



Transcript

Episode 23: The State of Accessibility in Canada — Part 2 (54:17)

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Dean Askin 00:03

You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. The podcast that explores the power of inclusion and why disability is an important part of the workplace diversity, equity and inclusion conversation produced by the Ontario Disability Employment Network with your host, Jeannette Campbell and Dean Askin. From the bird's eye view to a closer look at accessibility, hi there, and welcome to episode 23 of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. I'm Dean Askin. Thanks for joining us for this episode, part two in our series on the state of accessibility in Canada. Now, if you haven't heard part one yet, well, be sure to have a listen to that a great conversation about the overall state of accessibility in this country with three of the top voices on the issue.

Jeannette Campbell 00:53

And hello, I'm Jeannette Campbell with you here at the other mic and this episode, we're going to be moving in for that closer look at accessibility of branding, marketing, advertising and social media content created by businesses in Canada. We're having this conversation, because the accessibility of content for everyone can affect a business's profitability and brand reputation.

Dean Askin 01:19

That's right, Jeannette, you've just said pretty much the same thing. But the technology company XR Extreme Reach says in the introduction of its recently released 2024 Global Advertising Accessibility Index and Trends Report. Now that report focuses on accessibility of TV advertising, and the report

notes Canada is the world leader in this because of our federal broadcasting regulations. Every TV ad that airs in Canada has to have closed captioning.

Jeannette Campbell 01:47

And Dean but there's always a but. And the use of other accessibility features in TV advertising, audio description, and sign language is almost non-existent globally. And the same goes for closed captioning and digital video, because of the technical restrictions in the digital player process as the Extreme Reach report puts it.

Dean Askin 01:55

Yeah. And I'm thinking What about print material Jeannette? I mean, print ads and marketing flyers and brochures, hey, they're not dead yet, despite the digital age. I mean, we still get those weekly sales flyers in our mailbox at my house. Well, according to the survey on accessible print materials by Statistics Canada, about 5.2 million Canadians have difficulty with print materials, and get this 70% of them have trouble accessing the alternate formats they need.

Jeannette Campbell 02:39

And somehow that's not surprising. And then there's all the people who use emojis in their social media posts, they can't be read by screen readers. I know that this is a real pet peeve of one of our guests. And what about all the websites that are a customer's first point of contact with a business?

Dean Askin 02:59

That's right, Jeannette, well, here's the what about them. In 2024 across the top 1 million homepage is audited by the web a million. There were 56 point 8 million accessibility errors. Now that works out to an average of 56 point errors per page.

Jeannette Campbell 03:17

And product packaging. How accessible is that? Accessibility isn't among the basic mandatory labeling requirements for packaged consumer goods in Canada.

Dean Askin 03:28

So if you're listening to this right now, and you're in marketing or advertising, or you're a brand manager or a product manager, or a social media manager, or a webmaster, do we still call them webmasters these days or a grant or an outliner. Or even a freelancer who does some or all of these things.

Jeannette Campbell 03:45

Well, then you're in for some insights into what's right. And what's wrong about accessibility in all these aspects of marketing, advertising, branding, and social media, from two people who specialize in helping businesses make sure what they're creating is accessible.

Dean Askin 04:04

Kelly Thibodeau is the principal of Squarely Accessible. She focuses on educating businesses about how to create accessible website and social media content and accessible documents. She's joining us from out in Western Canada near Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Jeannette Campbell 04:18

And from Kitchener Waterloo Region in Ontario Jolene MacDonald is here. She's the founder and creative director of Accessibrand. Her agency helps busy businesses make sure all aspects of their branding and marketing are accessible.

Dean Askin 04:34

And Jeannette you know, they're in an authoritative position to do that, because all the staff at Accessibrand have lived experience with disability.

Jeannette Campbell 04:42

So how is it that we build the show and insightful conversation with expert guests? Well, Kelly Thibodeau and Jolene MacDonald, welcome to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D.

Kelly Thibodeau 04:55

Thanks so much for having me, Dean and Jeannette. It's Kelly.

Jolene MacDonald 04:59

Yeah, thanks. Thank you, it's Jolene speaking, much appreciated.

Jeannette Campbell 05:02

Well, we're really glad that two of you are here. So let's start this conversation. So first off, I'd like to get a sense of why you do what you do. What is it that led you to working with businesses to educate them and help them make sure their branding, marketing advertising their websites or social media, the whole gamut? His accessible? Why is doing this important to you both?

Kelly Thibodeau 05:27

I'll jump in first, I would say for me, yeah, I mean, honestly, this conversation often starts with legislation, and the organization that I was working for at the time, that's where it started with them. And I've been in marketing communications for 25 years. And I think that, you know, it sort of opens the door, but legislation only gets you so far. So I also have personal experience, as a caregiver for my mom who had a disability, and it ignited something in me around inclusion and belonging, and just really sort of recognizing that. I think accessibility, you know, post secondary education institutions, aren't there yet. People are struggling with, what do they do? How do they start? And I know that it's just not getting talked about. So that opportunity was just something that I felt compelled to, to starting.

Jeannette Campbell 06:24

What about, what about you, Jolene?

Jolene MacDonald 06:27

So, I trained as a graphic designer in the late 90s. I started in the industry. And then and I was working with, not for profits through my own design agency that I owned for many years. And one of my clients was also disabled. And I was telling them about my youngest daughter who was born with a rare type of dwarfism. And they were like, did you know that people with disabilities can't access media very well,

like, it's not all the time, but it's a lot of the time. And so it really had me thinking, because I was advocating already for her, like, wow, my own industry, how can I make this better? How can I change it. And so I started researching and studying and trying to understand and then learning from people with disabilities. And then I actually got very sick, I was diagnosed with Ehlers Danlos, which is a connective tissue disorder in 2018. I had been not well for a while, but, you know, they didn't know what it was. So it was sort of a combination of those things that led me to actually partner out of my other business and start excessive brand, because I needed something that worked for me. And my whole motto was, I'm going to hire people with disabilities also, and work to improve, you know, design and marketing and make sure that we not added on and not just focus on law is actually design it properly from the beginning.

Jeannette Campbell 07:46

That makes a lot of sense. It really does. And so thank you, both of you for talking to us about why this is so important and kind of how your journeys got you here. So speaking of here, where do you think we are on the accessibility barometer right now in this country? You know, when we think about the accessibility of have all these things that you were talking about? How would you describe the state of accessibility again, in branding, marketing, social media advertising?

Jolene MacDonald 08:19

Kelly and I probably have two different views. similar, but different, right, Kelly? Yeah. Why don't you go first? Okay, so, because it was like 2014, when I sort of learned about it, I've seen a lot of positive change in the last few years, particularly since COVID. Happens. A lot of swing in a positive way. My company does not focus on the laws, because if we do I think people won't learn why it's so important. Although we use it as a secondary sales. Motivation. It's like, yeah, if you don't do it, you know, you're you can get fined. So I think there's, the percentage is still pretty low. I will say the companies that have to legally be mandated to do accessibility, I think are probably there. But I would say if you had to put a number on it, it's pretty split and half or lower, I would say. I'd say it's like a 40% to 60. But I don't I don't have the facts on that. But that's how I feel it might be a

Jeannette Campbell 09:21

40% or so not quite a passing grade, but almost. Okay. And Kelly, what do you think?

Kelly Thibodeau 09:29

Yeah, I think you know, I think it's really easy to be critical on an accessibility conversation, and for good reason. But I also think it's important to be positive and bring a spirit of of that into the conversation. So there's certainly a lot more organizations that are really values driven and values minded and attracting loyal customer base because of that positioning. So that means that accessibility it doesn't always mean In that accessibility is top of mind, but it means that they're leaning towards it for the right reasons, creating some of those internal centers of excellence. But I think where they struggle is then scaling that out to other parts of the organization that are responsible for creating all kinds of content, whether that's a pitch deck for a presentation, or, you know, a document for creative campaign or something like that. I think, sometimes the view is a little bit limited to like, Oh, we've got that on lock, like our website, folks. They know accessibility, and they'd got it. And then the thinking kind of stops there. Right. So I think, you know, when we kind of like, look at the reasons why and the climate around

business right now, it sets a really good stage to start conversations around accessibility. And I think, you know, Jolene, and I both, we want to work with companies who believe what we believe, because it's a whole different starting point, when they're not, you know, not already thinking that way. So let's keep building on the good work by making sure now that marketing, communications, it's accessible as well.

Jolene MacDonald 11:08

100% agree with Kelly, we want to work with companies that already know, we don't want to go out trying to spend all our time convincing people to why. And I mean, I'd say the majority of our clients aren't like that. Before it was and now it's not because they know and they they're understanding, you know, equity, diversity. And inclusion also includes accessibility. So they're learning.

Dean Askin 11:30

Kelly, I want to jump in here. And you've sort of touched on this a bit. But I want to ask me, you know, in part one of this series, when we did our overview to get the high level look, I mean, we went right to the top to get that perspective. And we had Stephanie CAD you, Canada's Chief Accessibility Officer, on the show, in part one of this series, and one of the things she said was that accessibility needs to be part of every conversation at the start, not when we're looking at how to patch things together to make them accessible. I mean, you know, when you're having those initial conversations with, with businesses about the accessibility of their branding, and their marketing communications, are they indeed starting to think more about putting accessibility first? Or is it still primarily an afterthought? What do you think?

Kelly Thibodeau 12:19

Yeah, I mean, it's a whole evolution, but if I'm, like, really gonna be 100%, honest, I'd say we're a lot in the afterthought, space where, you know, people have personal reasons why they're passionate, and why they care deeply, and they might be able to sort of advocate for, to their boss to get approval that takes something like a training program, but then they come back to their day to day reality. And they're faced with the complexity of what they can change what they can't change, and, you know, projects that are already in process versus something that's new, and, you know, echoing is, or what you learn through Stephanie, is when you can get closer to the start. So almost like this mindset of what I've heard termed as, like shifting left, so into requirements of how can we make it accessible from the start, that's where it gets sticky, right? Like when you can actually look at, you know, everybody has requirements when they start a project, whether that's brand voice and tone, colors, logos, all that kind of a thing. And when you're thinking about accessibility, you create so much more room, it's a planned part of the process. And the opposite of that is when it gets left on the end, it's heavy, it's risky, it's the first thing you're gonna drop when that deadline is like marching down towards you, right? So it's it really like the sustainability of accessible processes happen, way closer to the beginning, even though, you know, sometimes the starting points aren't quite there yet. But it's that constant conversation inside. And I think that's, you know, something, I try to really encourage people as well as this won't be the first time you're thinking you're talking about accessibility that has to keep happening over and over and over again, you might sound like a broken record. But it's a really important thing to start getting people to think about

Dean Askin 14:14

Jolene, what do you find? Is it still an afterthought?

Jolene MacDonald 14:18

I would tell you, the majority of businesses are, are still an afterthought, and it is not. Because they don't care. It's a lot because they don't know. So while I agree, it should be a priority. It shouldn't be a first conversation. Comparing my two businesses, I sold it as an afterthought originally, because it was like, oh, they'll do this. And then we do this to make it accessible. So it always made it a burden. It always made it an extra cost when people are coming to us and they trust the brand we haven't built in. So it's not an afterthought. But the majority of companies come to us knowing that they need accessibility but they haven't been educated on how it works. So they're still in their thinking it's still at the end, but they are learning out through like myself and Kelly, that they can make it all part of the process. And it doesn't have to be an additional thing, we can change their brand colors, to have rules to make them work in certain applications, we can change digital, we can do these things. And it all works. Right from the get go. It's just a matter of reprocessing and thinking processes.

Kelly Thibodeau 15:21

I'll just add to that to say that I think accessibility gets a bit of a bad rap as being boring or complicated or too much work and the web developers job at the end of the day, right. So part of that growing awareness is recognizing that there's accountability across all the roles within advertising and marketing, communications, and sort of doing a little bit of myth busting that way, because it really is something that has accountability across the line.

Dean Askin 15:50

So let's expand on that perspective a little bit. So if they're not thinking about it in the forefront, what are some of the most common excuses, you hear about why companies aren't making their marketing materials and campaigns successful? I mean, and, and that must get frustrating sometimes. I mean, how frustrating is that?

Kelly Thibodeau 16:09

People really believe that if it's accessible, then it's ugly. Like, they can't have that intersection of creative and beautiful and functioning and accessible as part of the same idea set. So I think that's like, number one, and or a disbelief of like, well, people with disabilities won't buy our products or services, or they're not in our audience already. So they're in a little bit of denial about exactly, you know, like, I always try to help people really think differently about disability, because everything you do for accessibility improves the user experience and improves viability for search, right. So, you know, we're so conditioned to be able to think we can see disability when you think about like signage for accessible parking or accessible washrooms. It's people in wheelchairs, it's somebody in a wheelchair. But disability is so much more than that. And like, what if you broke your leg? For me? What if I broke my right arm tomorrow? Could I still use my mouse the same way? Right? So I think there those are a couple of the big ones for sure. But yeah, Jolene?

Jolene MacDonald 17:17

Yeah, no, it was like, it's cost. The goal, oh, my God, we can't afford it. Like, because they think they have to redo everything, rather than think in small chunks. I think the biggest thing I see if people are just so scared of it, and afraid that they're going to offend somebody that they don't do it. And we've talked about that in some of our podcasts that we did before. About why, you know, people don't do accessibility, but for from a design perspective, 100% We were like, oh, it's gonna be ugly. I can't do that. existing brands that we've seen, well, we could never not use that color. I mean, it's our brand. I'm like, oh, no, you can use your color. But you have to change how you use your color. You know, it's just different applications, different ways of thinking, as a designer, it's just another parameter. If you have a client that tells you, you can't use green, you can't use green. Like, if you it's same thing, we should not use scripty fonts for corporate America like or Canada or you know, anything like that, unless you're going to a wedding. These are just things that we have to think about.

Jeannette Campbell 18:19

It's pretty, it's pretty incredible, some of what you're both talking about when I think about the market size, you know, so for businesses, this should be like sort of an automatic, meet, go back, make sure everything's accessible, because you do want to tap into this market, hang globally, the disability market is 53% of the population globally. And like, so for Canada, right, we're at 20 27% of the Canadian population, but then you factor in friends and family, you know, people who care about disability about accessibility and make their decisions sometimes based on that, and who, whose brand they're going to be loyal to. So you know, I think Kelly, you had said something about, there can be a lot of myth busting. And Julian, you were kind of talking about, you know, sometimes they just don't know what they don't know. And I think that's, that's really fascinating is that you're coming across that in, in the advertising world. Now, Kelly, I know that you do a lot of workshops on Accessible Social Media. What are some of the big accessibility failures or faux pas that you've come across?

Kelly Thibodeau 19:35

Yeah, again, I think it's there's there's tactical things like using emojis to replace words or using ASCII art in social media, like caption things like that, or not using image descriptions or alt text or things like that, but more than anything, I also think it's people think that they can't start it until they get it all right and perfect. And so I really want to encourage people to like, discover their curiosity around what's an easy thing that you can change today? Can you start using camel case or initial caps on every word in a hashtag, right? And know that as part of changing that behavior, you're going to do it right once and you're going to miss it the next time, you're going to come back to it type thing and keep building from there. So I think, you know, there's, there's the the simple things that you can start changing. But there's also the mindset around, you know, like, just taking one piece at a time and keep going from there. And then having said those internal conversations, right, that create consistency. But you know, people often think when they see something trendy on social media means they should jump on it too. And unfortunately, a lot of those trends are not accessible. Right? When I think about trending audio is an example. You know, you might see the words that somebody's trying to speak, but you you're not if you can't hear the audio, you don't get like trending, how is trending audio work for an audience that can't access audio content? I'm not really sure.

Jeannette Campbell 21:10

Yeah, there's so many considerations that that people have to think about. But I do like what you're saying, but, you know, just start, just try, you know, often, you know, on on our team, we talk about Perfection is the enemy of done. And it's like, if you just if you're waiting to get it perfect, you're probably never gonna get it done. And you learn so much from exploring and making mistakes and trying and retrying. And, and so you, you know, you'll actually move forward much, much better. And Jolene, what about you on the branding and marketing communication side of things? What, what accessibility failures or full pause do you come across,

Jolene MacDonald 21:54

I think it's similar to what you were just talking about where people are just afraid to try, they're not perfect. We see that most often where they think they have to know it all, rather than start with something small. That's how I learned, I still don't know at all. I mean, you just got to start somewhere with good intention. I think for us, when I started this company, I really anticipate that I would be designing and doing more marketing for companies rather than teaching them. But we very much moved into teaching how to fix it, because we're the same people that they are now. And we're we've changed how we think. I think the biggest thing that we find our people are very afraid of talking about disability in general, like from a societal perspective, and they're afraid that they're going to offend someone. So if they do it wrong, then they've been threatened by our federal and provincial laws, that they're gonna get big fines. So they just don't do anything until they get in trouble. Or that they feel like they're gonna figure it out later. And then it just doesn't become part of it. Design is such a big open context, both print both digital, environmental, physical, it's all across the board. But all the same principles can be applied to that through like inclusive design practices. Kelly was talking about different things, curb cuts. Well, it's not just people with wheelchairs, they use them, we all appreciate those, whether you are a mom, or a dad with you know, a stroller. If you think about videos, there's really high percentages of people that don't listen to audio anymore, and they just read it. So you're already using these things that were created and designed for disability. So just, if we can shift our thinking, I think when you go, Oh, I get it like when you when you get the AHA. It's far easier, though, when you've dealt with it personally. So we ask people a lot to think about putting themselves in other people's shoes. And it helps it does it. I don't think living nation threatening with lawsuits is the way I don't think we're gonna shift humans. By threatened I think we're gonna teach them, we'll ship them by teaching them and making them see and feel and hear and understand what it's like to not be able to pay your bills yourself or, you know, get a building permit or, you know, do a simple grocery shop. That's, that's my thinking.

Dean Askin 24:24

Jolene, you kind of made an inference to exactly what I wanted to, to know. On next question I was going to ask, you know, it sounds like there's a lot of people who've got to have that aha moment. So what is that a ha moment that businesses need to have about accessibility and their branding and marketing advertising? Is it to do with like, you know, accessibility benefits everyone? Or is it the you know, the advertising market and the disability market or is it everything, all of those things?

Jolene MacDonald 24:55

I think it's a lot of the things I mean, when you when you talk statistics, I think I would always preface any sales pitch was statistics because you, okay? You're leaving out sales opportunities, let's face it,

like when you talk about the 27% of Canada that identify as having a population, that's only because they're meeting the criteria for Disability Tax Benefit, there is way more people in the population that refused to say that they have a disability because of stigma. So all of a sudden, you've said, Okay, I'm, I don't want 27 or 30%, more sales, forget it. Like, you know, you look at people who alone who use screen readers who are blind, it's like a billion or something. It's, it's very large. So I think that's the biggest thing is trying to just put those little nuggets of info out there to get the aha moments. And then I often use my own personal experience to say, like, look at my daughter, she is maybe going to be four feet tall photo her whole life. Imagine what that experience will be imagine that, you know, she wants to go apply for a job, maybe she becomes a doctor, you know, we need to get rid of those stigmas. We need to stop thinking about disability as something that is pitiful or sorrowful, or that you're only hospitalized, and thinking that accommodations are our special accommodations, every one of us whether we identify as having disability or not need different accommodations. So I think when we start talking about those things, in our sales tools, in short, start showing those examples. That's when we see people shift. I don't think there's another way to do it. And all the other negative ways don't seem to work in my opinion.

Dean Askin 26:42

Kelly, what do you think? What do you from your experience? What's the aha moment that businesses got to have out there?

Kelly Thibodeau 26:48

Well, I think they need to realize that like, accessibility isn't a special use case, it's a baseline customer expectation. And I've actually asked a group of marketers who work in this sort of business to business type industry, why accessibility doesn't get prioritized. And the response that I got is because customers aren't complaining about it. So, you know, don't wait for customers to complain, because they don't, they'll just move on to another organization that can offer an accessible experience. And I think you know, that reality of when you give someone agency over their choices, when you allow them to do something independently in their own way, and the own amount of time that it takes them, you change, you have the power to change their lives. And it doesn't matter who you are. Right. Like Jolene, I know, you and I have talked about situations where some of your auditors have had to ask a friend or family member to help them fill out a form because they it's not accessible. And they can't do it with a screen reader type thing, right? So and I also think that companies, maybe you can tap into the intelligence of their own employees with disabilities and ask them what it's like to work for their organization, what it's like to, you know, buy from their organization and start listening. I think that's number one, honestly, is start listening. And it's easy, it's tempting to just jump to solution mode and be like, Oh, we're going to do all these things, then. But you have to start with listening, and then move forward from there. Because it is a, it can be a big, like accessibility is big and broad. And it's important that we break that conversation down and then understand where the, the most urgent and highest priority places are a bit that need that time and care and attention. And,

Jeannette Campbell 28:47

you know, that's, that really leads well into into this next thing that I'd love for us to discuss. So one of one of the other points that came out, in part one of this series was that there's more openness to now to having those difficult conversations on accessibility. So this is what our guests were seeing, in part

one of this series, the way that I'm hearing things now, it's a little bit different from your take. And so I find this quite interesting. So what's your experience when you're working with business about the accessibility of their, their branding? Or their advertising, their marketing? Are they getting defensive? Are they you know, you both talked about sort of people are afraid of making mistakes? Is there or do you find that there's more open openness and willing willingness now, I think is the word I'm looking for?

Kelly Thibodeau 29:42

Yeah, I think it's important to approach that conversation with a spirit of being helpful and progress over perfection. And I know, like even for agencies where I've kind of looked at their content or people, you know, thought leaders that I know and I see them, do something on LinkedIn. where they're using fancy fonts, right? Because everybody, you know, wants their content to stand out. And they don't know that someone using a screen reader cannot understand that content, it doesn't get read back them the same way. And so I always feel very sensitive about approaching people, especially individually, because I'm not trying to, you know, point fingers or play the blame game or anything like that. But I truly know that there's an opportunity to be helpful. And when I think you can bring that spirit into it. That's what sort of opens the door for those those, those more difficult conversations. And then you can move forward from there. And just, I think, just admit, right, this isn't an easy conversation, and we are afraid of getting it wrong. And do we say person with a disability? Or do we say disabled person and, you know, just sort of chew through those things and create the safety to make those conversations possible?

Jeannette Campbell 30:59

What about What about you, Jolene?

Jolene MacDonald 31:02

I think it's very much along the same line. I don't know what it's been all through society for so many years. But I mean, even think back to the 70s. When kids were born with disabilities, they were told to put them into institutions like, so we haven't come that far from what our perception is, on what disability is. And I think there's just so much fear, again, for people who have no experience in it. I was to I mean, it's not until it's like you don't know until you know. And so I think there's a lot of that, and what I try and come into a sales conversation, or you know, any kind of discussion is like, I'm not going to get offended, we need to have these open conversations about disability. And then I'll, you know, I'll have people say, Well, I don't like to say disability, I'm like, I'm in that community, it's okay, we have to take back this word. It's just, there's just so much stigma with people that have no disability experience of fear and worry that it's, it's a paralysis, and it's happening in business, and that business paralysis and accessibility is a thing. I wish there was almost a better word that we could call it. But I would say that's sort of where things are at. We're lucky, I think, because people are coming to us. Pretty much with open arms, we're not going out trying to, to change anyone's minds anymore. They're coming to us, because they know they need to do it. So we just make it an easier process.

Dean Askin 32:41

You know, Jolene, a lot of what you just said, is sort of an expansion of, of something, something else that Stephanie Cadieux said in part one of the series, and she said, You know, it's attitudes that still

need to change. And she said, people still need to understand that disability is just a different way of experiencing life. And you know, so when you're, you know, when you're talking to people in business leaders and marketers and other communicators, and, you know, you're giving them some some idea of like, where they can improve and what might not be so right. What about the other side of it? You know, you kind of mentioned this near the top of the show, but I want to circle back on it. I mean, what are businesses doing right? Today about accessibility, that they weren't maybe just even five or 10 years ago? What do you think? Kelly?

Kelly Thibodeau 33:37

Ah, that's a good question. I mean, I think what they're doing right is starting to connect the dots between some of those Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, like the spirit of that, and bringing that into a conversation about inclusion and belonging, being like it's at the more values lead, things like that. And it's unfortunate that it's not enough, right? There's not enough people talking about accessibility, there's not enough people sort of being willing to start that ball rolling and initiating the conversation. But I do think that the spirit of the conversation is definitely taking a turn. And I I mean, I can't help but be optimistic and encouraged because I think that's an important part to bring into any kind of work that falls into advocacy and inclusion and, and, and making a difference, like this. This is really a significant conversation. It's about creating change in the world that lasts, and that really impacts people. And so you know, in marketing, we always talk about like, the next shiny object or the next campaign or the next, you know, whatever the next thing is, and I think like, you know, before you go down that path, you can reach so So many more people in a really impactful way that is so much more meaningful than that next shiny thing.

Dean Askin 35:09

It's interesting that you mention that because I know, you know, we want to get to that optimism factor in a in a minute or two. But Jolene, I mean, what do you think? What do you see people doing right that maybe they weren't a few years ago.

Jolene MacDonald 35:27

I mean, the types of companies that have come to us, they're prioritizing it. So like, there's the bigger ones, obviously, we're starting from the bigger ones and going down the smaller ones, you know, it's taking time, they're not paying attention to legislation, it's not that it's not on their radar, so to speak. They're willing and open to learning more, it started out as oh, we need to make our documents accessible. Well, it's more than just holding it to make it work for a screen reader. It's about the content, it's making it you know, easier to understand which we talked about plain language. It's about changing, you know, you're not doing red text on a black background, just making that that document accessible, which we're still seeing a lot of, it's about ensuring that you're not throwing in alt text just for the reason of having it. It's about picture yourself as being visually impaired. And what do you want to know? And what do you not want to know? So I think we're seeing the turn, I see it very positive, I don't see a lot of negative, I mean, there's still, we have some that, you know, it should be x amount of budget, but they only have this, but I would rather not turn someone away, because they have an interest in it. And they want to learn and get better than say, sorry, you don't have enough money, we're not going to bother. So I think Kelly and I are both focused on that, as you know, we're, we're trying to slowly, like urge people in Twitter or like, slide them into understanding that and become part of the education. I think

the other part that we're seeing is that the universities and colleges are very much aware of it. But it's not mandated by the Ministry of Education to teach it in the courses. So people like myself, and Kelly, who are coming out of college and university. Now, it's not part of their curriculum. And we need to have that we need more people bull advocating, because that's how it's going to work. That's how it's going to change. So I see a lot of positive things from that, because the younger generation are coming into the bigger corpse and go, Hey, do you know about this? So they're pushing them? It's small, but it's it's becoming a bigger trend? We'll call it I hope it's not going to be a trend because it'll go away. But it we're certainly seeing that upswing.

Dean Askin 37:47

So do you think is it teaching people about accessibility earlier in the education system? Is that one of the things that needs to change the most? What do you think needs to change the most?

Jolene MacDonald 38:00

100% it needs to be part of curriculum for web developers UX UI, content marketing, graphic designers speaking strictly from a media perspective. They're doing it in the entertainment sector. There's lots of big orgs Netflix has partnered with a company particularly that's disabled on that are trying to have more advocacy for actors with visible disabilities, and photography, these things are all happening. So yeah, I think it's there. And that bird needs to start

Dean Askin 38:30

Kelly what about you? What do you think needs to change the most?

Kelly Thibodeau 38:33

Um, yeah, I mean, I feel the same things that Jolene said. Also just thinking about, you know, the, those grassroots organizations that are creating change, and impact in impactful and significant ways. I also think that accessibility needs to be like an accountability across the organization. It's not just marketing's job, right? Like, again, we go back to education, people who are in product development roles and sales roles, like all the way through, right, and it's really important that there's top line accountability, it makes the goals that someone's working towards, and that, frankly, they're getting bonused on because it's just not going to have that same grip, if that piece is missing. So it's it's not just the accessibility team's job. It's not just the marketing communications job. It's actually across the whole organization, and people understand. And the other thing that I was thinking about is the storytelling opportunity around for companies who are doing really great work. They're not talking about it, they're not sharing it. So you know, have use cases or case studies that talk about people with disabilities being able to use their product or service, start sharing that. It still is a bit of a hidden secret because I think we're so busy trying to have people We'll understand, you know, how do they where do they start? That they haven't even thought about? How do we amplify and educate, share what we're doing?

Jeannette Campbell 40:09

You know, there's a there's a goal that we're all most people are aware of have Canada being barrier free by January 1, 2040. So thinking of everything that we've been discussing today, you know, how, how optimistic are the both of you that you'll, you know, that that day will come that people aren't putting emojis that can't be read by screen readers in all their social media posts, or that creating, you

know, brand marketing and advertising materials will be fully accessible to everyone. And like, this will just become business as usual for everyone. How, how optimistic are you around that 2040 goal?

Kelly Thibodeau 40:54

Ah, you know, I, I hope we're making significant progress to get towards that goal, for sure. And I think there's accountability on the people who are reading the communication and advertising and also on the platforms, frankly, right, like meta launched threads without any accessibility features, and they're all different, they all work differently. There's not one place you can go, it's not built into how you post something on social media, social media scheduling tools aren't consistent, don't have it everywhere. So like, I don't want to, you know, forget to acknowledge that the ecosystems that we work within the tools, the platforms and software, also have accountability to change so that it's easy, or it's not this backdoor hidden feature that, you know, you kind of have to puzzle through and either decide, you know, what can you really work with, or what can you not, so even the accessibility checker is in Word, right, like, they don't catch everything they end up with you turn that feature on at the end, that's the place where you're going to be like, I'm not trying to fix all that stuff. So I, you know, I want to be optimistic and positive, of course, but I think that we have a lot of accountability on both sides.

Jolene MacDonald 42:10

I would concur with I think a lot of it the authoring tools themselves that were stuck at what's working well, and what's not to make things digitally accessible, per se. I'm really optimistic about and I like to think I'm always optimistic about this, but how people perceive disability I think has changed a lot. We have some really great leaders like Stephanie Cadieux, like other people that we have met throughout this that are now in positions of higher decision making that have disabilities. And they're being very vocal about it and not trying to hide it and act like Oh, nobody should find out that I have this disability, the more positive role models that we see, the more people I think just make it part of their thinking. I don't think it's going to happen overnight. But I certainly see a very positive shift. You see it even in reality TV shows, are they all correct, and you know, representing those disbelief, you know, but it's become something that's part of everyday culture, it's like LGBTQ two, plus, you know, communities bipoc Like, we're, we're making this part of the conversations. And I think the more we do that, the more it will become part of everything that we do on a regular basis. So I remain optimistic about that. But I live in every day. And I see my daughter growing up and encouraging her to use her voice is really important. And I hope other people who are in the disability communities do that, and those that are advocates for other actors with disabilities, like Kelly was for her mom. You know, that's, that's what we need to do. We need to be collectively loud, and show the importance of it.

Dean Askin 43:54

You know, you've both brought out so many thought provoking points. And I'm opening up there's creative types and marketers out there listening to this right now that they're going, Wow, I never thought of that. That's a great point. I gotta bring that up. And we got to start doing that. I mean, we've talked about a lot in this conversation. I mean, is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important? I mentioned before we wrap up this second part of this series?

Jolene MacDonald 44:20

I think, for me just reiterate what Kelly said, Sorry, Kelly, we probably had the same thought. It's not ever going to be perfect. You will never be perfect. Your work will never be perfect. You will never be able to reach and fix your work to match every type of disability. It's never going to happen. So you do your very best, and it's the understanding of how to do that. I think that is most critical that I want people to take away from and just start somewhere.

Kelly Thibodeau 44:51

Yeah, and I'll just add to that too, by saying like, there's no green checkmark at the end, like you're done. Right. It's again, it's coming back to I've heard this had before and I love it is like when you're focused on the rules, all you see is rules when you're focused on people, right? You see people, and that's what this is about at the end of the day. And yes, there are some guidelines in place, right? Because we need that structure. But the thinking and the philosophy comes back to how can I how can I make this a better experience for for people.

Jolene MacDonald 45:25

We will all become disabled in our life. It's just a given. So while you may think that you can avoid it now, and you will never be disabled, you will be it doesn't matter, you maybe you broke your arm, it's temporary, you know, maybe you had a brain injury or concussion. It's all there. It's all right, we're all gonna get old and need accommodations. It's just a given. So I think it's a reality check for people and some people don't like think like that, but it's the truth. We're just helping our future selves.

Jeannette Campbell 45:59

That's a, that's a great, that's a great way to put that is really this conversation is about making everything. Everybody benefits, everybody, including our future selves. I think that that's, that's really great. And, you know, this has been such a great conversation about accessibility. And, and it's, you know, when, to your point, Jolene, that's so important to have, because disability is on the rise in this country, which means accessibility is simply becoming more and more important. And it is the one club, everybody's got a chance to join, everybody probably will join. You know, and, and, like I just said earlier, when things in this case, like like content, and the way that we receive information is accessible for everyone, everybody is going to benefit from it. You know, so I really would just like to say thank you so much, Kelly and Jolene, for coming on the show for sharing your insights and your experiences, and these incredible gems of advice and encouragement that you've been giving people, you know, and really encouraging people to take a closer look at accessibility and marketing and advertising, which is what we really hope that this podcast would would get that conversation going. So, you know, interestingly, I should mention that, you know, you did a bit of work with Odin last year Kelly. So the Ontario Disability Employment Network ODEN, we jointly created a tip sheet for creating accessible social media content, that's part of our seven-tips series. And that's a series of tip sheets for businesses. It's available on our website, but we're gonna put a link into the show notes for this episode about that. So people can take a look. And I've gone in and used it, it's really great. And you did a session last November at on accessible social content at our 2023 annual rethinking disability conference. And I know that was really well attended, and people really benefited. So I kind of want to encourage people that are that are, you know, following this podcast? We're not just talking about private sector business. We're talking about human services. We're talking about nonprofit, we're

talking about education institutions, we're talking about businesses. And so really appreciated you coming in doing that, Kelly.

Kelly Thibodeau 48:38

Yeah, well, thank you for having me. I mean, it's a joy and a pleasure to be part of this conversation. And I have loved every opportunity to work with the team at Odin. So thank you.

Jeannette Campbell 48:49

And Jolene, really, thank you so much for for joining us as well.

Jolene MacDonald 48:54

Lovely, thank you big fan of ODEN. I was also at that conference last year, too. And that's how Kelly and I got to meet in person for the first time. So we worked together on many projects. It's been awesome.

Jeannette Campbell 49:05

Oh, that's great.

Dean Askin 49:07

Well, I gotta jump in here and do the full disclosure thing too. Because, you know, our communications team at Odin, myself included did one of Kelly's workshops last year and I have to say it was definitely worthwhile and educational even for a senior communicator like me, because there's always something to learn. Now I'm now much more aware about adding image descriptions to social media posts and alt text to images I sometimes I forget, but I try to remember and now I know that there's a subtle difference between an image description and an old text and you know, I'm thinking that now I'm really kind of like Kelly I mean when I'm you know, reading LinkedIn or whatever, social media channel I cringe whenever I think I did it, just you know, just today I cringe whenever I see a social post with emojis in it or an infographic It's got some, you know, really interesting information in it, but it doesn't also have a text version. In the post, I've, you know, as another thing I learned out of that workshop is I've learned the right way to create infographics. So they're accessible. So thank you to you both, for coming on the show from me as well and sharing your expert insights about the accessibility of content. And

Jolene MacDonald 50:23

you know, having me,

Jeannette Campbell 50:24

yeah, thank you so much for making time for this conversation today. And hopefully, this conversation will get all those creatives and marketers who are responsible for creating the branding and the marketing, advertising social media content for their businesses, or organizations, thinking more consciously about accessibility. But you know, Kelly, to your point, it does have to be every part of the organization or business that's in there. So if you're in product management, you know, human resources, sales, customer service, these, everybody really needs to start thinking much more consciously about accessibility and all the reasons why he can't and it should never be an afterthought.

And so in our show notes, we'll also have the contact information needed. If people want to reach out to Kelly or Jolene to find out more about how to make your content accessible.

Kelly Thibodeau 51:27

Well, thank you.

Dean Askin 51:29

Just before we go, you know, I want to mention the final sentence in that 2024 Global Advertising Accessibility Index and Trends Report we mentioned off the top of the show, because I think, you know, it's a sense that really drives home the importance of accessibility, and is kind of a great note to end on. I mean, here's what the authors wrote. Accessible accessibility practices go beyond helping advertisers achieve the holy grail of reach, relevance, resonance, and results. It also lends itself to building a world that acknowledges and values every individual's experience.

Jeannette Campbell 52:06

That's that's a great insight to end on, Dean. Thank you. So with that, that's it for this episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. I'm Jeannette Campbell. Thank you for listening. And I hope that you'll join Dean and our guest co host, Jennifer Crowson for our next episode coming on July 9, in Episode 24, they're going to be exploring inclusion through images and storytelling.

Dean Askin 52:32

Yes, Jennifer is back again and the other chair while you're away, we'll be talking with a portrait and commercial photographer who's making sure all her images of disability are truly inclusive and authentic and tell the story about the person and the challenges around making sure of all that, you know, there's a lot of stock photography out there that doesn't really authentically portray disability. As you said, Jeanette, Episode 24 is coming July 9. I'm Dean askin Thanks again for listening, wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode has a healing cycle conversations like this one with Kelly Thibodeau and Jolene MacDonald, and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities. From all the angles you can't spell inclusion without a D is produced in Toronto, Canada by the Ontario Disability Employment Network. All rights reserved. Our podcast production team, executive producer and host Jeanette Campbell, producer Sudha fo associate producer and host Dean askin audio editing and production by Dean askin. Our podcast theme is last summer by Ikksen. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, contact us at info at odenetwork.com. That's info@odnetwork.com. Join us each episode for insights from expert guests as we explore the power of inclusion, the business benefits of inclusive hiring and why disability is an important part of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion conversation. Listen to you can't spell inclusion without a D on pod bean or wherever you find your favourite podcasts.