LILY BOND: Welcome, everyone. And thank you for joining this webinar entitled, "The Road to Sustainable Corporate Accessibility." I'm Lily Bond from 3Play Media, and I'll be moderating today. And I'm thrilled to be joined by John Foliot, who is the principal accessibility strategist at Deque. We have about 45 minutes for his presentation, followed by 15 minutes for Q&A. And with that, I will hand it off to John, who has a great presentation prepared for you.

JOHN FOLIOT: Well, thanks, Lily. And hi, how are you doing today? Good afternoon, everybody, or good morning for those of you that may still be on the West Coast. My name's John Foliot. And as Lily said, I'm a principal accessibility strategist at Deque. Today, we're going to look at the road to sustainable corporate accessibility.

I do apologize. I'm suffering quite severely from allergies right now. So if I go a little cotton mouth on you, please indulge me.

I guess the first place to start is talking about vision and commitment. Like any journey that you undertake, you really need to know where it is you want to get to. And you really need to be committed to get there. The path that we have here, or the path I'm going to talk about today, is essentially a road map that would be designed to support you as you make your way through the different phases required of getting your organization from where you are today to where it is you want to be at the end of the road.

It includes things like creating a web accessibility leadership team, looking at policies, communication plans, assessing where you are and how you're going to get to where you want to be, looking at QA, training, and monitoring. And so we'll go through all those steps in a little more detail throughout the presentation.

So the first thing you really need to do in any organization when you're getting ready to go on this journey is you need to establish a leadership team. One thing that's real important to understand is that web accessibility is not so much a project as it is a program. It doesn't have a start and end date. Well, it'll have a start date. It's whatever day you start on. But the goal here is that you're creating a program that ultimately is going to be part of the corporate DNA of your organization. And so to do that, you need a lot of support in place to ensure that it's fully integrated into the workflow within your organization.

Probably the most important step, or certainly one of the most significant steps, is ensuring

that you have executive management buy-in. The executive management person is the guy or the woman who's going to promote the vision throughout the organization, is going to ensure that the requirements are clearly articulated, and that they have tangible support. It's really important to, as most senior executives understand, to create and foster a team spirit around this project, to really look at this as a positive undertaking, as opposed to a, "we've got to do this because of" kind of thing, because that kind of attitude always permeates all the way down throughout the organization. If the management at the top of the organization are excited and positive about taking on this challenge, then that trickles on down through the entire organization.

They want to make sure that accessibility, this concept of accessibility that we're talking about today, is also integrated into other corporate guides. And one of the things that's important for management to understand is that, while they want to be very specific in what they're asking for, especially in the early days, they need to be very generous in what they accept--understanding that this is going to be new for a lot of people. It's a little bit scary. And so we really want to be sure that all effort is appreciated and recognized for what it is.

Another key person on your team would be your web accessibility coordinator. The web accessibility coordinator is basically the person who is responsible for the communication and promotion of the activity throughout the organization, communicates your accessibility policies within your organization, and works on promoting accessibility awareness in all spheres of activities and the core groups within the organization. The coordinator is also responsible for identifying and promoting various accessibility training needs for the key stakeholders in the organization, ensuring that that training is successfully implemented, and that the policies required for that are also in place.

The type of commitment from this kind of person is not a lot of time. There's not a lot of time involved, but really is kind of the key person on the senior management team that's going to steer this from start to finish. And so, ideally, they are also in a position where they're involved in budget discussions and corporate strategy discussions, along those lines there. They will take the interests and promote the interests of the web accessibility into those senior management discussions and ensure that they remain on the table as it were.

The next person within your organization that I would recommend you have is your web accessibility champion. This person is also a director level or above and has the signing authority. It is essentially the person that works with the coordinator to ensure that things

happen.

But while the coordinator is kind of the administrative person, the web accessibility champion is really the person down on the shop floor, as it is, the champion, the person that is the go-to person and has an understanding of the types of disabilities that we're looking at, understands the benefits of accessibility compliance, and also has an understanding of the legal ramifications, so a little more proactive, a little more hands-on in their activities.

Another role that's really critical is that of the web accessibility specialist. And as you look throughout your production lifecycle, the workflow, you're going to have a number of different people serving different roles. So for example, you'll have your business analyst or project implementer, the person that will bring new initiatives, new projects to your website or websites and really is the champion of getting that new thing involved. They should have an awareness of accessibility requirements as well.

But then, throughout the rest of the team, you're going to have interaction designers. You're going to have visual designers. You're going to have the web production folks, the coders that are doing the code, the people that are doing the graphic design, the CSS, and what have you. You also have the QA role and the different things that the people in the QA team are responsible for in terms of the lifecycle of the production. All of those roles, there should, in fact, be some kind of specialist embedded within that team. It may be a team that's looking at multiple projects, and you'll have one web accessibility specialist. But within those verticals, within those project roles, ideally, you want to identify and train one key person who is the go-to specialist by role, so that they can then provide the support to the other stakeholders on their team and is basically the go-to person.

So that's kind of an overview of the different roles that you would look at in your team. And having that team in place is a critical step in the first part of your journey, that you've got a team behind this. This isn't a one-person activity.

The next step on our road to success here is we need to have policies. And policies, like road maps, provide you the framework and the milestones that you'll share amongst your stakeholders and throughout the organization. It represents the statement or commitment towards your digital inclusion and diversity support. So you're going to want to review and propose internal accessibility policies with your leadership team, as well as other stakeholders in upper management and the legal department.

When developing your policies, you want to ensure that you review feedback from all the stakeholders in the team, especially early on, to ensure that you're not asking groups or teams to do things that they're physically incapable of doing, or that their role does not allow them to do. But by the same token, we want to make sure that there's a clear understanding that these are new policies and that their input is important, as you work on it.

As you're developing the policies-- and of course, it is going to be a process, it's one of the earlier things that your leadership team is going to undertake is to develop these policies-- they'll get to the point where they'll be reviewed by final leadership and the legal department. And then that leadership team is also responsible to ensure that they're communicated across the organization and that a follow-up strategy to communicate about the commitment is in place.

So what are the policies that you would be looking at? Probably the most important policy is your internal accessibilities policy and guideline. My recommendation is that your policy is driving your organization towards conformance to the WCAG 2.0 standard at the AA conformance level. The W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines is, for the most part, considered the gold standard or the benchmark.

And while its force of law in the United States is still under a little bit of question, the ADA and the Section 508 refresh being somewhat stalled in Washington right now-- I can tell you that the Department of Justice has been signaling, however, that they are looking at WCAG 2.0 AA as the benchmark they want to adopt. But they're not there yet. In other countries around the globe, you'll have many countries pointing to the same W3C standard as the definition of what their accessibility guideline is like. And so, generally speaking, if you are in conformance to WCAG 2.0, you are almost assured that you are meeting the requirements of various countries and organizations around the globe.

The scope of the policy is applied to both internal and external websites within your organization, so public-facing content, your WWW dot domain. But it should also apply to internal content, like, for example, your intranet and support content for your employees and staff. The scope should apply to all new, updated, and existing web pages, including content and functionality that's produced or updated both internally, but as well as content and functionality that's being provided to you by third-party developers.

And that's a really important part there. A lot of organizations are dependent on third-party

tools or third-party services to create or augment their online presence. And you want to ensure that your policy and guidelines addresses that content as well.

Other policies and guidelines that you would likely want to have or that is included in this larger policy is a recognition of milestones and compliance timelines, recognizing that you're probably not where you want to be now, but your policies should outline where you want to be and at what date you want to be there, so that everybody has-- if you'll excuse the expression-- their marching orders. You also want to call out and recognize known limitations that may exist within the body of content that is your web presence.

For example, there may be large, complex graphic images, or sophisticated maps. Let's say you're a library or an institution that has a lot of complex graphic images. It's fine and well to say that you have a policy that says that all graphic images must have an alternative text. But when you have hundreds of thousands of maps, delivering on that requirement becomes problematic.

So you want to make sure that your policy acknowledges those limitations and, at the same time, also have a policy in place to address those limitations. So again, in the example of the maps, some kind of disclaimer or notice on your website recognizing that textual descriptions of all these maps are not possible across all of the maps, but that there is a process for people with disabilities that are requiring that information to contact your organization and engage in a discussion about those ultimate or accommodation strategies.

You also want to be clearly articulating the responsibilities and who's responsible for what as we go through the timeline. And we'll touch on that a little bit more. But you need to make sure that the responsibilities for people, such as your business units, or your business analysts, as well as the web developers, the content providers, the editorial staff, the graphic people, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Every one of those people does have a role to play in the final project that you're working on. And so getting those articulated in your policy is important as well.

Areas around accountability and monitoring, who's responsible for what, that's usually the web accessibility coordinator and senior management. But you want to make sure that that is articulated in the policy, as well as what you're going to do regarding policy violations. What is the escalation process that your organization will take when a problem is, in fact, identified, and something needs to be done? What are those steps?

Finally, your policy should, like all policies, should have a scheduled review. It's been my experience that an annual or every two-year review is usually sufficient. I wouldn't want to go much more than two years. Most people tend to do an annual review of the policy. And that shouldn't take too long. It's usually a meeting, an hour or two, and you are where you want to be.

Other policies that you might want to consider for your organization is an exception procedure for accessibility violations. So again, we'll go back to that example of a map where you find that, as you're moving forward, and as new content is being created, something comes up. And after looking at the problem, or looking at the requirement, there are concerns about how to ensure that it is accessible to people with various types of disabilities.

You need to account for an exception procedure in those cases where there may be restrictions due to technical or financial restrictions that excludes you or precludes you from actually making whatever it is you're working on completely accessible. And so having that procedure and process in place, it usually involves senior management and, again, your legal department, because legal risk is probably the biggest issue at this point. But you want to have that in place as well.

If you have a large dependency on third-party vendors, either through outsourcing through agencies, or production organizations that are producing the content for you, or whether you're purchasing third-party software tools, you want to make sure that all of your engagement with those organizations ensures that accessibility is being maintained. So for example, a procurement policy would have a specific policy bullet point saying that the vendor attests to the fact that the product that is being sold or that you are purchasing will, in fact, comply with the WCAG AA standard when used properly-- those kinds of things.

Finally, I'm starting to see now-- it's starting to surface in a couple of clients that I've been working with-- an increasing need for a social media accessibility policy. Social media is a tricky area, because a lot of the platform is outside of your control. You have no control over whether the Twitter interface is fully accessible or not, or whether Facebook is fully accessible or not.

Exciting news this past week-- both Twitter and Facebook are now starting to provide ways of providing alternative text for their images, that being one of the largest problems that they've had. But there are other issues as well, including color contrast, the ability to resize the font on

the page and whatnot. And so some of those things are completely outside of your control, because you are using a third-party platform. Nonetheless, you, as the content owner, as the owner of that media channel, you're producing content to be consumed on those channels. And so there is a responsibility there to ensure that the production people that are producing that content are, in fact, doing the best that they can.

So again, I mentioned color contrast. There is a specific requirement in WCAG 2.0 that requires a contrast ratio of 4.5:1 for foreground and background text. If you're using an image that has text burned into it, you need to ensure that that contrast is being maintained, to remain in compliance.

The next step on our path or our journey here is to establish a communication plan. And communicating what is it you're wanting to do both internally and externally is really important. And it's something that you also need to get a handle on fairly quickly.

Almost at the same time as you're working on your policies-- your coordinator and that senior management team-- you should be thinking about how you're going to communicate this plan both internally to the various stakeholders, and anticipate that you're going to see some resistance from some quarters-- but also in terms of what can you do, if anything, to communicate externally that you are undertaking or renewing your commitment to additional accessibility. So you're going to be looking at things like processes, and tools, and other support, in terms of guidelines and training, and how you plan on deploying that out.

The Web Accessibility Communication Plan ultimately creates a bridge that connects accessibility policies to the people, processes, and tools. So again, decision-makers, implementers, both internal and external, whether it's your information technology people, the web developers, the IT team in general, or through your procurement agents-- you know, the people that are buying and contracting services and goods-- they need to be made aware of this renewed commitment or this new plan, this new program that you're undertaking, and make sure that they are well-equipped with where you're headed and the support that they have.

Communicating your intent to technology users and vendors is also important. I'll go back, and I'll use that example of Facebook. And I know the people at Facebook. They're good people. And early on, Facebook was taking a lot of grief from people with disabilities over the gaps in their accessibility. And rather than slink off and hide about it, Facebook took a decision to

really grab the bull by the horns and jump in.

One of the first things they did is they created an accessibility team internally within their organization. They hired a blind engineer to head up that organization. And one of the first things that he did internally is he created what he called an empathy lab. The empathy lab was a lab in their main site that had various types of assistive technology that people could drop by and they could experience firsthand what a screen reader did and how it worked, and what an alternative switch looked like if you didn't have hands, and how you could use speech input to actually control your web page.

And not only did that receive a lot of really positive feedback-- he created a really good positive feedback loop internally-- but along the way, media organizations picked up on it as well. And the next thing you know, they're actually getting positive media messages with pictures of the empathy lab and a couple of the Facebook engineers. And it became a good news story that started making the rounds on various online news channels.

So a communication plan that thinks about how you can take a lemon and make it into lemonade, if you'll pardon that expression, is something you want to think about. You don't necessarily want to shy away from the fact that you recognize that you still have a ways to go. But by communicating a very positive message, you could actually turn that to your advantage.

So some of the key messages of your communication plan include the effective use of technology, and that the effective use of technology solves problems. Whereas before, technology made things a lot more difficult. So it's not so much a question of, I couldn't do it before, why do I have to do it now, and more, look at what the benefits of technology bring, that we could never do this before, but technology now allows us to do it. So really, it's about adjusting the spin.

It's important to understand that accessibility is not the same as accommodation. Accommodation is what you do when all other avenues have been resolved. So if you have a complex image, if you can provide a text description of that image for non-sighted people to have their screen reader read it out loud, that's ensuring that the image is accessible. Whereas, is providing a 1-800 number where they can phone and get more information, that's accommodation.

And as you can rightly guess, accommodation is always more expensive than accessibility, which is message number three, that web accessibility is not necessarily more expensive. And

if you plan for it from the beginning, its cost is often negligible. I won't tell you that there's no cost, but that you can minimize your cost by addressing the problem early on. It's the old mechanic's expression, right? You can pay me now, or you can pay me later.

Web accessibility is an important component of delivering your services electronically. And so having that message out there is really, basically, a way of saying that you're open to business, that you're open for all, and not just some. Web accessibility impacts everybody, not just people with disabilities, but in fact, it could impact you, your mother, my father, just about anybody.

Seniors is a market that's often overlooked. But if you think about the different types of accessibility or disability issues that we try to address, whether it's vision problems, or hearing problems, or mobility problems, the inability to drive a mouse easily because you've got shakes or tremors, or even cognitive disabilities-- the ability to understand, which could be things from dyslexia or ADHD to early onset Alzheimer's, right? Seniors tend to manifest or start to-- as we grow older, a lot of the things that we consider to be disabilities start to manifest in seniors. So it's interesting to think about that and use that as a form or as something to guide your communication plan.

And then, finally, as I said, web accessibility is a journey, it's not a destination. It's a program, it's not a project.

One of the things you might also want to consider when you're developing your policies and in keeping with your communication plan is thinking about a customer service plan. It's been my observation experience over the 15, 16 years or so that I've been doing this that most lawsuits don't start just because there's an inaccessible website, but rather that because somebody with a disability reached out to an organization to say that they were having problems, and that that outreach to the organization actually created or accelerated the frustration, through a telephone operator that was unaware of what the issues were, couldn't provide any kind of useful resolution, and basically goes, well, I'm sorry. I don't know what we can do. I'll pass it along. And the end user really doesn't have a solution.

So if your organization is one that provides that kind of 1-800-type support, or a "contact us at help.com" or whatever, you want to make sure that you have some kind of solution there as well. If you do have live telephone operators, you're going to want to think about training them, providing them with an escalation script or support script so that, when people with disabilities

do reach out, even if you're not all the way there, you have a well-articulated and well-thought-out strategy to deal with those people as they approach your organization.

The next requirement, the next step along the way is creating a learning plan. And by that, I mean actually starting to bring documentation and training into your organization to embed it into the DNA of your organization. Training helps resources develop the skills required to do the work. And documentation in a training program ensures that, as your workforce, as your employees turn over-- and that's just a reality in today's workplace-- that as new hires come on board, that they too receive training in terms of accessibility.

One of the first web organizations I ever saw to do this-- and this was probably close to 10 years ago-- was Yahoo. And when Yahoo brought on a new hire, in the first week of a new job, a new employee at Yahoo, they went through a half-day web accessibility boot camp where, again, they were exposed to assistive technology and were given a high level introduction to what web accessibility was, what it meant to Yahoo, and what their role within Yahoo meant, and what they had to deliver to that.

In terms of providing that learning, providing that training, you have a couple of different options. In-person training tends to be the most effective, but it's also the most costly and is the hardest to scale. If you're a small to medium sized organization, in-person training might be something you might want to seriously consider, or doing live training via an online resource, webinars, and that type of thing. As you get larger, you're probably going to want to look at pre-recorded or some kind of e-learning training to ensure that you get that delivered.

I've posted a couple of different logos here. And in the interest of transparency, yes, the company I work for, Deque, we offer training. But there are other organizations-- Knowbility, an organization based here in Austin, offers an annual John Slatin AccessU. That's a two or three-day intense hands-on training. You come to Austin. It's held at a local university campus here. It happens usually in May. I don't know the date this year. I believe it's the third week of May. But that's a wonderful training resource as well.

The International Association of Accessibility Professionals has recently started up. It is an organization that is looking to create a training and certification program for web accessibility. They have started on that. They have started with their first certification program. It's basic at this [AUDIO OUT]. It's not a high level certification program, but it's certainly really good for people that have never done anything in this space before. The learning materials required to

be reviewed and then the exam that you take ensures that you will have a good, broad, general awareness.

Other ways of getting learning and training-- there are a number of different conferences that happen here in North America, as well as around the world. I singled out two here. Accessing Higher Ground, in Colorado every fall, tends to be very much a hands-on type of conference with a lot of training workshops as part of the conference offering. It tends to be very focused on higher education, but a lot of the principles, and techniques, and technologies that they use and that they teach at that conference are applicable to commerce and more commercial endeavors as well.

Finally, there's the annual CSUN Conference, the International Technology of Persons with Disabilities. It just wrapped up. It's usually in March, and it wrapped up about two weeks ago. It is the largest conference of its kind in the world. There's a couple of others. There's Web for All that usually is held in Europe. But these conferences usually contain a significant amount of hands-on training or webinars as well. So those are some of the other areas where you can look to to get your training.

As part of your road map, one of the next things you're probably going to want to do is start looking at an immediate strategy regarding the content that you have on the web today. And really, to my mind, it comes down to making a decision on what I refer to as the three Rs-- repair, replace, or retire. It's really hard-- and giving you a definitive answer on this one, I can't do, because it really is dependent on where your organization is and the amount of content you have. When we're working with our clients, we usually use a matrix or a grid similar to this where we will look at various projects, and the maturity level of where they are, and where you're going to be.

Content that is legacy content is going to usually have a high cost to remediate, but probably is going to have a low impact in terms of litigation risk, because it's been there, and it's very dated. Stuff that is still kind of secondary to your core business might be relatively easy to remediate, but you probably want to look at more stuff that's in flight or is about to launch, as well as stuff that is in its mature phase as being where you want to focus your efforts most.

In terms of cost, stuff that's about to kick off or new content that you're about to undertake, if you plan for accessibility at the beginning, the cost is lower. Going in and trying to fix existing content is going to be higher, because, of course, you've got content that's already live. And

so there is not only the cost and effort to do the remediation, but all of the things that are associated with that, including regression testing and what have you. And so that tends to add to the cost.

So really, you're going to have to look at what it is that you have in-house. You're going to have to do this triage around what your content is and prioritize what needs to be fixed first. As you're looking at that content, as I said, the three questions you should be asking yourself is, is this content at a stage in its life where we need to repair it? The new website went live eight months ago, and we're not ready for a total site refresh, then it's repair. Something that's older, but still has some value, that could be put into a refresh project, would be a replace.

And then you want to take a real serious look at some of the stuff that you may still have on the web. And I find this is most effective in really large organizations. There may, in fact, be a whole bunch of legacy content that just needs to be retired.

To that specific point, there was an issue. When I was working up in Canada quite some years ago, the Canadian government had a bit of a conundrum in that they couldn't just retire legacy content, because it belonged to the government. It belonged to the people. And so it had to remain open and archivable and open to all people to access it. But by the same token, the cost to remediate some of that older content, they couldn't justify the cost over that.

And so the government of Canada, they created a classification where they went through this legacy content, and they added a banner header to the content that noted that it, in fact, was legacy content, recognized that it may or may not have accessibility concerns, and that if you were having a problem accessing that particular web document, that you could then contact them to have a discussion over a culmination strategy. So that may be part of your policy. And that may be part of your strategy in terms of the body of content that you have on the web today.

Probably the better or more productive activity you want to take, though, is a longer-term process, which includes planning, designing, building, and then testing. And so when you design and plan for accessibility, you're going to save money. And you're going to ensure that everybody understands the requirements going on.

Coding and equipping your people to create accessible content is important. And when you have your policies in place, when you've got your training in place, you've equipped and empowered your team to actually produce an accessible material out the door, which, again,

of course, has an impact on cost.

The testing and remediation for accessibility-- the remediation effort goes down, because you've empowered and equipped people to be creating accessible content in the beginning. And as part of your training, you've also trained your testing and QA people and equipped them and empowered them with the tools to do appropriate accessibility testing, so that you can launch and sustain your accessible content. And basically, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So this is the end state, in terms of the actual gears spinning in your shop on a regular basis, right? You want to code, test, launch, design. And that's reiterative, almost agile, process that the development folks are very fond of. But you can see how it feeds into other corporate goals, in terms of planning, developing, testing, and sustaining.

And that, of course, is the final goal, right? We want to have sustainment. And we want to ensure that we have a plan so that, as we go down the road, it's bright skies ahead.

So one of the key things that you will require, along with your policies, and your planning, and your education, is you want to look at tools and testing. I do not want to turn this into a sales presentation for Deque. I will mention that there are a number of different browser-based testing tools, plug-ins for the different browsers, Firefox and Chrome. We're starting to see a lot of integrated, automated testing tools that developers are using in their development environment, so that they can do testing before they hand their stuff off to the QA folks.

And one of the things that I'm very proud of Deque is that we've open sourced the accessibility engine. So for our testing tools, there is an engine, a rule set, that is mapped to the WCAG AA requirements, and then a series of scripted tests that can be run to test for that. And that's the accessibility engine. The engine itself is open source. And it can be integrated into any kind of automated or integrated test [AUDIO OUT]

And so, for example, if your development team is using Selenium, aXe can be incorporated into Selenium, or Cucumber. Or because it's an open source engine, it can be incorporated into any of those integrated testing tools. So you want to think about that as well.

Part of your training is also going to be around screen reader testing. And you want to ensure that your developers, as well as your QA people, are given an exposure to screen reading testing. They do not have to be daily experts, but they should have a basic understanding of how a screen reader works and how they can use a screen reader as one of the tools in their

toolbox to test their content.

Equally important-- large organizations now use a bug tracking system. And any bug tracking system is fine. There's a number of free and open source ones, like Bugzilla, as well as commercial, off-the-shelf bug tracking tools. IBM's tool is a very common tool that we see in the marketplace.

You want to make sure that, in your bug tracking tool, there is actually an issue identifier that you can tag accessibility-related issues with. The geeks in our industry, we've all sort of clustered around a11y, which, for those that have never encountered before, is a pneumonym for accessibility, accessibility being a 13-letter word that starts with A, ends with Y, and has 11 letters in the middle. So there's the origin of a11y.

Finally, your organization's going to want to be looking at a tool for monitoring compliance, an enterprise level tool to ensure that, as your content is initially released and meets the accessibility requirements, that-- web content today is rarely static. It's constantly changing. It's constantly evolving. And so you want to make sure that, as that change and evolution happens on your premium web content, that it remains in compliance to your accessibility requirements.

And I believe, at that point, that's it. Thank you, very much, Lily. 44 minutes, so not too bad. And I'm happy to take any questions.

LILY BOND: Thank you, John. That was very informative. And there are a lot of questions coming in.

I want to remind people to continue to ask questions while we get into Q&A. To do that, just type them into the Questions window of your control panel. And also a reminder that a recording of this webinar will be available tomorrow.

I wanted to mention that we have a few more upcoming webinars. We have Quick Start to Captioning, Advanced Workflows for Captioning, and the Future of Closed Captioning in Higher Ed coming up in the next couple of months. And with that, let's get right into Q&A.

So John, really quickly, first, someone was asking what the name of the workshop that you mentioned in Austin was.

JOHN FOLIOT: Oh. So the activity that's happening in Austin is called the John Slatin AccessU. If you Google AccessU, A-C-C-E-S-S, capital U, you'll find it. It is a for-fee training activity. It's well-priced.

The people that organize it is a group called, Knowbility. They're a nonprofit organization based here in Austin. Not only do they do AccessU, but they also have another activity that's called, the OpenAIR rally, where they partner developers with non-government organizations. And it's basically a learn and apply program where developers take some training. And then, as part of the training, they apply their skills towards creating a website for a non-government organization and ensure that it's accessible. So yeah, there you go.

LILY BOND: Thank you. Another quick question-- someone is asking, is aXe a part of Deque WorldSpace?

JOHN FOLIOT: It is. The aXe engine is now one of the key components of the WorldSpace suite of tools that we offer. But we have made the aXe engine itself open source and free to use.

LILY BOND: Great. Thanks. Someone else is asking, given some recent lawsuits against private companies, do we need to add closed captions to our videos? And if so, do we need to caption public videos, internal videos, or both?

JOHN FOLIOT: Well, I'll preface my answer with, I am not a lawyer. And so you really do need to check with your legal representatives to get a definitive answer for your organization. What I can tell you is that the WCAG 2.0 AA requirement explicitly calls for captions, transcripts, and audio description. And so that's really what is required, per WCAG 2.0.

I know that there are some organizations today that still struggle with that third one of described audio. That one has not been tested in the court of law. There are alternative solutions that have started to emerge. For example, a transcript that is an interactive transcript, so the transcript is in sync with the video in the same way that the captions are in sync with the video. And so you can provide descriptive information in the transcript there.

It's not an audio description, but it's meeting the intent of what the requirement asks for. Again, that's not been tested in a court of law, but I would look at that and say, you're making a best effort. And it's better than no effort as well.

We've also seen a couple of proof of concepts where, instead of an audio file that's describing the content onscreen, it's provided as a text file. And non-sighted users can actually use their screen reading software to read that text. And there's been some interesting experiments around that.

But to go back to the basic question, what is required by WCAG 2.0 AA? Captions, transcripts, described audio.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. Another question here. You mentioned that leadership buy-in is key. How do you convince leadership that accessibility is worth the investment?

JOHN FOLIOT: How do you convince leadership that it's worth the investment? I'm not a huge fan of the stick. I'd much rather hand out carrots. I think most organizations today are beginning to realize that there is a legal liability risk that's happening here. There's been a lot of non-government organizations, advocacy organizations, whether it's the National Federation for the Blind, or the National Association of the Deaf, that have become very active in demanding their rights.

The Department of Justice in the United States has started to also weigh in here saying that it is their opinion that digital accessibility, web accessibility is in keeping with the spirit of the ADA, even though it's not explicitly in the ADA. The ADA was written over 25 years ago, and the web is about 20-some odd years old. So when they wrote the ADA, they had no idea that the web was coming. So I mean, really, the primary motivator for senior management is risk management, that they want to avoid the risk.

But as I said, if you take this idea of digital accessibility and you think about it as something that you want to do, and not something that you have to do, and you start thinking about some of the positives that flow from that activity-- I'll go back to that example I made of Facebook earlier on where they had a problem. And rather than try and hide the problem behind the curtain and, shh, we're working on it, we're working on it, they stepped right into it. They leaned into the problem. They acknowledged they had the problem. They took some proactive steps. And then they had their marketing people actually go out and shop those steps as being a good news story. And it worked. They got positive feedback.

So those are the types of things that I would bring forward to senior management, that not only do they have a legal responsibility, they have moral responsibility. We've got indications that up to one in five people in North America is impacted in one shape or form by some form of disability, especially when you consider that a disability is on a scale. I mean, how many people on this call today are wearing reading glasses? If you're wearing reading glasses, those pair of glasses is, in fact, an assistive technology. And you are using that assistive technology, because you have a type of disability, right? You can't see without the glasses.

So it's really about thinking about it in those positive terms. You're open for business. There's a 20% market share out there that maybe you're not focused on that you should be looking at.

So those are some of the strategies that I would recommend that I've used in the past.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. Another question here is, are there examples for the web accessibility exception procedures?

JOHN FOLIOT: Are there examples? Yeah. I provided one on the call, and I can probably think of a couple others. Are you looking for like a written example, or just an illustrative example?

LILY BOND: I think that they're probably looking for a written example of what that policy would look like.

JOHN FOLIOT: At Deque, we do have some sample draft policies. I'm not that comfortable sharing it broadly. If the person in question is interested, feel free to reach out to me, and I would be happy to give you a peek over my shoulder. But there are those types of policies that you can find on the web.

Again, really what you're thinking about is we have to acknowledge that technology is not perfect yet. There are still some things that we cannot do. And if that's going to have an impact on your ability to make some of your content accessible, you need to be honest about that. And you need to have a policy in place that acknowledges that this is a problem, that you've looked at it, that you've tried to apply technology solutions, and that a solution does not exist. Ergo, you're exempt, right? I mean, there is no solution.

But you want to make sure that you've got that caption articulated as part of your larger collection of policies so that, if and when the lawyers come knocking at the door, at the very least, you can say, yes, we've looked at it. And here's where we are today. There is no technical solution. We went through the process. We did the evaluation. We did the research. We came to the conclusion. We got it vetted by a third-party. We can't do better than that today. That's really what your exception policy is looking to accomplish.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. The next question here is, if our company doesn't have any employees with disabilities, do we still need to make our content accessible?

JOHN FOLIOT: Wow. Again, I am not a lawyer. Your company may not have any employees with disabilities today. And the person that's sitting two rows down from you in a cubicle might fall and break their right arm. And their right arm is now in a cast for the next eight weeks, and they can't use a mouse. Are they disabled? So I understand the question, but my answer is that we all are somewhat temporarily abled, and that at some point, we may all be somewhat partially disabled.

As well, if your organization is looking to grow, prospective employees are, in fact, protected by ADA legislation that says you can't discriminate against them if they have a disability. And so not having a policy in place that talks about accommodation or ensuring that your internet content is accessible could be looked at as sort of being one reason why you're not hiring a person with disability. And that's protected by law.

So again, I'm not a lawyer. And I don't want to be scary John here, but understanding that question, I think you need to look at it from a slightly different lens, if I could say it that way.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. That makes sense. Another question here. If money is tight, where should our accessibility budget go first?

JOHN FOLIOT: If money is tight, where should your budget should go first? That's really hard. And there are other factors involved with that.

If your organization has got lawyers knocking at the door, then the answer is, go put out the fire. If you're in a situation where you want to avoid that, you have a limited budget, but you want to start taking proactive steps, I would say look at A, ensuring that you have policies in place. That's usually a very cost-effective thing. That's just internal manpower. I would probably spend the money on training, to be very honest with you, Lily. Empowering your people to avoid making mistakes in the first place is the most cost-effective way of avoiding accessibility problems down the road-- and so looking at getting your people trained up and empowered with the skills.

A lot of web developers, once you start teaching them this, it's been my experience that they get it, right? And all of a sudden, they start getting really excited, because they're learning something new, right? Developers and web designers, they are by their very nature somewhat geek-like. It's geeks that are attracted to this kind of thing. And so when they're learning something new about technology, it tends to resonate for them very well-- and if it's done in a positive atmosphere, that they don't have this threat of a legal challenge over their head, but rather it's a skills training thing that's going to empower them to be better developers, and, I might add, it's a skill set that is portable, that whatever skills they learn today, they'll carry with them throughout their career.

So yeah, if I had a magic wand, and I wasn't pressed by time, but I had a limited budget, I would look at training as probably my first goal.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. Another question. Are there standards for non-web-based technologies, since WCAG 2.0 is for the web?

JOHN FOLIOT: So yes and no. So WCAG 2.0 was written in such a way as to be somewhat technology agnostic. And when you look at some of the techniques that are associated to the WCAG standard-- and there's a huge body of information at the W3C. I mean, we could spend an hour just going through that. But when you look at some of the techniques that have been vetted by the W3C and the experts there, you'll see techniques for things like PDF and Flash.

So WCAG was not-- it was written-- I mean, it's eight years old now. When they tried to write it, they tried to make it technology agnostic. There are some gaps. So for example, right now, those of us that are actively involved at W3C, we recognize there are some gaps, say, around mobile, and especially native mobile apps.

Work is happening on that right now. That will probably be rolled into a next-generation of WCAG. There's some [AUDIO OUT] that's going to look like, whether it's going to be a WCAG 3 or a WCAG 2.1. They don't really know. I mean, it's under active discussion today.

But the spirit of WCAG is based on four principles-- that your material is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. And if you take those four principles and you remain true to the ideals of those, then you can apply them to other technologies and start to ask questions around whether or not, is this perceivable? Is this operable?

When you get into complicated technologies and when you start having those deeper philosophical questions, it's very useful to have a subject matter expert involved in that discussion, because they're just going to be a little more attuned to the types of questions you want to ask about what does perceivable mean, what does operable mean when you have no hands, or when you are blind? Those are two different states, and yet they both could be impacted on operability. So I don't know if that answers the question, but that's kind of how I would respond.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. It looks like we have time for one more question. Someone is asking if you could recommend any specific accessibility testing tools or browser plug-ins.

JOHN FOLIOT: I could, but I would rather not. I work for a company that produces those tools. And so my boss would say, hey, recommend the tool. And so, hey, I'll recommend Deque suite of tools.

There are other tools out there made by companies that are competitors to Deque that are doing the job as well. So I'm going to take the fifth on that one. I apologize. That's probably not a useful answer, but I'm kind of uncomfortable specifically recommending one over the other.

LILY BOND: That's totally fair. Well, John, thank you so much for joining us today and for your great presentation. It was very much appreciated.

JOHN FOLIOT: Thank you, Lily. To everybody that joined us today, thank you for joining. This is something I've spent 15 years of my life on doing. I'm quite passionate about it. And so after this webinar, if you have any questions, I'd be happy to take emails. I can't give you tons of time, but the first one's always free. So if you have some questions, feel free to reach out. I look forward to hearing from you.

LILY BOND: Thanks, John. And thank you to everyone who joined us today. I hope you all have a great rest of the day.