# Transcript for Accessibility Insights with David Padmore and Matt Simpson of ITV – December 2022.

EMMA: Hello everyone, and welcome to today’s webinar.

It's just gone 1 o'clock so I'm just going to give everyone a chance to join - do feel free to drop into the Q&A box and say hi.  We have disabled the chat feature as we’ve discovered it can cause problems for some people using screen readers.

 I can see that nearly everyone has arrived now, I'm glad you all could make it.

…Great

So we're going make a start now. So, hi everyone and welcome to the 4th episode in series two of our Accessibility Insights sessions, where AbilityNet’s Head of Digital Inclusion, Robin Christopherson hosts a monthly online chat with individuals who are each working to improve digital accessibility and digital inclusion.

This month he’s chatting to David Padmore, Director of Accessibility for ITV and Matt Simpson, Head of Technology within the Accessibility Services, for ITV

I’m Emma Wheeler, Marketing Manager here at AbilityNet and I’ll be running you through today’s session.  So, a few bits of housekeeping...

We are joined today by John Emery from Sign Solutions, who will be providing live British Sign Language translation for you today.

You can increase the view of the panel, including the BSL interpreter, by sliding the panel bar on the right. This can only be done on desktops or laptops and cannot be done on mobile phones, so for the best view of BSL, please join on your desktop or laptop.

We also have live captions provided today by MyClearText –you can turn on the captions using the CC option on the control panel.

Additional captions available via streamtext.net/player?event=AbilityNet

Slides are available at Slideshare.net/abilitynet and on our website: abilitynet.org.uk/itv-insights

If you have any technical issues and you need to leave early don't worry, you’ll receive an email in a couple of days’ time with the recording, transcript and slides.

Depending on how you joined the webinar, you’ll find a Q&A window. If you want to ask David, Matt or Robin any questions, do drop those in the Q&A area for them to address. They will do after today’s session in a follow up blog on our website at abilitynet.org.uk/itv-insights

Also, please feel free to leave feedback in the post-webinar survey

So, that’s all from me for now, so over to Robin, David and Matt

ROBIN:

Thank you so much. Emma, this is amazing we've got 2 guests, this month.

It's never happened before!

So, we are doubly blessed having these guys on.

And it's very timely as well, because we're going to talk about ITVX, which is really exciting development is recent days really, you know, a couple of weeks maybe.

So, yes, welcome guys.

How are you doing?

DAVID: Very good. Thank you. Nice to be here.

MATT: I'm great.

ROBIN: Always a cheesy question to break the ice. What hot or cold beverage have you go the to get through this ordeal? I've got a bucket of tea. There are two cups that are identical feeling for me. One is about coffee and one is about tea. It is 50/50 that I've got the right one! What have you guys got?

DAVID: Well, I'm speaking to you from ITV up in Leeds, so at this time of day it has to be Yorkshire tea, I suppose.

ROBIN: That's what I've got in here actually.

DAVID: Maybe later, we're along the road from the very fantastic Kirkstall brewery, and later it might be something different. Yorkshire tea for now.

MATT: I'm speaking from my home office in France. Sadly it is not a glass of wine. It is a glass of French tap water. That will just have to do!

ROBIN: That's very abstinent for someone coming from that lovely country. The first question then, let's talk about the changes in TV and particularly, you know, digital, media delivery. You know, it's a completely different landscape. So, do you want to talk about accessibility in terms, particularly of digital? Let's expand it, I would normally say over the last decade or so, but let's go back 20 years, just because that kind of encapsulates this time frame of the revolution that has been TV. Who would like to kick off? Dave David yes, well, maybe I will go first. I will answer it from a programme perspective because I've been working in TV accessibility for nearly 30 years now so certainly in the first ten years, the big change we saw was the explosion of digital TV and, you know, the advent of channels like the BBC News channel, and the kind of solutions that were found at that time for making subtitles for that volume of content, that was the key challenge in the '90s. I think we proved that 100% subtitling is absolutely possible in that time.

Since then, of course, we have added audio description and sign language translation so those have become a real staple feature of the TV environment. Audio description has only recently celebrated its 20th anniversary on our TV screens. So, it seems amazing to think of a time before that existed know, but it was the case.

And then, the sort of most recent challenges are, you know, we have seen TV shift from a very linear schedule, where every week we would get ten days out preview of what was going to be on telly in ten days' time for a week. We were able to work in that workflow. We were creating subtitles and audio description and sign language translation on that sort of broadcast linear workflow. Now, that's changed now. So the first thing that happened obviously is that, you know, with the advent of places like Netflix, you know, TV channels started to release box sets. The first episode might go out on a linear time frame, but at that point all episodes of that box set would be released at the same time. We suddenly had to move to a kind of different workflow where you need to ensure that the subtitles and the audio description and any sign language translation is ready for the publication date rather than this linear schedule. That's moved on again now to the point where with something like ITV X, we can be told oh, by the way in two weeks' time, we're going to drop 270 episodes of Two and a half Men on platform. It is this change in time frame for publication and sharing of content has created a lot of challenges for making sure that accessibility is preserved. But Matt will have a view ...

MATT: On the technology and the user interface side. Yes, I think one of the biggest challenges is ensuring that there's a homogeneous experience between what you see on linear TV and what you experience on various devices. A lot of thought particularly in the UK was put into the transition from analogue TV to digital TV back at the end of the '90s into the early 2000s, that really did focus on the look and feel of services like subtitling and introduced audio description, it made it possible.

The same kind of processes haven't really happened with digital, with online services. So, it's taken quite a lot of effort on our part to try and make sure what appears to happen in the applications and the website equivalents all looks the same. That's not a given. If we get subtitling working, there's no guarantee to will behave in same way that the features that we're looking for, things like text alignment, colour to indicate speaker change, all of those things, they're not guaranteed. We have to do a lot of testing to make sure they're going to work.

Even now we're still, this morning, a fault reported, we are failing to see line breaks in the right places. Things like that can have unintended consequence and make it a considerable challenge to get the thing looking how people expect.

ROBIN: Yes, you have so many different platforms to take into account and to test for and the feedback must be, you know, exponentially more challenging, particularly when you're on this more agile time frame that David was talking about.

So, let's talk about digital, then. Because, you know, there are all of these different platforms, people are watching it live, and on-demand. We had Heather from Netflix on a few months ago, she gave her insights into the unique and specific challenging of digital streaming. You guys are obviously massive players in this game. What's your take on the kind of unique challenges around that area? We have touched on some but have you got any other kind of insights about digital?

MATT: If you think about our intention to make the experience as similar to linear broadcast as possible, and there is massive diversity in the mechanisms people can use to consume the content, to watch and to listen. We then have to go through a number, a considerable number of parallel projects to try to make sure that the subtitle files and AD files we create back at the start of the process and there is one file for each, look and feel the way they should when they reach the viewer and the listener. And that's really, really, really difficult. That's not an excuse but it is kind of a frustration of mine. Anybody who has listened to me speak publicly before know it is a pet frustration of mine. We can make a subtitle file for online, we can publish it on a platform, and that process, that project may take us some months to go through testing, deployment, et cetera. And then we have to repeat it for umpteen parallel platforms that work almost but not quite the same way. That all takes time and effort and to a certain degree, money. To be honest, it is more the time and the effort that is the problem. What I would love us to be able to do is to be able to create these assets the once and publish them the once, like we do with digital linear TV and then all of these platforms would be equally accessible. It is really, really hard. We have an email address accessibility@itv.com, which anyone who uses this service is welcome to message us on. We get all sorts of feedback through that. It is really hard to explain to people that we have not deliberately left their platform out. It is just, for a start, we have to run this project in parallel multiple times. Secondly, we have to try to get multiple different vendors and part of that solution to play together nicely so that what you see or hear at the end is seemingly identical to what you get on linear TV. It is really, really annoying.

DAVID: For anybody on the webinar, ITV X has not yet launched for some of these reasons on to Sky Q devices or on to BTTV devices, or Your View devices and some other platforms, because of technical issues. The rollout is an extended process. The people in ITV X have been talking about a launch year, so I think, you know, it won't take a year to get ITV X on those devices but there is some significant technical challenges still to overcome.

I think the other thing is around content. I think one of the challenges for the industry is to make sure that increasingly assets like subtitle files, AD files, sign language translations are consistent with content. People don't necessarily, as a customer, see the difference between an ITV platform an Amazon platform and a Netflix platform and a BBC platform, they're seeing the same content move around between all of these different platforms. Yet on some platforms, they've got accessibility. On other platforms they don't. We're not sophisticated enough in the industry to make sure that those access services files are seen as integral components within a programme asset. They need to be shared more efficiently. The duplication in the industry need to be reduced. So, that's another big challenge we have with the way things are today.

MATT: Providing the accessibility for live services is still -- for IP, for internet delivered services, it is really quite a new thing in the UK. The solutions that we're reliant on are really not as mature as they should be which is really very frustrating.

ROBIN: Yes, it is not mature, is it? It is not joined up. But would you, for example, if you got some content from another provider and it didn't come with those files, would you push back on that? Would you try and get those, so you can avoid the wheel reinvention?

DAVID: You do. But it is often the time pressure just says you need to get on with it and recreate them. So, we want to publish all content with subtitle files available. We don't want to be waiting for the distributor if they haven't supplied. Yes, it is a bit chicken and egg but that's a shift we will see over the next few years, that these accessibility components, alt tags, AD files and caption files, all of these things will be seen as integral bit of metadata within an overall programme asset but not yet.

ROBIN: There's got to be a place for regulation here that means you can justifiably push back or expect that things will happen first time. So, what are the regulations or legal obligations that a streaming provider like yourselves face and, you know, is that the way to make the biggest impact through regulation, would you say?

DAVID: Well, I mean we have been very used over the years to regulation on linear services, so, you know, ITV along with all our broadcasters in the UK, has Ofcom regulations around the amount of subtitling and audio description and sign language translation that need to be there. That's been very effective. That has not yet been replicated on to on-demand services. There are recommendations that have gone from Ofcom to the Department of Culture, media and sport, that they're in an in-tray at the moment, so we are waiting for that to be turned into regulation.

But, you know, when it comes to streaming services, I would say, you know, regulation is no longer really the primary driver for what we are doing. You know, ITV talks the talk when it comes to ITV is for everyone, it has a very strong diversity and inclusion message, I think, that goes out publicly. I think it recognises that it, therefore, need to walk the walk on things like digital accessibility. So, we're not waiting for regulation to kind of compel us to do things. It's the right thing for the business in a commercial sense. It's the right thing for the employees in the organisation, if we want to attract the right people to work in the organisation, it is the right thing for their motivation and morale. But, you know, it's clearly the right thing for the customer as well. So, it's happening anyway. Regulation can help us kind of strengthen our message when we're trying to bring the organisation along. But frankly, I think we're winning that battle and it is increasingly -- we know about the regulation and we value it and we value the relationship with Ofcom and we take the compliance with the regulation very seriously, but it's not the primary driver for what we're doing any more.

MATT: I think the technical side of regulation, we can certainly see in the US with the FCC, where they've made a carriage of things like captions required if they already exist in the signal. That's simplified some of the nudges they've given towards the technology in and service providers has simplified the carriage of that data and we really could use that in Europe and particularly for us in the UK. That would make our job in rolling out those services, as I said earlier, much simpler. We'd run one project, the data would be there and it would be a shared responsibility for all of the partners to make that available to the end user. Rob reason absolutely. I mean, we saw a massive uptake in accessibility when it came to the public sector regulations that came in a few years ago, and, you know, there's no doubt at all that however much people want to do something, I mean you guys said it was more about time than resourcing which is, you know, at least you don't have both of those challenges but until you can clone your team, time will be an issue. So, to be able to really prioritise inclusion and the acknowledgement that people are using those additional accessibility features for a whole raft of reasons. I mean, YouTube said a couple of years ago that 60% plus of that videos that are streamed have the subtitles turned on, obviously, that's not just people with a hearing impairment, it is news channels to a station concourse, or pub, or wherever it might be, where you've got the sound off, or nobody can hear it, you know, or it's students sneakily watching YouTube videos in a lecture theatre where they can't have the sound on, et cetera. Maybe that second use case is not so honourable, but yeah, absolutely, there's general recognition there's a much broader audience for these as well.

DAVID: Yes.

ROBIN: Carrots and sticks.

DAVID: My favourite one was feedback telling us that they needed the subtitles because they liked to eat crisps while they were watching television! So, yeah, I think we know from research now that, you know, Netflix have said that 80% of their users have put the subtitles on within the last month and 40% of their users have them switched on permanently. We see similar stats from BBC I player. We know that they're just an expected feature of a platform like us now. We're definitely seeing, you know, increased take-up of audio description as well. You know, we get a lot of feedback now about audio description and, yeah, so all of these features ... I think there's a recognition certainly within ITV and I know other organisations that, you know, accessibility features genuinely do benefit everyone. You can't anticipate really the use case. You just know that you're going to find new interesting ones all of the time.

ROBIN: Yes, people for whom English is not their first language, that would reinforce their dialogue. A lot of people mumble these days in their dialogue! So, let's talk about ITV X. He have talked about it before, people not be familiar with it. It's new, it's still rolling out. Do you want to say exactly what it is, this new streaming service? And what people can expect when it comes to accessibility or inclusion. And what new or prioritised features are part and parcel of ITV X? Who would like to start?

DAVID: Well, I'll start and then Matt can pick up bits that I miss. Yes, so fundamentally, ITV X is a replacement for ITV Hub that has been ITV's catch-up service for the last, I don't know, eight to ten years. ITV X is much bigger than just a catch-up service. So, where ITV had about 200 hours of content on the platform, it now has 1,500 hours of content on the platform, so that's been a huge challenge for us over the past few months. It is a free advertised funded streaming service. It comprises lots of kind of archive catch-up and on-demand catch-up content and also access to live channels through the platform so you can watch all of ITV's main channels. And also 20 what we call fast channels, so free ad-supported television challenges. There are 20 of them, themed channels, there's one around Christmas at the moment. There's a Vera channel, if you just want to watch 24/7 episodes of Vera. Within those fast channels, we have added this ITV-signed Channel. It is a 24/7 channel showcasing highlights from our signed archive, including things like the weekly Coronation Street and Emmerdale omnibuses and, you know, series of Broadchurch. We will be refreshing that over time and making sure that channel, that sign channel becomes an every richer feature. So, yeah, a free advertised funded streaming service. You can subscribe if you want to watch things ad free and get access as well to what was Brit box UK which has also been incorporated so the content from Brit box UK is on the platform as well.

From an accessibility point of view, what will you find? You'll find something which is better than ITV hub. It is also a work in progress so we are by no means sort of at the end of the road here. We have now got subtitles working on every platform and device for on-demand and catch-up which is a huge step forward from ITV hub. Be have audio description now available on a range of connected TV devices so you can watch the audio description on Apple TV, Amazon Fire, chrome cast, Samsung televisions. As I said before, we have also got this sort of signed fast channel.

But also, you know, I say it is a work in progress because we're very conscious that there are still some gaps, gaps in, you know, the availability of features but also in the overall user experience. The good thing about ITV X and Matt can maybe expand on this a bit more, is that we really feel confident that the basic building blocks are in place to make it a really accessible streaming platform over a bit of time. We have been working very closely with a range of teams from the marketing creative branding side through to the kind of coders who are building the code base of the platform, to make sure that's the case.

MATT: Yes, absolutely. I mean, we were lucky as a team, an accessibility team, we pretty much kicked off about three years ago. By time this project started more or less at the beginning of the year, we were sufficiently familiar with all of the internal folks we needed to talk to and we were there right at the beginning and we had input into the creation of the brand. There was focus on at the very starting of it, choosing a colour palate that will work, through front and iterations. We went through multiple iterations of the font to make sure all of the characters are legible. We worked with the design team on creating the design system so there is a fully documented in a platform called Figma, a design system that tells all of the developers and testers how everything should work. Our challenge now what you see as ITV X is based on what we built as ITV Hub over many years to make sure all of that good stuff is translated on to the page and on to the screen so that the user experience matches up with how we expect it to behave. As David said, it's not quite there in places. Some pages are considerably better than others. It was interesting, once we have launched and read people's Twitter feedback, I was sorely tempted to put the Jira ticket numbers, the bug tracking ticket numbers on people's tweets, where they found it doesn't do this or that when they were auditing it. It is good to see people are finding the same stuff as us and largely not finding new things. As David said, it is very much a work in progress. This isn't the finished launch product. It's got a lot of iterations I think before we get it to the place we really would like it to be but probably considerably fewer iterations to get it to somewhere where it gives a really good comfortable experience.

ROBIN: Fantastic! We mentioned an email address earlier. Where would people go for fear of giving you lots of feedback that is –

MATT: It's all good!

DAVID: Yes, so accessibility@itv.com. The email address you would expect. Yes, we are very keen to get feedback into that. I think we're also, you know, keen to sort of stress, you know, it will be responded to. We know it's a work in progress. We're looking at this as Matt says in great detail. There's a great ambition. One thing we have achieved I think within ITV is the senior management team, up to the Chief Executive, are very bought into the idea of the need for ITV X to be the most accessible platform it can be. So, that senior management team buy-in is absolutely there. So the commitment over the long-term to plug the gaps that still exist is very much there. So, that's why feedback is very useful to us, because it kind of guide us. We know a lot of the things we want to do but we're also very receptive to how this is received and what people themselves think are the priorities.

ROBIN: Fantastic. I cannot stress the importance of senior buy-in and support strongly enough.

DAVID: One thing, on that, I was thinking about that. We have got fantastic buy-in. The other thing I have learnt through this project I think is that you absolutely need to get to the product managers and the programme managers as well, because without them, it is such a big project and it's so kind of vast, you know, you have to have the individual product manager and programme managers really brought into the idea because they are the ones directing work day to day, the detailed work. Absolutely senior management buy-in but also get at the product managers and the programme managers.

ROBIN: Cool. That's half answered Natalie's question we will get to in a second. But we're rapidly running out of time. I think because we've got two guests, it's okay for us to go a little bit over. Briefly, if possible, let's just talk about the future now. Because ITV X is such an exciting development and evolution. What does the future hold? Is it more of the same goodness? Are there any other step changes to expect, you know, the next big thing? Or is all of your energies focused on really delivering for ITV X in the coming months? So, let's talk about the future. Has anyone got anything they can share in that area?

DAVID: Yeah, so I would say that absolutely, a lot of our energy is going to be focused on refining what we have already put out there. However, I think there is also, one of the focuses for 2023 that we have already agreed within ITV is to start looking at production. So the idea of accessibility in production and shifting left within the production environment is quite an interesting one, that we haven't really thought about very much. How do you build accessibility into the production of a TV programme, you know, right from the start, as you do with all other aspects of accessibility, how do you do that in programme making and in the way things are scripted? We're making good progress within ITV on representation on screen. We have got to do better in terms of the diversity and inclusion behind the screen. We have also got to think laterally about, yeah, accessibility in TV production and how do you make the people who are making the programmes think about accessibility from the start? And, therefore, solve some of the problems that exist further down stream where we're trying to make sure that there's great accessibility to TV in the last mile. I'm thinking particularly for a large proportion of programmes which are not currently audio described because as we know the audio description percentages are much lower than they are for subtitling, but in many TV programmes that are not audio described it would not take very much in terms of awareness at the TV production phase to greatly increase the level of accessibility inherent in the TV programme. So, that's one of the focuses that we have agreed.

Being within the broadcaster is a great position to be because you can actually engage directly with the programme makers.

MATT: Something like a TV studio can be a really frustrating place from an accessibility point of view. They are designed for large cumbersome bits of camera equipment to get around them, but they're not right for a wheelchair users. I don't think it is right that a wheelchair users comes in through the scenery entrance. They should be able to come through the door as with everybody. It's a challenge. It's a challenge. It's something that we will probably have to spend a lot of time and repetition to get right.

ROBIN: My number-one request auto be going back to that mumbling thing again, if you have the ear of the people that are casting and doing the production, then yes, please, because I can't access the subtitles to reinforce what people were saying, it would top over the top even if I could, which I can on certain platforms of I don't get the lips reinforcing what people are saying. Ah, it's a struggle!

MATT: Clear speech is going to be an interesting topic in the future. There are things like dialogue plus currently in use in Germany, et cetera. It would be useful and interesting to see it grow in the UK. I share your woes there. My hearing is gradually fading and I'm going to need to have some assistance there.

ROBIN: Yeah, more ability to mix levels post, so up the vocals or maybe use some clever AI to enhance those, be able to change the level of the AD versus the background, et cetera. Fantastic! We're horribly over time but I don't care! So, let's quickly talk about last month's guest Natalie of Spotify. Absolutely brilliant guest. She touched upon, in her question, what we were talking about earlier, you are such a massive organisation and you have such a big reach, you're working with so many different types of content and media, so many different teams, so many different external organisations, so how can you kind of manage all of that in your interactions and still try to maximise accessibility and inclusion across all of those different activities? Who want to kick off, if you can.

MATT: It's a really good question. I think I spend a lot of my day on Slack. If you're not familiar, it is a messenger tool for communicating with developers, et cetera. But to be honest, I think the best thing I can say is start the conversations early, make sure you know who, in an organisation such as hours, who is support for something. We had a conversation earlier today, where we were wondering who exactly we need to speak to get something changed. That's key, just knowing where the levers are so you can pull on them, building those relationships internally so you can call on somebody to say, hey, this is not quite right and how do we change it. But clarity of communication. Also, clarity of purpose. One of the things we set out at the very beginning was our accessibility standards policy. What do we want to achieve? If somebody queries us, where do we point them to answer some basic questions of how we things should be. That's certainly been my approach.

DAVID: Yes, you've got to multiple your impacts, you know. So, we've been building champions network within ITV. The measure of success for us is seeing things happening, progressing without us because there's four us in the accessibility team, which is great, but it's only four. So, seeing things happen without our direct involvement is the measure of success, really. That's what we need to get to.

ROBIN: I like it. Successful delegation, I'm all for that! Oh, empowerment, maybe that's the best way to say it. So, now we're actually at the end of the run Accessibility Insights for this season and we don't have actually have a person confirmed for next season which will be coming early next year. So, I'm really sorry, but I'm still going to ask you to give us a generic general question for an imaginary person, probably not too dissimilar to yourselves in a similar field, accessibility and digital inclusion. This is a tough one but, yes, have you got a general question we can put to the mystery guest for next time?

DAVID: Well, I'm kind of interested in creating pressure and creating levers within an organisation and how do you persuade people, what are the tactics you use. My question would be, what have been your most successful tactics or strategies for building that pressure for cultural change in your organisation?

ROBIN: I love it. The horse head in the bed, maybe.

MATT: Little extreme!

ROBIN: Are you happy with that question, Matt?

MATT: Yes, I think that's absolutely something we have had to learn how to do.

ROBIN: Fantastic. Thank you both. Absolutely brilliant conversation. Sorry guys, we overran. We have taken a bit more much your lunch than intended. I hope you felt it was well worth it. Thanks guys. Thanks again of I will pass you back to Emma for a little bit of out row admin. Thanks, Emma.

EMMA: Thanks so much, David, Matt and Robin. There really were a lot of questions today. We hope to answer them online in the next few days. You will receive an email with a link to access them. Finally, just a little bit more information that might be of interest to you. We run online training sessions on digital accessibility. You can book those at AbilityNet.org.uk/training. Some upcoming and on-demand courses of interest are: How to create accessibility documents and presentations, understanding accessibility evaluations and testing results, and how to produce accessible videos.

With over 2,000 registrations, AbilityNet's TechShare Pro 2022 was Europe's largest gathering of accessibility and disability inclusion professionals and their allies. Our archive ticket gives you access to all of the recordings from three days of engaging interactive sessions, including keynotes, workshops and discussion forums. You can also sign up to our e-newsletter on our website at AbilityNet.org.uk/newsletter. Don't forget about our next webinars which you can access at AbilityNet.org.uk/webinars. We have a full programme in 2023 and we're starting with higher education at the end of January and more details will follow with that soon. So, thank you again, David, Matt and Robin and to everyone who has joined us. Please do complete the feedback form that you be directed to. We'll be in touch with you soon. Bye everyone.

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