



ACHIEVE!

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Coming of Age: The A-SIG in Year Three

By Dan Voss, Orlando Chapter



*Dan Voss,
Immediate Past Manager,
AccessAbility SIG*

Can the AccessAbility SIG really be three years old? Yes, we really are. And since we really are, wouldn't this be an appropriate time to take a brief look back at our original vision, see how we stack up against it now as we recharter ourselves as part of the STC Transformation, and determine where we should go from here? Let's do.

To some of us, it seems like just yesterday we were a fledgling organization struggling to get off the ground. I remember well the frantic scramble to line up our first 75 members and secure their original signatures on petitions to present to the Board before the 2002 international conference in Dallas. At the time, I was manager of our predecessor organization, the Special Needs Committee (SNC), founded in 1997 by Judy Skinner of the Lone Star Chapter. Just three months before the conference, we were informed that we were to be terminated as a committee. Rather than disband, the SNC elected to take on the daunting task of quadrupling our membership in 90 days in order to be reinstated as a Special Interest Group (SIG). Impossible? That word is not in our vocabulary.

We did it! But we had no time to rest on that accomplishment. I remember well the disappointment of learning just a month into our existence as a SIG that our budget, now allocated strictly on a per capita basis, would be reduced more than 75 percent from the budget we had received as a committee—and upon which our goals, objectives, and activities were based.

This fresh crisis prompted another intensive membership campaign, far more extensive than the first one. Under the code name "Operation Starfish," 14 hardy volunteers contacted nearly every STC chapter in the world, explaining our mission and seeking new members.

The result? We grew from just over 100 to nearly 260 members. Compared to our original SNC roster of 20, this represented an unbelievable growth of 1,300 percent in just over 11 months. That success, coupled with some generous corporate and personal sponsorships, secured our funding for our first year.

The next year we changed our name from the Special Needs SIG (SNSIG) to the AccessAbility SIG (A-SIG), adopted a new logo featuring a butterfly that flies despite an injured wing, and an official motto: "The Wind Beneath Your Wings." (See AccessAbility logo on page 2).



Manager's Column

Fabien Vais, STC AccessAbility SIG Manager

Our SIG is growing up. It is actually in its third phase of development.

Many of you may know that we started as a handful of stubborn, tireless, and passionate people determined to make known the concept of "accessibility". Thus, the Special Needs Committee grew into the AccessAbility SIG. We were nearly wiped off the map at one point for lack of members. We launched a historic membership drive that catapulted our SIG into financial stability by quickly more than quadrupling our membership.

However, this sudden rise proved short-lived. By the next STC membership renewal time, our membership dropped sharply by 15-20 percent, possibly because some who joined the first year did so primarily as financial patrons rather than active SIG participants.

Now, however, our membership not only has rebounded but also has surpassed even our highest number ever. The latest count (March 31, 2005) puts our membership at a comfortable 290 members!

The best part about this is that the members who are now with us seem to be here

because they have chosen to be actively involved, not just because they wanted to help us financially.

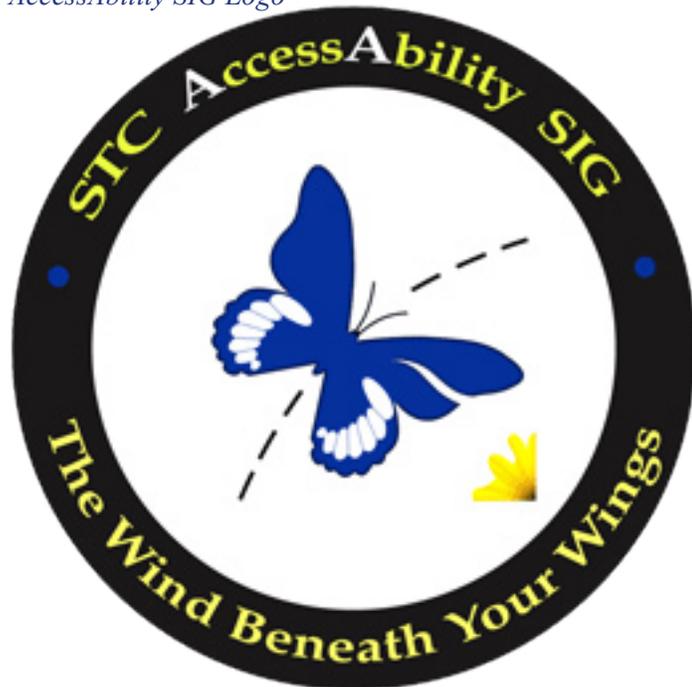
Our members come from over a dozen countries, including North America, Europe, India, and Japan. The quality of our newsletter and our Web site is now well-known. Our presence at the annual conference has grown steadily every year. We have joined forces with the Usability SIG on many occasions to solve queries on our listserv or to present joint panels at the annual conference.

We have an online shop where you can soon buy many items bearing our SIG logo. Finally, for the fourth consecutive year, our SIG is again publishing the ever popular Accessibility Guide, for all conference attendees with special needs.

In short, our SIG is doing fine. Most importantly, we continue to do the two things we set out to from the start—helping people one by one and advertizing the fact that we are experts in accessibility.

So far, we have managed very well in these two fundamental initiatives. ☺

AccessAbility SIG Logo



A SIG-wide mandate provided overwhelming approval of our new logo and motto.

The Wind Beneath Your Wings© Copyright 1999, Barbara Luther, <http://www.WindBeneathYourWings.com/>

The AccessAbility SIG acknowledges Barbara's kind permission to share her slogan.

For more information, see the [history](#) of the SIG's logos.

Achieve! has provided a tremendous resource for A-SIG members since our inception. Our archive of newsletters remain great references for inspiration and techniques.

After a hiatus, we're reviving Achieve! I can only hope to meet the standard set by my predecessor, Mike Murray.

Sustaining volunteer efforts is a perpetual challenge for any organization, as any STC chapter and SIG leaders can attest. If you found Achieve! helpful in the past or if you are new to the A-SIG and welcome its revival, please consider submitting an article (or recruiting an author).

I was introduced to accessibility in 2000, through my role as a software project manager. The A-SIG was a lifeline, guiding me through uncharted waters. In 2004, I was fortunate to become an accessibility analyst with SAS Institute. Here, I lobby for accessibility in our software, work with development to identify and repair accessibility defects, and I educate sales and customers on the what and why of accessibility. The best part of my job is working one-on-one with customers with disabilities. They amaze me with their tenacity and inspire me with their courage.

E D I T O R ' S C O L U M N



"A-SIG" Continued from Page 1

We also pumped more monetary mortar into our fiscal foundation with a highly successful fund-raiser. Code-named "Operation Butterfly," our sale of A-SIG lapel pins featuring our new name, logo, and motto generated nearly \$600 in revenue (after costs). The logo became quite the rage at the international conference in Baltimore. We still have a sizable inventory of already-paid-for pins that will support another fund-raiser when the time is right.

Since then, we have finally been able to stop fighting for our survival as an organization and start focusing on our dual mission: helping technical communicators with disabilities in the practice of our profession and helping all technical communicators design information products that are fully accessible to end users with disabilities.

The original charter of the SNC was the first half of that dual mission. The second half has taken on added emphasis over the past three years as accessibility of information emerges as a new specialty within our profession.

Uniting the two parts of the mission is a vision of what many would consider to be an impossible dream—universal accessibility. This takes me back to the compelling story which Judy Skinner told in her [landmark paper](#) in 2000, "My Brain Works but My Legs Don't: Let's Take the 'Dis' out of 'Disabilities'":

"I'm reminded of the story about the beach strewn with starfish and the little girl picking them up and throwing them back in the ocean.

'Little girl,' a passer-by said, 'what are you doing?'

'I'm saving starfish,' she replied.

'But there are so many! Your efforts can't possibly make a difference.'

As she picked up another starfish, the little girl said, 'It makes a difference to that one.'

We ask you to help us make a difference."

To measure our accomplishments against our vision, we should look at how many "starfish" we have saved. Those of you who subscribe to our robust and dynamic listserv will vouch for the fact that almost daily our SIG has provided support to fellow practitioners as well as family members, friends, associates, and members of the general public who have disabilities. Over and over, our members have been forthcoming with valuable technical information, leads to outstanding resources, and, most importantly, strong words of encouragement.



Everybody counts—boil the AccessAbility SIG down to two words, and that's the two.

We are more than a SIG; we are a family—the doors of our electronic "home" are always open to those who need our help.

At the same time, we have also maintained a continuous exchange of bleeding-edge technical information to help technical communicators design information products that are fully accessible to end users with disabilities. Step by step, we are helping to effect a cultural change—a paradigm shift—one that will eventually lead to a society that views an inaccessible Web site or a conference room not equipped with assistive hearing technologies with the same intolerance as a public building with steep stairs and no access ramp. We're not there yet, but we are getting there.

And that's just the listserv.

Throughout the past three years, our comprehensive [Web site](#) has continued to grow to the point where it has truly become a definitive online international resource in the field.

This year, in preparation for the 52nd international conference in Seattle, we will be publishing our fourth consecutive [Conference Guide for People with Special Needs](#) (online, in advance, and printed copies at the conference), as well as an *Addendum* printed and distributed onsite following a site visit to check for last-minute challenges.

Each year, our level of involvement in the conference has increased, with more technical sessions devoted to accessibility, more papers published in the proceedings, more [materials posted](#) to the conference Web site (and on our own Web site).

We recently conducted a highly successful Call for Articles and have selected a blue-chip line-up of accessibility experts as authors to contribute to a February 2006 edition of Technical Communication thematically dedicated to disabilities and accessibility as they pertain to technical communicators and the information products we create.

And let's not forget *Achieve!* We've been "off the air" for a while, but we have several outstanding editions in our [online archives](#) and, as you can tell, we're back now to bring you more of the same!

So let's take stock of our accomplishments. As a direct result of the A-SIG, people have attended international conferences who otherwise would not have been able to, and many more have had a much better experience than they would have had without our involvement.

Because of A-SIG, many professionals with disabilities, both within and

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Congratulations: You Have ADD!

By Mike Murray, Orlando Chapter President

You say you have Attention Deficit Disorder? Wow, that's great! Congratulations! No, I haven't lost my mind—at least not yet. A positive attitude is a tool I've learned to use as a coping mechanism for dealing with some of the challenges that life hurls my way. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's back up and establish what Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is from my perspective, how I came to realize I have it, and a little about how I came to deal with it. Having established that foundation for discussion, I'll let you in on ways not only of dealing with the disorder that work for me, but also of actually capitalizing on its positive traits—and there are several. That's the good news, which is really what this paper is all about.

Definition

Let's begin by clarifying a question that sometimes confused me in my quest to become educated about my condition, "What's the difference between ADD and ADHD?" The difference is mainly one of terminology, which can be confusing at times. The "official" clinical diagnosis is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or AD/HD (sometimes just ADHD). ADD can (obviously) stay with a person into adulthood. Sometimes the "hyperactivity" component stays as well, but very often that piece diminishes with maturity.

Diagnosis

Behaviors

ADD is a complex disorder, the exact nature and severity of which varies from person to person. Some of the characteristics associated with ADD, such as distractibility, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, are things that can happen to anybody at various times. The difference is that people with

ADD consistently display these and other symptoms for many years, as opposed to occasionally. In addition, these behaviors can create a real handicap in two or more areas of a person's life (e.g., home, work, or social settings).

Checklists

A popular method of determining whether ADD may be a factor in your behavior is to examine a general adult ADD checklist to further define your symptoms. In conjunction with other diagnostic techniques, the world-renowned ADD researcher, Daniel G. Amen, MD, uses a checklist that you can find on the "One ADD Place" Web site at www.oneaddplace.com/addcheck.htm. While this is not a tool you should use to make a final diagnosis, it **can** help you determine whether it is appropriate to follow up with an experienced professional.

Personal History

There is an excellent probability that ADD is hereditary. After spending most of my life feeling that something "wasn't right" with me, a very insightful counselor suddenly said to me after numerous sessions, "You have ADD!" It was a euphoric moment for both of us. At long last, I could put a label on the "something" that had been troubling me my whole life!

I was astonished several years later when I was discussing my father's Parkinson's disease with my stepmother. At one point in the conversation, she casually mentioned something about his ADD. Of course, neither my stepmother nor father realized that the condition was hereditary. If you suspect you might have ADD, the first thing you **must** do is make a beeline for your immediate family and find out if anyone before you has ADD. It could save you a lot of time and frustration and result in a higher quality of life sooner than later.

Ways to Cope

I'll address specific circumstances in a moment, but first I'll share the more general methods I've adopted that have successfully helped me cope with ADD and, yes, even **embrace it**. Some people have even stated with conviction that, given a choice and knowing what they know now, they would **keep** their ADD! It's part of what makes them who they are today.

Positive ADD Characteristics

Here is the great news! In addition to characteristics that are generally considered to be less than positive, ADD definitely has some **very positive** characteristics. Some of the positive characteristics that I **choose** to dwell on include endless energy, great imagination, creativity, humor, ahead of "establishment" thinking, creative thinking and problem solving, and a great passion for interests.

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outside the profession, have found the resources and encouragement they need to succeed. And as a direct result of the A-SIG, the world's shared database on accessibility has been significantly enriched and continues to grow daily. Truly, we have been the wind beneath many wings.

Can we rest? Of course not. The beach is still strewn with starfish. But have we been true to our vision? You bet we have! My friends, the A-SIG has come of age.

As I look back and recall the countless hours we put in to help the A-SIG get off the ground, I ask myself, was it all worth it? You bet it was!

We can look back with pride, and we can look forward with hope, because, as the little girl said, we make a difference. 

The Starfish Chamber: Making a Difference!

Compiled By Lisa Pappas, Carolina Chapter
AccessAbility SIG Achieve! Editor

Over the A-SIG's three-year history, our listserv has proven an invaluable resource from advice to guidance to empathy. This archived response to a U.S. Supreme Court decision exposes our beach-combers.

Fourteen years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it took a Supreme Court case to state that Americans with disabilities "deserve equal access and accommodation at government buildings, such as courthouses and schools, in all states."

Bill Mears. CNN Washington Bureau. May 17, 2004.

Kathy Alerts the List

At 2:59 PM -0400 5/17/04, Katharyn Bine wrote: Check it out: <http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/05/17/scotus.disabled/index.html>

Kim Responds

We transport our 8-year-old son in a wheelchair (he is unable to move, so we push him). I continue to be amazed at how many places are **still** not accessible. Here's my short list:

- Our attorney's office.
- Our pediatrician's old office (new office is better, but not great).
- Elevators at our children's hospital are too small for his chair; security has to let us use the transport elevators.
- Old school buildings (we successfully got that fixed).

And this doesn't even go into the accessible parking issues that we have with our son and the van we transport him in. I agree that the court decision was a step in the right direction, but there is still a lot to do. We have learned to advocate for each situation, but often times with no success. We

just keep trying and hope to not tire of trying to make a difference.
-Kim

Cynthia's Experiences

Kathy, I heard about this on the radio yesterday. The ruling is good for state-owned government buildings but I still don't think that this will provide a way to get an accessible entrance to two of my local post office buildings. The post office belongs to the U.S. government. I think there is a caveat for Federal buildings that says building access doesn't have to comply if it is not technically feasible or it will cost too much to renovate an existing building built before 1968.

I haven't tried to go to a post office since 1999. Perhaps the access has changed since then but here is what I encountered then. The seven steps on the Riverdale, MD post office are steep (taller than average risers) and take you up one flight on the outside of the building. My husband, Dennis, said it is even difficult for him as a "normal" person to climb them. Because the main floor level is very high up, a straight ramp would be dangerous. A ramp would have to wrap around itself several times or be a block long to make a gentler slope. Or build a platform lift. The building is very close to the road and the outside edge of the stairs is near the sidewalk. The steps have two handicapped parking places in front of them. I called the post office and asked if they had a handicapped entrance and the answer was "No ma'am."

I was able to get in the Greenbelt, MD post office. It is a little better — a few low steps to climb to get from the parking lot into the building. It's okay for a walker or someone on crutches but not for a wheelchair or scooter.



And I don't think that either post office complies with any of the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards, Section 9, Postal Facilities, for the internal requirements (table height, etc.).

I got the following response to my questions about this back in 1999 from a friend of a friend:

I am very happy to answer your questions to the limits of my ability.... Since 1968 when the Architectural Barriers Act was passed by Congress, all federally funded construction projects have had to be accessible. That means if the buildings were built or remodeled since that time they would have to be accessible. Buildings that have not been remodeled would be affected [because] accessibility would be required when the program was viewed as a whole. This means that they could have a different branch [that is] accessible and get away with not having certain branches accessible. Seems like a crime to me, but it's the law.

John P.S. Salmen, AIA President
Universal Designers & Consultants, Inc; Publisher - Universal Design Newsletter <http://www.UniversalDesign.com>

I should visit the post offices again to see if there has been any improvement in the last 5 years, but I doubt it. Pre-1968 buildings don't have to comply unless they get renovated or get additions to the existing building. Fortunately, parcels are usually left at our doorstep under the carport. If there is one that has to be picked up at the post office, I can send my husband to get it. I can buy stamps over the phone

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A good resource for identifying and relating to positive ADD characteristics is the "Hunters, Explorers and Dreamers...Different Ways to View Your ADD Traits" Web site at <http://bornertoexplore.org/addexp~1.htm>.

Positive Attitude

Thinking positively about having ADD is especially important because ADD is so often a descriptive label that focuses on a narrow set of negative traits. You may have noticed in "Positive ADD Characteristics" that I said I **choose** to dwell on positive things. Know this if you know or believe nothing else – having a positive attitude rather than a negative one is **most definitely** a choice!

One day a few years ago, I decided that I was tired of feeling down and depressed. I wanted to feel better about myself and about life. I made a choice to change things. Now, making a decision to be a positive person and following through on it are two very different things. For me, the journey was difficult at times as I worked every day to see my world and everything in it in a positive light. It wasn't long, however, before I realized that maintaining my positive attitude was becoming easier and more automatic every day. Today, I'm thrilled to report that I am a generally positive person!

Humor

One of the techniques I chose to support my developing positive attitude was to establish a humorous outlook. I think the funniest moments can come from taking literally some of the things people say. I also enjoy puns. I realize my kinds of humor may have a limited audience, so instead I offer "Funny Stories About Life With ADD" at <http://add.about.com/cs/humor/a/humor.htm>. There is a big difference between ridiculing yourself and enjoying the humor in life. Choose to enjoy life and take some of the lesser consequences of ADD with a grain of salt.

The Clutter

For many people with ADD, the biggest challenge is dealing with clutter, both physical and mental. We don't function well in a cluttered environment.

Physical

The only thing that's worse than living in a physically cluttered environment is having to **clean it up**. I have a book about dealing with clutter somewhere at home, but I can't find it! Sadly, this isn't a joke—it's true! And talk about procrastination (another ADD characteristic)! The best recommendation I can make is to dedicate a Saturday or even an entire weekend to nothing but organizing and eliminating the clutter in your office area. Don't turn on a radio. Don't check your e-mail. Close the door so nobody will know you are there. If necessary, unplug your phone. But most importantly, be strong and firm with yourself and **show up!** For additional ideas regarding how to deal with physical clutter, go to the "Clutter and Organizing Links" Web site at http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories_clutter.html#clutter.

Mental

Mental clutter can be every bit as debilitating as physical clutter! Earlier, I listed "a great passion for interests" as a positive characteristic that I **choose** to dwell on. I also said that some positive characteristics can fall into a "not so positive" category depending upon how you handle them. Well, I have numerous interests, and I want to be perfect in all of them.

I remember once talking with the counselor who originally diagnosed my ADD. I was discussing my sleep difficulties (**another** ADD characteristic) and remember stating that I felt sleep was a waste of time and that I wish I never had to. She asked me what I would do if I never had to sleep. After I rattled off my extensive list, she asked me, "Do you

realize that **two** people couldn't do all that in their lifetimes?"

Over time, I've adjusted to not being able to do everything I'd like to do, but I **still** do too much. I've come to realize that "only" three or four extra interests can be too much when you have "a great passion for your interests." I'm working now to find a better balance in my life between my outside interests, my career, and my family. It's time to back off and de-clutter my mind!

Workplace

One of the most difficult questions for a person with ADD to answer is, "Should I tell my boss?" Unfortunately (or fortunately), there is not one "yes" or "no" answer for everyone. The answer has to be "It depends on your boss." I have taken the calculated risk of telling mine about my ADD, and all is well. Because I proved myself first, she knows I won't use ADD as an excuse, and she knows it's not a detriment to my work.

If your ADD is severe enough that you absolutely must have special work accommodations, you may have no choice but to reveal yourself sooner. You know yourself, your circumstances, your boss, and your company's culture better than anyone else, so the decision is yours alone. The "ADD/ADHD Categorized Links Pages" Web site, "Workplace" link at http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories.htm#work contains some marvelous articles that could help you deal with workplace issues, including information about the Americans with Disabilities act and your workplace accommodation entitlements under the act.

Education

The best thing you can do for yourself once you've been diagnosed as having ADD is to become educated about your lifelong friend. (Note the positive attitude!) In the "References" section, I have included just a few of the

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Accessibility, Section 508, and Adobe

Acrobat PDF

By David Harrity, STC Senior Member

Tag your it! No, tag your PDF. While the first statement is child's play, the latter is no fun and games, according to Kathy Bine, senior associate with ICF Consulting.

Kathy discussed the importance of accessibility tags as guest speaker for the February meeting of the [Metro Baltimore STC chapter](#). Her presentation, Accessibility, Section 508, and Adobe Acrobat PDF, provided nearly 20 STC members and guests with an introduction into the accessibility features, including tags, of Adobe Acrobat 6.0 Professional. She discussed the typical problems and solutions encountered as a consultant to several federal agencies, and techniques and methods to generate and develop Portable Document Format (PDF) files compliant with Section 508.

[Section 508](#) is a 1998 amendment to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act that requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. In addition to requiring accessible telecommunications, video and multimedia products, Section 508 also mandates that software applications, web-based information and provisions for information, documentation and support are accessible and accommodate the communication needs of end-users with disabilities.

While Kathy admits that accessible PDF files can be a challenge, several simple steps make the task less difficult. The most important step is making the source file accessible and Section 508 compliant.

For example, Kathy says, start by developing accessible web pages (e.g. HTML) or documents (e.g., Microsoft Word, Adobe FrameMaker files). Most source formats provide a means to insert alternative text into images, figures and tables that conveys the essence of the image to blind or visually-impaired end-users. Additionally, retrofitting and editing a PDF is time-consuming and the tool set is manually intensive.

The Accessibility Checker within Adobe Acrobat v6.0 provides an explanation of what the errors mean and guidance on how to resolve the errors. Kathy warns that visual inspection, which works for HTML, does not work in PDF files. In PDF files, the reading order may be incorrect—causing difficulty with screen readers. She recommends that authors test the files with several screen readers. For a list, see <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/visual.shtml#READ>.

To avoid problems, Kathy recommends that technical communicators tell management to consider accessibility early in the project planning and cost estimation process

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“ADD” Continued from page 6

resources that I use regularly in my journey with my pal ADD. There is much more I could have discussed in this article, things like tips for organizing your day and managing your time. I chose to cover the topics that have the most impact for me in my own continuing education, the ones I know the most about because I have lived them. The rest of your education is up to you. Of course, the *good* news is you have ADD!

Congratulations!

When one door closes another door opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us.

—Alexander Graham Bell (diagnosed with ADD) 

References

“ADD 101” Web site (“What Every Beginner in ADD Needs to Know”) http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/add_101.htm

“ADD/ADHD Categorized Links Pages” Web site http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories.htm#work

ADDitude magazine, P.O. Box 500, Missouri City, TX 77459-9904 <http://www.additudemag.com>

Attention Deficit Disorder Association, P.O. Box 543, Pottstown, PA 19464 <http://www.add.org>

“Clutter and Organizing Links” Web site http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories_clutter.html#clutter

“Hunters, Explorers and Dreamers...Different Ways to View Your ADD Traits” Web site <http://borntoexplore.org/addexp~1.htm>

Meetups (group meetings in your area of the world) <http://adultadd.meetup.com/>

“Resources for Adults with ADD” Web site <http://add.about.com/cs/foradults/index.htm>



Accessibility Testing by People with Disabilities As a Best Practice

By Debra Ruh

What are “Best Practices” when it comes to conducting accessibility tests? I believe the gold standard of accessibility testing is to use people with disabilities. Does that mean I should ask a friend, who is blind, to test my software application? Not necessarily. If the friend is not fully knowledgeable in the use of screen-reading technology or uses an older version of screen-reading technology, a faulty evaluation could result. That is certainly not a best practice. In addition, my friend may not be familiar with accessibility standards such as Section 508 and Section 255 or she may not be a proficient PC user. Having “just anyone” who happens to be a person with a disability test applications for accessibility simply does not make good business sense.

Should I purchase screen-reading technology and test the product myself? No. Assistive technology (AT) is sophisticated and takes time to master. I once had problems taking a video-conference class. An associate of mine, who happened to use a screen-reader, was having the same problem. We contacted technical support. The support person was baffled that my associate did not have a monitor! Investing money in AT is wasted unless you are prepared to exert the time and effort needed to become proficient using the technology.

Adhering to sets of standards and testing methodologies is critical to assuring successful accessibility testing outcomes. We recently tested an online course for a government agency. Agency representatives told us that the course had failed a Section 508 compliance test. We asked to see a copy of the test results. No one could provide one to us. All they were told was that the course failed the test. This led us to do a quick analysis. We created a test plan and several

test cases. Two of our professional accessibility evaluators performed the tests. One tester was blind and used Freedom Scientific’s JAWS screen-reading software. The other individual has both cognitive and upper body mobility disabilities. He used A-I-squared’s Dragon Naturally Speaking, a speech recognition program, and a track ball to test the product.

Each analyst followed the test case carefully as they reviewed each section of the course. The results were compiled into a report. The course passed! While our evaluators did identify several usability issues, they successfully completed the course. We presented our results to the agency. As you can imagine, our positive results caused confusion. Once again, we asked our customer for the report generated by the previous testers. We wanted to know how the testing had been conducted and what AT had been used to test the course. Was there a test plan? None of that information was provided to our customers; all they were told was that their course failed.

Is it necessary for people with disabilities to test every phase of production? Should they test every page of a Web site, every line of code in a software application? Not at all. Accessibility or Section 508 compliance* should be part of the development process. It should be an integral part of the process just like usability should be part of a solid development plan. When you create a software application first and then test it for Accessibility and Section 508 compliance afterward, correcting the problems will be much more expensive than if accessibility had been factored into the design. Include accessibility and/or Section 508 compliance into the entire process and test at all milestones. There are many ways to test your product at

milestones and not all of these must include people with disabilities. The developers should know how to test their product for accessibility and compliance.

There are many accessibility and Section 508 compliance testing tools in the market place. If you understand how to use these tools and have the most current version of these tools, they can provide good feedback during the development process. However, these tools can also give you false positives and false negatives, so you must understand the benefits and constraints of these tools. To be sure, test with a person who has a disability and who knows the standards, knows assistive technology and understands the technology of the product you are developing.

Gold, Silver and Bronze Standards

Perform solid testing at each milestone and follow the Gold Standards of Testing when ever possible. In our book, if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it. By measuring accessibility and Section 508 compliance, you can know that your investment is working; you can tell what areas need more work, and you can improve the process. Create accessibility and Section 508 compliance metrics that make sense to your business and follow the standards.

* Other compliance laws speak to accessibility and making Web and IT accessible for people with disabilities. However, for this article, I focus on Section 508 compliance and the broader term, accessibility.

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In designing a standardized test environment, you should organize the computer hardware, software, and test platform configurations and test activities that you set up, into three categories: Gold, Silver, and Bronze. Keep in mind that some projects may include all three testing standards.

- Gold Standard – Guaranteed to Work
- Silver Standard – Should Work
- Bronze Standard – May Work

Gold Category

The Gold category is the Best Practice of Accessibility Testing. The Gold category includes hardware, web and/or software products that will be thoroughly tested and “guaranteed to work.” In this category, accessibility testing is part of the process. This category always includes solid testing by skilled testers with disabilities using assistive technology as part of their test platform. Test cases are created that include testers with all applicable disabilities. Different versions of assistive technology (AT) are added to the test cases. Accessibility and Section 508 compliance tools may be used during the process to help ensure Accessibility and standards compliance. The developer performs internal testing at all milestones in the development process for accessibility and Section 508 compliance throughout the development process.

This might entail repeating presentation test cases for each of the different platforms and/or distributing functional test cases evenly among the various combinations of hardware and software. Any significant defects, or defects found and reported by the testing team, are fixed typically in the next development cycle. Adding more products to the Gold



Debra Ruh with Sean Stapleford, who tests software and web accessibility with his mouth stick.

category increases the number of test cases to be executed and increases the cost or potentially reduces the quality of testing for each product. A reduction in the quality of testing, consequently, increases the probability that a serious defect might slip through undiscovered until the end, when it becomes a costly remediation problem.

Silver Category

The Silver category includes hardware and software products that undergo less rigorous testing. In this category, accessibility testing is still part of the process. This category always includes spot testing (prioritized by areas of risk) by testers with disabilities. Test cases are created for the areas to be tested, and the tests are performed by testers with all applicable disabilities. Different versions of assistive technology (AT) are added to the test cases. Accessibility and Section 508 compliance tools may be used during the process to help ensure accessibility and compliance. The developer makes spot checks (prioritized by areas of risk) for accessibility and Section 508 compliance throughout the development process.

Since the items listed in this category typically represent a smaller proportion of your audience, they are assigned a limited number of test cases. These items “should work,” but a few defects may slip through your testing as certain combinations of older hardware and software may not be compatible with your product or solution. Some of these defects may be worth fixing in future development cycles, while others may not.

Bronze Category

The Bronze category includes the hardware and software products that will not be tested. Items listed in this category “may work” but few people (if anyone) will typically care if they don’t work. Defects that are only specific to Bronze category products typically may not be fixed. However, the company’s customer support group should still log any incidents that your customers report. This log may serve as a knowledge base of “work arounds” that could be built and maintained.

For the Bronze category, the developer spot checks for accessibility and Section 508 compliance throughout the development process. Accessibility and Section 508 compliance tools may be used during the process. This test has more risk that the application is not accessible and Section 508 compliant and the results are much less reliable. 🌀

Debra Ruh is Founder and President of TecAccess. TecAccess, a SBA 8(a), SDB Certified and Small Woman Owned Company specializing in E&IT Accessibility and Section 508 – Section 255 compliance solutions. Most TecAccess’ associates are persons with disabilities. For more information, please contact us at (804) 749-8646 or druh@teccess.net or visit www.TecAccess.Net.

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or on the USPS Web site, and I use UPS to mail packages.
-Cynthia

Karen Recalls a Positive Difference Made

This reminds me of a little anecdote connected with the A-SIG pins. I asked for the pins to be sent to my mom in Pennsylvania because she was preparing a care package for me (here in Denmark). Bonnie included some card about the A-SIG. (I haven't gotten the package yet, so I don't have the details.)

Well, my mom showed it to a woman who lives in her building. My mom lives in a retirement-type housing (she's 80 and mobile, but some residents are much younger and aren't mobile—that kind of housing). This woman is in a wheelchair and apparently goes around in a group in Harrisburg, PA, to check on public facilities, like restaurants, and see how easy it is for people with assistive devices to use their facilities. She got all excited about the A-SIG logo and whatever else was on the card. She thought the A-SIG was the greatest thing she'd come across. I said I'd be happy to talk to her, but she hasn't called yet. (I tried sending my mom the SIG Web site link, but my mom and her computer are not always on speaking terms!)

My mom always said that improved (special) educational opportunities only came about through the blood, sweat, tears, and **loads** of patience from parents—the grassroots level. This woman is a part of another grassroots movement. The world may not notice them, but Harrisburg will. Ever since then, I've become more aware of how I'd much rather be in a wheelchair in Denmark, than in America. To begin with, we have sidewalks here!!! We have a better public transportation system in general, so it is easy to add on a "handikap" bus service, as it is called—a cross between a taxi and a bus, a mini-van that has the ramp in the back for driving the chair into the van - and you book it like a taxi, although you do have to plan a little bit more in advance. There is quite a bit of legislation about these things, but there is a lot of volunteer, grassroots level work behind it all.

So, Cynthia, I think you should go to the post office!!

Regards,
Karen Mardahl (who won't tell the negative stories because I'm sure you have enough of your own!!)

PS Bonnie, thanks for including the card! 



"Adobe" Continued from Page 7

and assist management in choosing software applications to build Section 508 compliance or accessibility into the files, rather than retrofit them with it. If possible, ask for sample files and test the accessibility of the source documents early and often to ensure that a workable plan of action can be achieved.

Note: This article focuses on the accessibility features within Adobe Acrobat 6.0 Professional. With the recent release of Adobe Acrobat 7.0 Professional, a review of the accessibility tool set will be addressed in a future newsletter article. For information from Adobe, please see <http://access.adobe.com/>. 

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