

Making Technology Accessible *Podcast Transcript*

Prevention and Protection a United Educators Risk Management Podcast

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Guests:

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MELANIE: Hello, and welcome to Prevention and Protection, the United Educators (UE) Risk Management podcast. I'm Melanie Bennett, associate risk management council, and today we'll be discussing technology accessibility. Joining me is Erica Ellis, e-learning instructional designer at UE. Welcome, Erica.

ERICA: Thanks, Melanie.

MELANIE: Before we get started, I want to let listeners know that in addition to this topic you can find other podcasts and risk management publications on our website, EduRiskSolutions.org. Erica, what brings you to this topic?

ERICA: I'm an e-learning instructional designer here at UE so I assist in developing risk management resources, specifically online courses. I have been designing and developing e-learning websites and other forms of interactive media for about a decade now.

I started in the federal practice where accessibility was always a top priority. So it's been an important part of my process since then, and in addition to building new learning programs here, a large component of my role at UE is to ensure that all of our courses are accessible to people with disabilities. What about you Melanie, how did you get introduced to the work?

MELANIE: A lot of my work involves researching and writing about topics that are concerning institutions at the moment, and over the past few years we noticed institutions were coming to us and saying, "We want to make our technology more accessible." We also noticed that OCR [Office for Civil Rights] was taking more of a focus on this issue in the past few years, and so you and I wrote a bulletin [Understanding Your Institution's Duty to Make Technology Accessible](#).

ERICA: Let's break that down a little bit and start with accessibility. That simply refers to the design of products, devices, services, and even environments for persons with disabilities. And the concept of accessible design ensures both direct access, which means they can access the information without assistance of another person, and indirect access, meaning compatibility with a person's assistive technology, so like a screen reader.

EIT [Electronic and Information Technology] consists of all electronic information and equipment used to convey it. This is your computers, your websites, telephones, software, learning management systems like Blackboard, videos, and computerized documents. Melanie, I'm sure you see a lot of EIT in schools and on campus. What are some other examples?

MELANIE: Well, everything that you mentioned is on a campus somewhere. Most institutions to start with, have a website for prospective students. On top of that, teachers and professors frequently have pages on that website for their current students, there are online courses, there are LMS [learning management system] pages put together by professors and staff. And there are also in-class technologies. There are videos being shown, recordings being played, and documents are frequently sent via email. It feels like everything on campus is technological these days and it all needs to be accessible. When these technologies are being created, what should the people creating them be cognizant of to make them accessible?

ERICA: There's a lot to think about. I would always start with the two widely recognized standards. The first is Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the second is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. So that's WCAG. Version 2.0, Section 508 is out of date, and is currently being revised to reflect WCAG 2.0. So my suggestion is that they get familiar with its guidance.

There are three levels of compliance. Our suggestion is that you aim to be compliant with the second level and that's AA. As much as possible, try and adhere to the Web Accessibility Guidelines while you develop. So this will help a great deal to minimize the time and effort at the end of the process.

For example, if you are working in a Word document or a PowerPoint, go ahead and add alternative text as you insert the images. If you're writing a document in Word, use the heading structure that's already provided within the program. These tools were there to help with table of contents obviously, but many don't know that by using the heading structure you also make the document much easier to follow with a screen reader.

Other things to think about are your disabled population and their specific needs. So for example, those with hearing disabilities need to be able to read all the information that is presented audibly, and those with visual disabilities need to be able to hear with their screen readers all the information presented. A blind user can't use a mouse, so it's important that the navigation is possible without their keyboard. The same is true for most users with a condition affecting mobility. And we keep those with a learning disability in mind by creating a simple layout and organizing information in manageable chunks, and this, as you can imagine, will help all of our users. I can actually go on and on about what we could be cognizant of when creating EIT, but I wanted to find out, Melanie, a little bit more from you about what the departments of Justice and Education say about EIT accessibility.

MELANIE: The departments of Justice and Education have reached a number of resolution agreements and consent decrees in the past few years, and these contain some common elements. For instance, the WCAG 2.0 AA guidelines that you mentioned are standards that they often point to as the standards that schools should be reaching towards. They also say that institutions should have a nondiscrimination policy stating that they will not discriminate on the basis of accessibility when it comes to technology on campus, and they advise institutions to create a plan towards technology accessibility.

So this will identify when each area of technology will become fully accessible. The good news there is that institutions don't need to be fully accessible tomorrow, because there's so much technology it would just seem overwhelming. Instead, they just need to lay out in the plan when it's going to happen.

Finally and most importantly, they strongly suggest that institutions create a position for an EIT accessibility coordinator. This is the person responsible for driving the coordination, the technology accessibility on campus. This person is not somebody in the disability services department, rather it's somebody with the technology background who's really familiar with how to make technology accessible on campus.

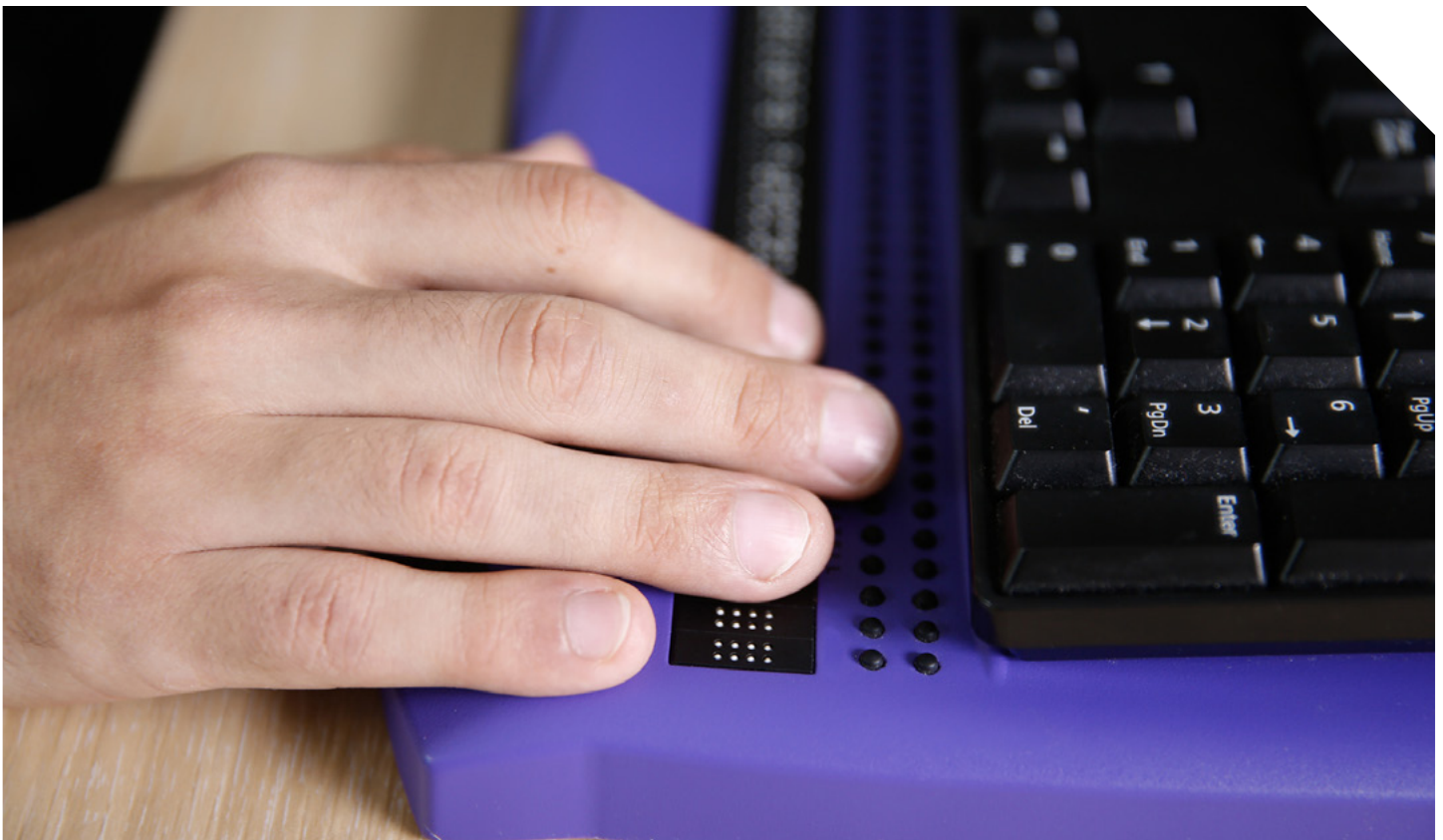
ERICA: Wow, that's actually quite a relief that there can be a plan and a phased approach that it doesn't have to be done tomorrow. But it sounds like a lot of training is necessary. So who on campus should receive the EIT accessibility training, and who should conduct the training?

MELANIE: Well, Erica, the EIT coordinator is really the person who should be coordinating that training. There should be different types of training. It does not all need to be live one-to-one training, which is really good news because many people on campus are going to need this training; most staff, most faculty, anybody who's creating technology needs some form of training on how to make it accessible. But that training, in addition to being live, can be on a website. They can create a webpage that houses manuals or videos identifying how to make different areas of technology accessible on campus. In addition, they can also do live training, especially for people who are working with technology on a more frequent basis on campus. So on that webpage, in addition to the manuals and videos, they can also house other helpful guidelines and resources.

Are there any resources that you think in particular they should include on that type of page?

ERICA: There are hundreds of resource options. My favorites include the accessibility checkers in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat. As you're creating your documents, you can check for accessibility as you go through.

For those who are in the math and science fields, it's important that your notations, equations, and formulas are accessible. So MathML, which stands for Math Markup Language, is the web standard for that.



One of my favorite websites is webaim.org. There you can find a host of great resources and articles on accessibility, including a website accessibility evaluation tool. It's actually called WAVE.

This is really helpful in making sure your website is accessible, and there are many companies that will caption your videos for you. Video captioning is important, especially for those with hearing disabilities. This will cost about \$3 a minute. But if you want to try it in-house, start with YouTube, which has options available for captioning as well.

MELANIE: You mentioned going to external vendors for captioning, and I imagine that institutions may also go to vendors for other types of technology. If they are using third-party vendors, does the institution need to be concerned about whether that technology is accessible?

ERICA: Absolutely. So there's something called a VPAT, which is the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template. This is a document that evaluates how accessible a particular product is according to Section 508 standards. Now, I mentioned that the 508 standards are out of date and will soon be revised, but this document, the VPAT, is still the tool to use to ensure accessibility when working with the vendor because it is a self-disclosing document that's actually produced by the vendor. By having the vendor submit the VPAT to you and validating that they are fully accessible, they then assume the responsibility in the event the resources are found not to be accessible. We mentioned the VPAT and a host of other great tips in the [bulletin](#) we wrote. Did you want to tell the listeners more about that?

MELANIE: Absolutely. Our bulletin really goes more into some of the topics we talked about, creating the policy, creating the plan, and what the VPAT looks like. It also looks at the types of technologies that exist on campus, how to make them accessible, and the legal background that brought us to this point. The [EIT Accessibility Bulletin](#) is currently available on EduRiskSolutions.org.

That's all we have time for today. We at United Educators hope you found this topic interesting and helpful to your work managing risk on campus. Let me again remind you, you can find additional resources on our website, EduRiskSolutions.org. We'll also have additional podcasts coming soon. Finally, I'd like to thank my guest Erica for joining me today.



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