the moment, what sorts of trends are you seeing on their policy side in particular from where you are working at the moment?

KEN NAKATA:  Well, I'm noticing a lot more activity from the justice department in terms of their interest, and enforcement in web accessibility.

MARK WALKER:  And what do you see driving that?

KEN NAKATA:  Erm, I think that there is a change in leadership at the top, that has a much stronger interest and focus on web accessibility and sees the overall impact that it will ultimately have for people with disabilities.

MARK WALKER:  And do you think that that reflects a shift in terms of digital accessibility in particular, being higher up the agenda politically?

KEN NAKATA:  Yeah.  Absolutely.  Well, within the justice -- it is not so much higher up within the administration as much as just within the civil rights division at justice there are people that have a clear vision about how it is ultimately going to affect the future for people with disabilities.

MARK WALKER:  Okay, and what particular activity are you thinking of in terms of the changes you've seen?

KEN NAKATA:  Well, the highlight to me was recent H&R Block Settlement Agreement which I blogged about at length, and just a change in the overall mood about things.  I notice also that there are a couple of attorneys from my old office on the enforcement side that were at CSUN and that's something that you had never seen before.

MARK WALKER:  And at CSUN as well, you were saying about the change in the sort of atmosphere and it is a little bit more corporate interest, and that's reflected in what you think some of corporate America is thinking as well.

KEN NAKATA:  Yeah.  Absolutely.  That was my overall take from this year's CSUN that made it different from the other years.  Within the audience, there just seems to be lot more people from corporate America.

MARK WALKER:  And in terms of your take on it, why do you think they are there?

KEN NAKATA:  Well, I mean, accessibility in the United States, and whether you are going to get sued as a corporation, is really like rolling the dice.

The disability rights groups and the justice department and private Plaintiffs tend not to be going after corporations in a particular pattern, so if I were a CEO of a corporation that didn't have an -- that had an inaccessible website I might be thinking to myself well every day I just roll the dice in terms of whether I'm going to get sued today or not.

MARK WALKER:  And -- and that goes hand-in-hand, I guess as you were saying, with the way in which the civil sector operates the charities, the special interest groups.

KEN NAKATA:  Yeah.  Absolutely.  They just seem to feed off each other, but I think that, yeah, there is something about it when the government also gets involved.  That raises a much greater awareness level.  Actually, that's something that sort of surprised me, because in California, that's where you get significant money damages, but that's not the driving factor in corporate America I don't think.

MARK WALKER:  So the government, what you are saying in terms that they are more actively involved in the litigation and they are enforcing, it is not just that the special interest groups are using the legislation as the lever for their action, the government are actually part of the process themselves?

KEN NAKATA:  It seems so, yeah.  Corporate America responds to the fact that the government is involved in enforcement activities in web accessibility, much more so, I think, than if just the Plaintiffs are.

MARK WALKER:  Okay.  Something that you said about the case in particular was it is a shift towards the sorts of things that are being included within the legislation.  Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

KEN NAKATA: Yeah.  Absolutely.  Well, the Settlement Agreement focused very extensively on making sure that H&R Block's web content was accessible.  It wasn't just a passing reference to web accessibility.

Interestingly, they also included mobile apps as part of that, and I would never have thought that justice would include that as part of a Settlement Agreement, because, well, the access board has tinkered around with the idea of including software under the which can act 2 guidelines, but to actually see that as a requirement in the Settlement Agreement I thought was quite interesting.

I don't think that that's something that we'll necessarily be seeing in the future in terms of regulations, or at least on the near future, but the fact that they included it as part of the Settlement Agreement I think is still quite notable.

MARK WALKER:  What would be interesting, then, of course, is to see what the impact of this shift is, so, you know, you are seeing a trend towards more legislation being enforced.  What do you think the impact of that is going to be in terms of the accessibility of digital services and content in general?

KEN NAKATA:  I think that we're going to see a large up take in terms of accessible content from private corporations, yeah, the Wal-Marts, the Kmart, the safe ways of America, I think that they are going to be much more focused on web accessibility.  So that ultimately is going to benefit all consumers.

MARK WALKER:  Well that's interesting.  Do you think there is any possibility of a ripple effect from that outside states, in terms of international impact?

KEN NAKATA:  Well, there is a movement towards harmonisation, obviously, so I would be really shocked if, say, the justice department's future regulations on the Americans with disabilities Act, and web accessibility didn't dovetail perfectly with WCAG2.0.

I think that the multinational corporations of America, the huge brand companies that export all of our culture all around the world seem to -- they are not just going to be focusing on corporate America when they are redoing their web content, so they are going to be focusing also on their international sites, and yeah, I could see that driving other countries, corporations in other countries to, yeah, to keep up with what they are doing, with what their US competitors are doing locally.

MARK WALKER:  Ken, that's great.  Thank you very much.  It is great to hear, particularly about the legal issues which are shifting in the States, and the ripples that they might have around the world, particularly on global accessibility awareness day, that's exactly what we were looking for, so thank you for that.  And thank you for your time in joining the webinar.

KEN NAKATA:  Oh thanks Mark.

MARK WALKER:  So, that's the run through of our speakers.

Thank you so much to everybody who has joined in and spoken there.

For those of you who have been following all of that, all of the notes that we've taken with the speakers are available, will be available afterwards, we'll send round transcripts of the conversations that we've had had, I know we've covered a huge range of topics there, but rest assured you will be able to follow it up.

We've got notes that include blog posts and other things that will be referred to in the conversations, and again they will be collated and sent round for you to follow up.  Robin, I guess in terms of Q&A and picking up on particular issues, there is a couple of things I have sort of heard about there, and then we've got Ricardo and Shadi are on the call I can see, so we'll bring those guys in as well.  I'm just going to do that, Shadi, can you hear me Shadi?

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA:  Yes, I can.

MARK WALKER:  Cool, and Ricardo?  Let me just find you on my attendee list and unmute you.  Ricardo, can you hear me now?

RICARDO GARCIA:  Yes, I can.

Mark Walker Great.  You are quiet there.  So yes, and Robin, just to check you are there, and --

MARK WALKER:  And we can hear you.  Great.  I was going to just mention couple of things, and then we can go over to some questions.  I have got a couple of questions that have come in, but I thought I would just sort of comment on one thing.

One thing that has come up a lot was this thing to do with WCAG, the accessibility guidelines.

Shadi was talking about guidelines at the beginning and how they need to be adaptable for the change in technology, and this Internet of things that we're going to see, and then right at the end there we had Ken talking about what he has perceived as being an increase in litigation in the US, and how that will then, you know, potentially lead to people having a more interest in the guidelines and recognizing the value of WCAG as a tool for legal action.

So that’s one thing in particular.

And then in the middle of that Thomas from Samsung talked about the fact that they think that there is a danger that accessibility will be seen as a national issue when he it needs to be seen as a global issue and of course that brings you right back to the need for the guidelines as well.  So that's one thing that I picked up on.

One very specific thing was the social media, just about the accessibility of social media, and Dennis mentioned a number of appointments to particular social media companies around accessibility, and I wonder whether we can just pick up on that, and see what we think that means, and then perhaps finally and overall, really, this issue between the carrot and the stick of accessibility, you know, the commercial appeal of accessibility versus the legal issues.

And Ricardo mentioned some of this in terms of the shift in spending in the public sector in Spain, but also a shift in perception towards trying to reach particular consumers.

So those are my three issues:

·       the WCAG guidelines and the web of things,

·       accessible social media

·       and this carrot and stick thing.

What about you Robin? I don't know whether you've got any observation before we switch over to questions and answers.

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  I think from my point of view it is all about awareness, and, you know, that came up time and again, right from Australia over in the east, and obviously, Shadi mentioned it from a global point of view, and everybody else seems to, you know, have touched upon it to one, you know, one area or another right across to the west there, and Ken in Seattle.

I think that, you know, it is apt that it is global accessibility awareness day because I think that's the main challenge that we have, and just like you were saying with the carrots and the sticks, I think that if we can get people to appreciate the very significant return on investment along with, you know, good customer experience, and, you know, we know that's all about happy customers these days because there is so much choice out there.

So that, I think, for me, is the main takeaway which is quite appropriate on global accessibility awareness day.

MARK WALKER:  Shadi, can I just ask, in relation to the guidelines, Ken was talking about their usage from a legal point of view, but Thomas from Samsung was talking more about his concern that the guidelines should be seen as, you know, the global standard.  Is that something that you are aware of as an issue?  He was talking about it within Europe, but it may have impact elsewhere as well.

SHADI ABOU-ZAHRA:  Yes.  Absolutely.

So I think the word, "Global" was used today several times for good reason.  It is the global accessibility awareness day, and it is more so on the one side, the Internet, by design, does not have boundaries and is international, but also the world is coming closer with the globalized product and market, so harmonisation of standards is something that is really essential to accessibility, to help accelerate the statement accessibility.

Not only in Europe, and there has been a lot of progress in Europe, pushed by the European Commission who has been trying to harmonise the different legal requirements, or standards, that have been applied in different European countries, but also around the world.  We've been having a lot of discussions in China, for instance, in India, in Russia and all around the world in many different countries, Brazil for instance, and other countries who are increasingly harmonising towards WCAG2.0 - much more than was the situation with WCAG1.0, where different countries, including the US, for instance, had different interpretations, or different derivatives of the first version of the guidelines.

And that created a lot of problems in, when you have, say you develop the website or a product in one country and it doesn't meet the legal requirements of another country, so you would need to redevelop that product, or redesign it, or even just tweak it to be able to provide the next country.

Also the know how between developers who can share knowledge, who can share tools, who can share resources, also diminishes of being able to benefit from a single harmonised standard that helps accelerate implementation of accessibility.

So that's one of the things that we focus on very strongly at the web initiative, is try to promote, harmonise a set of standards, and thankfully we are seeing that this is being addressed, at least with the latest draft of the US specifications.

The same in Europe with the so-called mandate 376 which is the European procurement standards, has adopted WCAG2.0, and we hope that other countries will follow on to that as well, and other parts of the world, so that we can help accelerate the implementation of accessibility.

MARK WALKER:  That's fantastic.  Thanks Shadi.  That's a really helpful overview.

Somebody in the audience is asking, do you know anything about when the European accessibility Act is likely to be implemented?

The question says did someone says when the Act is due out, and also my question obviously on the back of what you just said is to what extent does it harmonise with what you are saying, you know, in terms of similarities with the US Section 508 proposals.

SHADI ABOU ZAHRA:  Yeah.  There are actually several things happening in Europe right now.  So one is the mandate 376 which is the procurement standard, and that's comparable with the standards part of Section 508.  So that would be used by the national procurement legislation, or policies, in individual European member states.

And the European Accessibility Act, as far as I understand, is more comparable to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA or in the UK, the Equality Act, so that is more kind of a rights-based approach as far as I understand it.

And then there is the proposed directive on web accessibility, a third piece, which is addressing public websites, and making sure that they implement WCAG 2.0.

Now, as far as I understand there has been a published version of that and that references WCAG2.0, and also the mandate 376, the procurement standard has been completed.  That also uses WCAG2.0.  I'm not aware that the European Accessibility Act is in a publicly available form yet, but we do hope that that would also be harmonised with WCAG2.0.

MARK WALKER:  Okay.  Great.  Thank you.  Ricardo, I don't know how much impact that has on your work in terms of work that maybe outside Spain.  Do you see this harmonisation being an issue in terms of the work that you do across Technosite?

RICARDO GARCIA:  In terms of the European sphere we're pretty much waiting for the disability act to get through, because what we see is more of -- what Robin said before about working at government levels, so the same situation in the UK, or in Spain, that is going on in other countries, especially, for example, eastern countries or some other, southern European countries that we've been able to analyse, in which there is a very, very low degree of awareness at a government level.

So as long as there is no real enforcement of web accessibility, with regulation, I mean, if there is no real accessibility legislation enforcement then web accessibility is not going to be enforced at all.

And in terms of legislation, in terms of regulation presence and the existence of regulation in different countries, in Europe we can see that not all of them have developed this kind of legislation, and we're just waiting for the Accessibility Act from the European Union to be released so that we can see a real transfer of these good practices, and of course of these regulations on to every single country.

But obviously it is a matter of what Robin just said, of awareness, awareness at a government level as well. But if there is no awareness at the government level, there is going to be no legislation, they have raised no regulation and of course no enforcement instruments.

There might be legislation and regulation in place but there are no enforcement instruments in place.  Here we're going to see the same situation.  I mean, Government Ministries, public bodies are not going to help with their websites made accessible, so we don't see much progress in that respect in some countries.  We pretty much see a kind of same situation in this respect.

In the US, as Shadi has been mentioning, and Ken in his interview, there is a lot of changes taking place, and we see that we are very much expectant about what is going to happen over there in states with the latest type of section 23 changes, and ADA as well, so we're quite excited to see what is going to happen in the US and how companies are going to react there.

But here in Spain, yeah, of course, we have legislation, we've been having legislation regulation for many years and the government instruments, and more and more public bodies, of course, have to adhere with this, to this enforcement instrument, of course.  Large companies, of course, have to also comply with legislation.  We're seeing obviously the crisis cause problems, but we hope that when the recovery finally is at full pace we can see much more focus in this respect.

MARK WALKER:  Great thank you.

Well, as you say, I think that if we see that action that Ken is talking about in states, then obviously we're likely to see some sort of response in Europe, and looking at it from that point of view, and as Shadi said, if that leads to a greater take up of guidelines, you know, on a global basis, then that's obviously the answer.

And maybe that comes with -- brings with it the change in awareness and understanding that obviously people need to know more about why accessibility is important, and, you know, all of those things, hopefully, will just lead to greater awareness and understanding of that.

So, a final question, Robin, I don't know whether you can help with this.  But I think I just wanted to pick up on this social media thing.

Somebody was saying, here we are, James Carlton was saying do you think that this easychirp solution for adding alternative text, which obviously we're going to have to see, as Dennis said it has just been made available, do you think this is the sort of thing that other big social media companies will introduce?  I guess there are a couple of questions there.

One is it going to be relevant to the other social media companies in the sense of the actual technology, but do you think it also reflects what Dennis was saying about having maybe more access the knowledge embedded within those companies now, Twitter and LinkedIn, and Facebook, that he mentioned?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  I think, I mean obviously they need to be created from within easychirp, so you need to use that client, and but the beauty of it is that you tweet that out, and I open it up in Twitter I have I can, or whichever, you know, my Twitter client of choice is.

And it is just a link, so it takes you to an easychirp branded page as Dennis said, with that text, the alternative tag, the alternative text as it should be called, as the sort of title of the image, and then the longer description if there is one provided, underneath.

And I think that's where the awareness will come in, because, you know, people use a whole range of different Twitter clients, and they are used to seeing links and clicking on them to, you know, to follow content.

So I think the awareness will come with people clicking on those links and saying “hey, you know, this is good, this adds value to the offering”, and it might make people, fingers crossed, follow that, you know, follow his lead, and put something into their clients. Because as I said, I'm not aware of any that allow you to provide alternative texts to images that you are uploading as part of your tweet, so I think it is a really useful project that he has taken on board.

MARK WALKER:  And then in terms of the, you know, his mention of Jennison, who is one of the people behind the global accessibility awareness day, you know, joining LinkedIn. I think the other question was, you know, does this reflect the fact that those sorts of companies are taking accessibility a bit more seriously, and therefore should we see easychirp type solutions appearing in the mainstream.  Do you expect that to happen?

ROBIN CHRISTOPHERSON:  The accessibility of LinkedIn is really very good, and the accessibility of the actual Twitter client, actually, is very good too, you know, just Twitter.com.

They have now got, you know, key strokes, so I do think we're moving in the right direction, but just as, you know, to go back to what David said right at the beginning, everything is fine until they bring out an update to your favourite app and everything is broken, or they, you know, they change their focus and they take their eye you've a the ball and they refresh Facebook.com and everything is a disaster again.  So let's just hope, going forward, over the next 12 months, that things will carry on moving in the right direction, and we won't have any major setbacks along the road.

MARK WALKER:  Great.  Okay.  That was a most positive point to finish on.

So thank you everybody for he joining us, particularly Shadi and Ricardo who are here to join us, and obviously the other speakers that we've spoken to during the session.

All of this has been recorded, all of the content will be available afterwards to the people who have registered, we'll also publish it on our website if you want to share it, and if you haven't done already, do go and take a look at all the stuff that's around on global accessibility awareness day.  There really is a lot of stuff going on.

I have been following the Twitter feed during the session, lots of other interesting activities going on.  Webinars, and events to join in with, and all of that is all part of that, raising awareness and making sure that you, you know, you tell everybody you know that this is something that they need to know about, and so thank you very much for coming along.

Thank you Robin, and we'll have another webinar during June, an AbilityNet webinar, we have them every month.

That is it for today so next month's will be on SEO and Accessibility and if you do want to talk to us about our services, there is some links there.  So thanks for coming along everyone and this webinar will end in one minute.