Kathryn Allan:

Perfect. I think we are all here, so we can go ahead and get started, and all of our panelists have made it in. But hi, everyone. Thank you so much for coming to our first virtual Accessible Tech meetup. I'm Kate Allan, I'm the accessibility education specialist intern, joined by Michael D'Anvers, WWs ADA compliance, quality engineer and accessibility expert. We are so incredibly excited to have you here today as we have an incredible lineup over the next two days. Before we get started, just want to inform you that closed captions are available at the bottom of your screen. Additionally, this event is being recorded. So, today, you'll be hearing first from our community panel discussing the diverse personal experiences with accessibility followed by a Q&A session with our senior product designer, Jesse Kim, to discuss design considerations for screen reader implementation.

Be sure to join us again tomorrow same time, 3:00 PM Eastern for an interactive session on the importance of imageries led by Rich Collins, senior manager of visual design and an engineering round table with web engineering manager, Alex Oxford, and software engineer, Russell Savage, discussing the implementation of accessible features. Once again, thank you so much for being here and joining us on our journey to democratize wellness and truly make it acceptable to all. We hope that you all walk away from this event with a new perspective, ready to make some impactful changes in tech. Additionally, throughout today's event, be sure to post any questions that you have in the Q&A box, also at the bottom of your screen, just so we can answer those at the end. But with that, we'll go ahead and start our first session, the community panel. So, thank you to our panelists for joining us today. If you could just go and do me a favor, make sure that you're unmuted, our panelists and go ahead and introduce yourself and your positions in the WW community. And we can go ahead and start with Monika.

Monika Pierce:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Monika Pierce and I am in the inclusion and diversity lead for WW.

Kathryn Allan:

Great, thank you, Monica. Ian.

Ian Lowry.:

Hi, Ian Lowry. I'm the senior manager of engineering full retail systems.

Kathryn Allan:

Great. And Michael Carrano.

Michael Carrano:

Hey everyone. I'm Michael Carrano. I am an engineering manager for the Android team.

Kathryn Allan:

Awesome. And then, Michael D'Anvers.

Michael D'Anvers:

Hi, I'm the tech and product accessibility expert.

Kathryn Allan:

Great. So, thank you all for joining us today. So, we'll go ahead and get started with just some questions. Michael D'Anvers and I often talk about how accessibility is a field that unfortunately many don't know about unless they've had an experience that opened our eyes to the disabled community. If you don't mind sharing, did you have a particular event, a person and interaction, anything along those lines that introduce you to this community and the diverse needs of its members?

Monika Pierce:

So, I can definitely jump in. I am the youngest of three and the oldest, my brother is deaf. So, that was really kind of my first experience with hearing-impaired community, disabled community. And what I'll just say from my experience was when you're kind of born into that community or that family, you don't necessarily know that there's a difference. Growing up, I don't think it wasn't until I really started to get exposure to outside opinions that I even considered my brother disabled, that was just never something that we kind of terminology that we used in the house. He was just my brother and he just spoke in a different way. Definitely, recognized that that wasn't the common way of kind of communicating because the extended family didn't know American sign language and didn't have a lot of experience with it, but it was just a matter of fact situation, just like anybody would be like, with just like gender or something like that.

So, it was just a very kind of different, I think experience, and it gave me an opportunity to see things a lot differently and I think to have a more consideration and just everything that I do. And so, I really do bring kind of that lens and that experience the way that it was in my household growing up, but then also kind of what I started to see as I went out to the real world if you will, and start to see kind of how others started to perceive my brother and the deaf community. So, I always kind of carry that with me and carry that kind of voice for accessibility for the disabled community and everything that I do as far as work, personal situations, even just going out shopping, and I think I have this kind of super awareness that I think is important to have not in the sense of catering to, or treating differently, but just in that inclusive concept.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely. Thank you so much for sharing, Monika.

Monika Pierce:

Of course.

Kathryn Allan:

Ian. [crosstalk 00:05:17].

Ian Lowry.:

Yeah. I would echo... Yeah, that's what I was going to say. I would echo what Monika said. There's some great points there. I was rendered paraplegic about 18 years ago, but I've been in software even longer. And the one thing for me has been, whilst it doesn't impact directly my use of software, it opens your eyes to how you see the world. I'm always concerned with that physical accessibility, and so, therefore, I am concerned with these two aspects and other aspects of my life. [inaudible 00:05:46]. It's the eye-opening bit and then engaging with those that are different. Those that have different needs.

Michael Carrano:

For me, I was young and I didn't even realize that I had a disability. It wasn't until second grade, going down to the nurse's office every year, they do the eye test, they do a hearing test. And it was discovered that I can't hear certain frequencies, and so I actually have moderate to severe hearing loss in both ears and to accommodate for that, I wear hearing aids.

Kathryn Allan:

And then kind of going off of that question, disability and accessibility, that's what this conference and this meetup is about, but there are terms that are used quite broadly in a lot of categories. So, I was wondering if any of you could define those terms and what they mean to you, and how you define them in your personal life?

Ian Lowry.:

It's a good question. That's a very good question. I actually think I try not to see it. I think that's the key. You try not to see it as a differentiator. You try not to categorize. You try to see a more inclusive and in fact, you can diverse society or just the way people are. So, you just try to question every time you think of something or every time you're asked to make a decision to stop just for a moment and just think, "Well, maybe not just from my perspective, who else do I have to consider when I'm thinking about this, when I'm working in this area, when I'm doing this?" So, for me, I definitely try not to categorize. I try to decategorize. I try to make everything as inclusive as I can, certainly, in the way I'm thinking. I know bias will always creep in, we never get it right. We never get it perfect. That's my take on it at least.

Monika Pierce:

Yeah. I think that's a really important piece, it's to think about impact, right? And to think about how can I have the greatest impact and recognizing that to be able to have great impact, you have to think of people beyond yourself. And I agree with Ian, when you start to kind of put people into these little buckets of... It's not the diverse, it's not the inclusive environment that we want, it just becomes like I am doing something because I have to, or because I'm trying to address this certain group of people. I think that you have to be aware and have that acknowledgment, but I think it's a very fine kind of tightwalk balancing act of being aware and having that awareness, but not kind of overcompensating or treating them differently or doing something just because.

Michael Carrano:

Yeah, I completely agree. My hearing loss, I don't really consider it as a disability. I just feel like I can bring a different perspective to the conversation and say, "Here is someone of hard of hearing, here's how you can help me out. Here's how you can help millions of other people with hearing loss."

Michael D'Anvers:

What I think is the-

Kathryn Allan:

[crosstalk 00:09:15]. Sorry, go ahead, Michael.

Michael D'Anvers:

... oh, I was going to say, just to add to this. As I've looked into how other people define it, especially when I started people asking me, "How do we define disabilities?" The thing that I came across that I thought it was really interesting to help me frame it was this idea of the social model of disability, which essentially says let's not look at disability as the individual problem, but as a society's problem. So, society can create barriers. They can exclude people and we need to remove these barriers as a society and think of it not as the individual problem, and that kind of changes the responsibility of, we need to all make our designs accessible if you look at it through that lens of defining disability.

Monika Pierce:

Yeah. I think when you define disability, sometimes you end up kind of othering communities, right? And that's just not where we want to be, so I really love that kind of that idea that it is not an individual's problem or even just individual community, it's just a societal, like how do we just live together? Which I know is kind of like an utopian kind of concept and that expands beyond disabilities, but I think that's really just the way that we need to think about how do we just kind of co-exist and just live in a way that's comfortable for all and not thinking about the individual and just take the unity, the unified group.

Kathryn Allan:

Kind of going off of that, talking about making things accessible, obviously that is our goal is to make our products more accessible and to make... Just to encourage that within the community. However, there are some things that people think shouldn't be accessible. What are your thoughts on making everything accessible? I know Michael and I talked about an example that the Coca-Cola vending machine. Some people think, "Oh, that shouldn't be accessible, because it's not something that's very good for someone." Right? It's one of those things that maybe everyone shouldn't be drinking Coca-Cola or whatever it may be, and just kind of different people imposing those barriers upon this community and just kind of saying what they can and cannot have access to. So, I have a feeling I already know the answer to this, but do you all think that everything should be accessible?

Michael D'Anvers:

I can start. I think the simple answer is yes, everything should... Accessibility isn't a tool for us to impose our own morals. Let's say Coca-Cola example is about giving people who don't have access to the vending machines because of their disability, giving them their choice, right? So, if I think drinking Coke is bad, it doesn't mean I get to limit that person's choice through accessibility. And I think you can look at lots of things that are accessible, but don't always give that choice. And one of the examples is Google's Hangouts. They provide computer-generated captions which removes that barrier. It gives people access who can't hear, but that tool also sensors the captions.

So, now Google is imposing their own personal values on just the people who benefit from the captions. They're not censoring the audio. So, if people are excited and everyone's saying, "Oh, fuck, yes, that was so great, we launched the product." Only the people are using the captions and benefiting the captions are getting censored. Like Google's Hangout doesn't bleep me from speaking and doesn't bleep anyone who's using audio. So, that's an example of where accessibility is used halfway correct, where they're adding access, but they're imposing their own values. They're creating barriers and not creating choice with accessibility.

Monika Pierce:

And I think it's a slippery slope if we start to kind of police accessibility and who's entitled to what access, where else could that potentially go, right? Are we now saying that people who are of different socioeconomic backgrounds don't have access to certain things? I think it goes into kind of creating these second and third-class citizenships, and it's definitely not the way that we need to be going.

Ian Lowry.:

I think there are some-

Kathryn Allan:

[crosstalk 00:14:30]. Go ahead, Ian.

Ian Lowry.:

[crosstalk 00:14:32]. Designing a fresh or designing in the modern world is certainly something where we have to be inclusive. I don't think there's any argument about that. Where there is an interesting question in my experience is retrofitting access. Just as an example, they go and look up on the internet, how they've retrofitted access to the Pantheon in Athens, they have tried hard, but it's really a very, very difficult task to get right. And if you then think about that, there are other examples of things that already have limited access, not in terms of just the groups it restricts access to, but just by its very nature.

A 12th-century building that only has a single staircase that's only two feet wide, it's very difficult to even to... No matter how much you want to and how much legislation, whatever you put in place, it's very, very difficult, if not impossible to retrofit some of these things to go in the right direction. It's like anything going forward I'm antsy with, but I have a certain... Over time, I've bumped up against through these situations that have been a head-scratcher and I've actually ended up thinking, "Maybe you just have to let that be because it just is..." But that's maybe just conceding. I don't know, but it's a bit of a head-scratcher.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely, I think there was an interesting article as well on accessibility for The Met and the stairs at The Met and navigating that, that's so iconic and something that's you think of The Met, you think of the steps to The Met, and just trying to keep one's identity of what they are while also making it, as you said, accessible to all can really be a hard line to navigate. And kind of going off of that and switching it to the flip side, the modern world, we are now obviously in a very virtual world and obviously just seeing people's faces on a screen or sometimes not seeing them at all can change the way that we initially perceived someone. How do you think that this transition to a more virtual world has changed society's perception of disability, if at all?

Michael D'Anvers:

I'm curious to know that if being virtual, one of the things I was thinking about is that you only are seeing people from the chest up, and Ian, if you don't mind, if people aren't seeing you using a wheelchair, does that change their perception of how they interact with you?

Ian Lowry.:

It's a very good question, Michael. I have to be honest, my interaction since COVID has largely been with work and with colleagues, with whom I'm familiar and they're familiar with me and I've done... I've not sensed any change in there, which has always been great and I think we have a great community at WW, but it's a very valid question I think. And Sandra raised one about [inaudible 00:17:46] how this changes things. Talk to science, I think these things are based on experience. It's hard to sight until you butt up against an experience that affects you negatively or that you see not working, but maybe I should get on a Zoom call with my doctor or a new doctor or something and see how they work with me, just to move from the chest up, that would be the sort of experience or some sort of customer service somewhere. I don't know. Something like that, but I think until you meet it, you don't know, but yeah. Internally, not really, I think WW is great [inaudible 00:18:30].

Michael Carrano:

Yeah. For me, I think largely my interactions have remained the same, whether they were in the office or now virtual. But I think for me personally, sometimes you can get self-conscious about having trouble hearing someone, but now that I'm virtual, I could just like blame it on Zoom or internet connection issue, and just say like, "Hey, can you repeat that?" And that just like a way for me to kind of deflect that I had the hearing loss and I put there the sort of challenges and problem on the tech and not myself, personally.

Kathryn Allan:

And then obviously, we're having this conversation here and I think it's fantastic that as Ian said, WW is such a place that you know really does work to have a company value that doesn't see disability as one of these exclusionary principles. But how do you think other companies that maybe aren't working on accessibility yet, or don't really know how to approach the conversation, how would you suggest that people bring light to this conversation needing to be had?

Monika Pierce:

I think to Michael's point earlier, I think it's starting to have the conversation and reminding all that it's a societal kind of challenge and responsibility. I think it goes when you think about just diversity and inclusion across the board, regardless of whether it be race, gender disabilities. It's the responsibility of every single person that exists in the organization. And so, I think as especially now where we are with just everything that's happening, especially in the US, people are just kind of becoming more aware and more sensitive and more open to kind of having certain conversations. So, I think it's again like those people speaking up and having a voice and kind of saying the things that maybe they didn't say before, didn't know before, but now is the time, now is the opportunity to gently or directly call people kind of out on some of the opportunities that we haven't taken advantage of.

I think it's challenging organizations to think differently. It's asking them to start to measure some of the things that as far as diversity metrics or where they're putting their resources and things like that, I think it's starting from kind of the ground up. I know we said previously, it's not an individual problem, but I think it is going to be individuals that start to help people to understand that it's a community and it's a societal issue. And then we can start to see the change that we want to be. Yeah, I think that would be my answer.

Ian Lowry.:

Something that has occurred to me over the last few months, and then it's something of a different reflection on this is the concern that to some extent, it's the virtual is a bit of a level [inaudible 00:22:04]. It's giving for a lot of a different kind of access to things, and you see people as you're saying in a certain limited light and I would just be concerned that if even when there's a return to a more old school world, whether or not we forget the differences that actually manifest themselves greater in a physical space than they do in the virtual space. So, while some things are more impactful, virtually, somethings are more impactful physically and do we forget those differences whilst we had this more sort of level playing field as well. I think that would be a dangerous step back new.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely. I think that's a really interesting point that this time obviously can bring both a negative and positive turn to how disability is perceived at that societal level. And I think that it's a great opportunity, obviously for those barriers to be broken down, as Monica was saying, just what's going on in America at the moment, on a greater level of conversation, just that conversation about diversity and inclusion at a very broad strokes level. I think that it's just an incredible time for these conversations to be had really. I know I was excited to see what accessibility be talked about on the news the other morning. So, it is great to see things catching on because of how the nation is right now, which is unfortunate but yet also an opportunity for us to ignite these discussions that need to be had.

And then kind of taking that on a personal note while having a very candid conversation, how would you recommend people to just have these conversations about your opinions on disability or your opinions on accessibility? How can those conversations be had, whether it's with a colleague at work, whether it's with a friend, whoever that may be, just so that they can gain more of an insight into your perspective, into your experiences and that unique viewpoint that you bring with you?

Monika Pierce:

I think it's all about being bold and being brave, that kind of line that I've been using, and I think I've shared it with you Kate and especially in my new role is it's becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. It's not always a easy conversation. It's not always something that you feel like you want to do at that time, but just pushing yourself to have a conversation. And just I think assume maybe the person that you're speaking to is unfamiliar with the situation, whether it be disability, whether it be race or whatever the conversation is, and just use it as an opportunity to educate, use it as an opportunity to inform. And I think if you are just recognizing it as again, like it's everyone's responsibility and carrying that with you, and that it's going to feel a little bit uncomfortable, but you still have to push forward because again, it's the impact to the greater good that's going to come out of it. I think that just the bottom line is to be brave and to be bold.

Ian Lowry.:

[inaudible 00:25:38] going to use as well. I was also going to say that I've seen in technology, we spent quite a amount of time trying to think about what technological assumptions we're making and therefore detail we may be missing. And I think the same goes for this, I think you have to stand back and say, what assumptions are we making about our members, about our staff, about people and challenge them up from and try to bring it up the roster a little bit, if not at the top. It is uncomfortable, but being bold about it is definitely something that we should do and take. It's a bold move.

Michael Carrano:

Yeah. Since you brought up this question, I've been thinking like to date, I can only think of really close friends or family members asking me about this type of stuff. And so, I think Monica and Ian are right that you do have to be bold and really step out of your comfort zone to start those conversations, because yeah, only close friends and family members have ever had these kinds of conversations with me, but it's something I'm definitely willing to have with anybody that wants to have that conversation.

Michael D'Anvers:

And I think from a tech accessibility point of view, realizing that people are kind of afraid to ask stupid questions and not getting frustrated when I hear like, "Well, how many people on [inaudible 00:27:19] who are disabled?" Because for me, that feels like they're asking the wrong question and they're framing it in the wrong way, but realizing that that's just where people have to start somewhere and being open to answering that question without being frustrated with what I'm seeing as the wrong direction.

Ian Lowry.:

Yeah. That absolutely is the wrong question, isn't it? That's like saying how many people are playing this already rather than what would somebody be willing to play it. So, it's like, if it works great, [inaudible 00:27:57], maybe we'd have a greater [inaudible 00:27:59], not what's the current stat, what are the current numbers? The current numbers are just the current numbers and probably reflect not as well as we'd like to.

Michael D'Anvers:

Yeah. And there's so many ways to think about numbers too, not just permanent disabilities, like how many people benefit from temporary disability, situational disabilities. But yeah, I realized there's a lot of questions that people have that I get asked a lot and trying to remember, like before I got into doing tech accessibility, that I had a lot of the similar questions and I had to learn how to reframe the problem and how to look at it in a different way, and sort of, I guess it seems silly, but empathizing with the people who have come from a place where they know nothing and remembering what that was like, because that sometimes it can come off sort of, I don't know, as an attack or just not understanding why they seem so ignorant.

Monika Pierce:

[crosstalk 00:29:12].

Kathryn Allan:

Sorry, Monika, go ahead.

Monika Pierce:

I'm just going to say I think it's an important piece, but I recognize the challenge in that, right? Because you're just like innately kind of aggravated by how somebody could say or ask or not see the other side of it. But I think you're right, Michael, and it's definitely thinking about what's the end goal and what's the end game. And that always kind of helps me to manage either the frustration or the incredulous reaction that I want to give that at the end of the day, I'm trying to move us closer to where we need to be. And if I react in a very kind of negative or kind of punitive way, it's not going to get me any closer to what I need to do, and that person would ultimately shut down as well. So, it's that balance of kind of being very assertive and straightforward and the education piece, and helping them understand why where they're coming from is not the best place, but do it in a palpable way so that they can actually truly learn, digest and hopefully move it forward.

Michael D'Anvers:

Yeah. I just to build off that, one of the first things I learned starting at WW, three years ago, that I couldn't walk in and demand people to care, that I had to first educate them, they may be like, "Oh yeah, accessibility is important, but we'll get to it in 10 sprints, maybe next year or whatever." So, I had to step back and be like, "Well, I'm passionate about it." Sure, they care about it. They have other real priorities. And the minute that I brought in the educational piece and help clarify these questions and like who it's benefiting and how it's more than just a couple people, then I got real responses to the product owners wanting to include accessibility in the first sprint or the second sprint. And for me, that was a game-changer is learning how valuable the educational pieces, because, again, you can't demand people to care.

Monika Pierce:

Yeah. I think you definitely have to approach it from a human capital kind of perspective, but then also from a business perspective, right? Like by being more accessible, you open up the doors to the number of people, the number of customers, the number of members that we could potentially have, but it's also the right thing to do, so you do kind of have to kind of plug and play which one are you going to lean harder on, depending on maybe who you're speaking to.

Michael D'Anvers:

Exactly.

Ian Lowry.:

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:31:53].

Kathryn Allan:

There's also a great intersection between the two when it comes to people that as you said that transient, you might have been a WW member for years and then X, Y, or Z happens, and you want to know that that community in that platform can still cater to your needs before you even knew you needed them. So, whether that means that you now need to use an assistive technology of any sort, just knowing that that capability is still seen so that when you have that need, and that need arises, that it's there for you.

Ian Lowry.:

I was going to say design takes many forms, and if I spot a design that doesn't have any type that doesn't cater to a wider audience, then my response is your design is incomplete. Now, systems are always in a state of being incomplete, but that's not [inaudible 00:32:40].

Kathryn Allan:

Well, I think that's a great time to transition over. If absolutely anyone has any questions, this is definitely the receptive group to be asking. So, you can drop those in the Q&A section or just in the chat if that is easier. But while we're waiting, did any of you have a subject that you were really wanting to get to talk about that we didn't quite get to touch today that you would like to touch on in these last few moments here?

Michael Carrano:

The last comment I wanted to say was accessibility is important because although you might not have a disability today, tomorrow was unknown and you might need that help. So, that's just my last point there.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely, I think that's a really important note to end off on.

Michael D'Anvers:

Yeah, that's a big part of what I like to talk about is back to the how many people who are disabled to use our tech and reframing it about few design, few people, disabled, again, you're benefiting those who are [crosstalk 00:33:58]. You break your leg and now you're benefiting for those wheelchair ramps. Then situational disability, which is you're using the closed captions because you're in a noisy cafe. Kids are yelling behind you. We're all on Zoom now, dog is barking. Maybe English isn't your first language, so you're watching Netflix with the captions, and all of a sudden, you think of all these scenarios that weren't designed for you and that we're all benefiting from.

And of course, as we get older, statistically, our bodies will break down or eyesight will get worse, or our hearing will get worse or mobility get worse. So, the things we do now will at some point, benefit us to Michael's point, like you might not need it now, but there'll be a time in your life, you will. So, it's never about just designing for a small group, it's always about designing for a few and benefiting many.

Monika Pierce:

Michael, it's kind of funny, you mentioned the closed caption because again, growing up with a deaf family member, we always had closed captions on and it wasn't until I was like a lot older and it might be even in college that I realized that people didn't usually have closed captions on. So, I was just like, "What do you mean you don't have that? And why isn't it on your TV?" It was almost like just a default setting.

Michael D'Anvers:

Yeah. That's interesting. And actually, companies now are rethinking making captions being on as the default, instead of being off. It's like small details like that, that can really make a difference.

Monika Pierce:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kathryn Allan:

We actually have a question that just came in from Maya and it says, "In regards to helping people understand accessibility and educating them on the importance of integrating accessibility, what is the question that you wish more people asked or a point that you wished more people would consider?"

Michael D'Anvers:

Sorry, can you repeat that?

Kathryn Allan:

Of course. It says, "In regards to helping people understand accessibility and educating them on the importance of integrating accessibility, what is the question that you wish more people asked or a point that you wished more people would consider?"

Michael D'Anvers:

I would say, I wish people would consider more about who they're excluding when they design. So, I think we tend to design for ourselves. I think its inhuman nature to do so. So, I would say people should ask more about, "Who haven't I thought about when I'm designing?" Because I think it's natural to design for yourself, for people around you, for you, where you live. We live in a city, a lot of our people in the office are young and able-bodied so asking, who have I not thought about? Who am I excluding? Being aware that you naturally are designing for yourself, unintentional bias is really important because then you can start empathizing with other groups and other people.

Monika Pierce:

And I think to just add onto that, when you have an environment that is more inclusive, and more diverse, you can start to solve for that unconscious bias that we have of designing for ourselves and designing for people like us. But if you have a more diverse kind of population and group or people on the project, then you're going to have diversity of thought, right? You're going to have diversity of experience, and then hopefully, you'll start to design and start to plan for a larger group of people rather than just ourselves. [crosstalk 00:38:12].

Michael D'Anvers:

Yeah. Can I just add one thing? I think you can only go so far and by having diversity, you bring that individual experience that empathy can add. So, definitely, diversity is huge for solving so many of our exclusion problems.

Monika Pierce:

Absolutely.

Kathryn Allan:

Great. Well, I think that is it for our community panel. I just want to thank you guys so much for coming on and sharing these experiences. I know it was great to see some of your faces that I hadn't seen before. So, thank you so much for your incredible output and just flexibility and willingness to discuss today. I hope that everyone gained as much from this as I did. And with that, we will just take a two-minute break before getting started with Jesse Kim and her Q&A on screen reader app adaptation.

Michael D'Anvers:

Thank you.

Monika Pierce:

Thank you.

Ian Lowry.:

Thanks.

Michael Carrano:

Thanks.

Kathryn Allan:

Great. So, with that, we will go ahead and welcome our next session. So, next, we are joined by Jesse Kim to talk about the design considerations for implementation of screen readers. So, Jesse, thank you so much for joining us today. If you could just go ahead and introduce yourself very briefly, that would be great before we get started with your session?

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. Hi, Kate. Thanks for having me. My name's Jesse Kim, I'm a product designer for foundation team with WW.

Kathryn Allan:

Awesome. So, today we will be focusing with Jessie about a project that you worked on, SRAAD. So, could you explain to us what that acronym stands for and a little bit more about this project?

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. It's a screen reader accessibility annotation document. What was the second part of your question again?

Kathryn Allan:

Just about what the project entailed, just a little bit about the project.

Jesse Kim:

Oh yeah. So, what we introduce, the annotation document for the first time. I was working on this here pre-paywall onboarding experience. So, essentially, this is for the mobile app and the purpose of this design was to introduce and show the perspectives to learn about what membership entails before we show them the signup funnel. And I actually don't quite remember why we suddenly decided to think about accessibility side, but I think it was right when we were looking at this design like all like visual and [inaudible 00:44:10] engineer asked me, "Hey, so how would a person with low vision would experience this?" And so, that's when Michael D'Anvers, the engineering team, and I sort of sat together and talked about how to tackle this. Yeah.

Kathryn Allan:

Awesome. And was this the first project that you experienced that had to really tackling an accessibility issue?

Jesse Kim:

This wasn't the first one, like overall, because at the time that I worked on this project, I was part of the growth team, and most of my projects were on the web and for the web projects, at least for the growth team, we do look at the accessibility, sort of those side of experience to make sure that no matter what disability you have, you can sign up for a membership. So, the concept of thinking about accessibility wasn't you, but introducing the annotation to the app is something that we've never done before. So, for the app side, it was new.

Kathryn Allan:

Awesome. And I just changed the side to see the after of what it looks like once those capabilities were set and I'll just stop on the side here. If you want to run us through just kind of what this picture shows and kind of how it's important.

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. Sorry, if you're hearing a construction next door.

Kathryn Allan:

No worries.

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. So, essentially what I was trying to map out here is the order in which the cursor needs to move. And what is just say when your thoughts [inaudible 00:46:22] pursue announce the information.

Kathryn Allan:

Yeah. So, one big thing when we're thinking about screen readers is visually a lot of people can deduce what they're supposed to read first, or what information they're supposed to absorb first. But with screen readers, you kind of have to tell them. Obviously, as the technology, you really have to make it as easy as possible for that information that's being put through that reader to go through the same way that we would read, right? So, it's definitely something that can be easily overlooked as a sighted person who can just look at the screen and not have to take those considerations. So-

Jesse Kim:

[crosstalk 00:47:06].

Kathryn Allan:

... it's definitely really awesome that you were kind of able to switch that mindset and think how would I approach the app and how would I utilize it if I were of low vision kind of that initial question that you were asked, which is awesome. Looking back on to how the project was approached, do you think there's anything that you could have done differently, whether it was the timing of implementing accessibility or whatever it may be, if there's anything that you think could be done differently that you would change in the process of incorporating accessibility?

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. I will say that how we tackled this project for accessibility sort of informed us how to do it more in the future, because when you're implementing like all tax, for example, for the web, we sort of did it at the last minute where like all the experiences are already built. Like you're just queuing them and then as a last-minute check box, you'll say, "Oh, did I miss any all text? Or did I miss any focus date on implementation?" But for this, because we knew nothing about how to do this properly, we actually talked about how we will code this or how we should hand off necessary information for developers to do this so that it was like a mini-project if you will within a project, for us to think about each process of how this should be done. And so, this really actually informed us a lot about how to replicate this for the other app projects.

Kathryn Allan:

That's awesome. And one thing I want to point out that we've discussed before, and that you said that really stuck with me is that you said that this project felt like an extension of what you were already supposed to think about. You were already supposed to think about that smooth experience for a user to complete a task, right? So, promoting that accessibility really fit in with what your original intentions as a designer were, which I think was really awesome going off of our discussion that we just had with the panelists, and that as not designing for the other, it's just designing for all. So, I really love that. What do you think was the biggest takeaway that you had from this project going forward? I know you said it kind of impacted how you approach other projects, but if you had to take away one, one thing, what would you take away?

Jesse Kim:

So, not the biggest takeaway, but biggest surprise that I had with this project was that it wasn't as difficult to do this than I thought it will be, at least from the design side, because as much as I was thinking about how visually the user would go through this experience, the same mindset would apply for a person who's navigating this with just three buttons to go back or forward and select. And then that design of mindset really informed me to think about how this [inaudible 00:50:23], they should be able to skip around some content, if they want it to, because nobody wants to sit around and listen to so many texts being read up to you. So, that validation of how easy it could be done, it was take away for me.

Kathryn Allan:

That's awesome. And I think that's something that a lot of people don't always think. I think accessibility is looked to be like, "Oh, no, you have to do everything really differently, but it's just a different approach, as you've mentioned. It's just looking at it from a different perspective, so using all of the tools that you have as an incredible designer and just looking at it from a different perspective. And then how do you think that a team... This may be just starting a project, or maybe it's in the midway of the project, what are words of wisdom, a piece of advice that you would give them to ensure that their product is accessible?

Jesse Kim:

Yeah, that's a great question. So, I did share my learnings with the design team on how to do this. And then I was actually going through that deck for this talk, but one of the points that I thought at the time that is important is to iterate. So, as much as you iterate on design solutions, one of the things that we had to do was like going back to some of the annotation that I wrote, because the way it is written wasn't a word enough. Like, it wasn't clear if you just listened to them, because you'll be like meeting what you write, but then if you listen to them, sometimes it doesn't make sense or the order in which the cursor moves, sometimes it didn't felt right when we were cuing them, and so, we have to reiterate more than two times, even though we plan things out. And so, I think it's okay if in the first draft, it's not perfect and you implement it and you listen to them and they feel like you can still iterate and make it better. Yeah.

Kathryn Allan:

Well, I think that's once again, another thing that Michael and I talk about a lot is that there's a whole accessibility tab on your phone that many people don't even know exists. So, you can simply go on there and turn on text to speech and screen reader on your phone, just to see how would it be if I were navigating this app, this website, whatever it may be if maybe I wasn't sighted or maybe I was vision-impaired. And I think there's a lot of ways for you to experiment, as you said, don't be afraid of those different iterations when it comes to really getting a grasp of what is needed by that audience or just by people in general. So, I think that's a really good takeaway. And do you have anything that you wish you were told before going into this project?

Jesse Kim:

Well, this is something that we did in like a year-two ago. So, at the time, at least we didn't have a lot of resources to refer to, but now over time, like Google and Apple of course, they're working on new ways of tackling screen readers and having the text to voice or the audio to text feature on Android, I think that's exceptional. I think they just launched that few months ago and whatnot. So, things like that really helps me to be inspired and know how to solve this issue. And then I'm also seeing lot more medium articles for example, on how to write about imagery use than before. So, one of the conversation that Michael D'Anvers and I had was, "Oh, should I describe what the woman is doing in the every step counts image?"

At that time, my thought was, "Oh, it's not really helpful. I'm already describing in embodied text." And then Michael was, "Well, it does give you the context on which how activity can come into play because the person is in the house as opposed to a gym." And so, that kind of conversation back and forth, I think is getting more structured and frameworked the way people were looking at it now than it was before. So, I think in the design community, we are getting a little more sophisticated in how to tackle this design problem than we were two years ago. And so, I think it's great time to be part of solving this design problem together now. And I wish I knew all this knowledge, then that I feel like I would've been a better [inaudible 00:55:41].

Kathryn Allan:

But it's always incredible to see kind of, as you said, that progress is made when these conversations are had, that's how progress is made. And Michael, if you want to hop on, if you have any questions and more particular details to add about this project, that would always be appreciated. But once again, if anyone has any questions about this, please hop into that Q&A box or the chat to ask Jessie, she's a wealth of knowledge. But as far as I know, you said kind of, you didn't think that the woman sitting there, for you, that didn't provide much, even though subconsciously, it really did. I always think that... My mum says, "You eat with your eyes first." And I just always imagine the experience of those restaurants that do deprive you of certain sensory inputs to elevate or change other ones, and that's because it does do that. It changes how you perceive in other sensory inputs. So, I think it's always really interesting to put ourselves into different shoes and really think of, "Oh, maybe I didn't think it was important," but it does provide so much context when you think about it.

Jesse Kim:

Yeah. Just to add to that, the latest article that I read about the image description is to think about the subject, the action and the context. And so, I think the context part is something that I didn't think about much before, but now I am. Yeah.

Michael D'Anvers:

Just to kind of jump in, for me working on this, these annotations and really sitting down with the designer and the engineer and fleshing out how we are going to do it and learning from the designer, like, what is the intent of your design and how can that translate to what I like to call the screamy or experiences that an audio-only experience? So, how do you design only through audio kind of reframing it like that? And realizing how much context is in a design, so you look at the carousel and you buy the design, you understand that something that you can sort of flip through and you can see the images moving and no one has to tell me, "This is an image carousel." The design inherently says that. So, how trying to think of ways to translate that context that we visually get from designs into that audio-only experience, I found that really interesting. And I found that thinking about it in the beginning stages of process before the designs go to the engineers and then having this document so they can build off of it.

There is so much to think about beyond just the labels of your buttons and the all texts of the images. It's really that translation from the visual design to the audio-only design, and also how much time it saved the engineers. So, they won't going back and having to redo their work. They knew upfront exactly what was required of them. And that was a big thing I've been pushing to change is putting accessibility in the beginning of the process. It's not a QA problem, it's a design problem, it's an engineering problem. It starts with... It's a good design, accessibility is part of good design, so you don't wait to QA to add the color, for instance. It's the same kind of idea. And working with Jessie to create this document was a big push to help people think about it early on. And I had a lot of fun working with Jessie to create this document and think about all this stuff. So, we have a lot of work to do, but I think this is definitely a huge step in incorporating accessibility early on.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely. I think it's also important to note that the finished product, it's not as if you were sacrificing a beautiful design in order to incorporate those accessible features. It's not that just because it's accessible means that it's detracting from the user experience of another. Accessibility and making something accessible is just really promoting and enhancing that user experience for everyone. So, now we have this beautiful pre-paywall onboarding that looks pretty similar to the non-accessible. It's just now an incredible, it's user experience for everyone, which I think is really important to take away. Yeah. If there are no further questions, Jesse, if you had anything that you wanted to add off of Michael, we can finish up with that.

Jesse Kim:

I hope this inspire people to annotate more.

Kathryn Allan:

Definitely. Well, thank you, Jesse, so much for joining us today and just sharing this project with us. I know it was a lot of work and you put a lot of energy into it and it shows, because you really did create something beautiful and innovative that really captures what we're hoping to promote within accessibility. So, to everyone, thank you so much for joining us today. That is today's segment, closed out. However, we do have more tomorrow. Tomorrow, we will be hearing from Rich Collins on the importance of imagery, so kind of tying in with this talk as well, in addition to an engineering panel with Russel Savage and Alex Hawk shreds. So, that will be incredibly interesting to get their perspective as well as engineers, just on how to implement some of these changes that we're discussing. So, thank you all so much for taking the time today to join us. And we hope to see you all tomorrow.

Michael D'Anvers:

Thank you, Kate.

Jesse Kim:

Thank you.

Monika Pierce:

[inaudible 01:02:07] everyone. Have a good one. Thanks-