

MBPR Accessibility Presentation by Laura Brady

The digital publishing trajectory has been the definition of fits and starts. An early surge of interest combined with extremely high hopes for new sales channels has tempered into ambivalence about ebooks that sometimes feels like it is bordering on indifference. At present, no publisher who values the bottom line actively ignores ebooks and digital publishing. But the attention paid to ebooks has often been middling at best.

[slide 2] Things are changing, however, and accessibility seems to be on the tip of everyone's tongue these days. Increasingly legislation aimed at improving access for people with disabilities is having an impact. I will talk more about this piece shortly, but where legislation is relatively toothless, institutions like libraries and school boards are having an impact by refusing to buy content that doesn't meet minimum standards.

In Canada, in March 2019, funding amounting to 22.8 million spent over a five-year period was allocated to the question of accessibility in Canadian publishing. This has been a game changer. Ranging from work aimed at incentivizing born accessible content, to training, workflow consulting, certification and other big-picture projects, the digital publishing landscape in Canada is undergoing a dramatic transformation. Exciting times.

A little known fact is this: ebooks are not automatically accessible. Learning how to design and publish inclusive content as a standard part of the workflow makes great business sense. Being aware of how content and design may create barriers to reading also helps us generate new ideas and designs. It highlights opportunities to create solutions with utility and elegance that will create better books for everyone.

The market is enormous. An estimated 15% of the world's population uses assistive technology because of a disability, and 85% of the non-disabled market has a situational disability that calls for assistive technology. As the population ages those needs are intensified. It is worth noting here that the term "print disability" is a diverse category. It can mean blindness but also low vision, dyslexia, mobility, or even attention issues.

In an era of thinking inclusively, paying close, thoughtful attention to accessibility in how we publish content is a natural extension of work on diverse voices.

[slide 3] One of the key affordances of eBooks is that they are democratic: they are what the reader needs them to be. They're essentially simple HTML and CSS in a EPUB wrapper. Their very nature means that they're ready to render in the various reading systems, but they can be easily output to braille, read aloud via a screen

reader, or put into a custom font that makes it easier for someone with dyslexia to read.

Paying attention to accessibility at all stages of a publisher's workflow is critical. Trying to retrofit accessibility is inefficient and wasteful. Accessibility is like ice cream, the longer you ignore it, the messier it can get. Content that is sloppily built generally means that you are settling for the least value you can get. Content that is more usable is more valuable. Books that are built with accessibility in mind fit this category.

[slide 4] A quick zoom out to consider the size of the marketplace. As recently as five years ago, many disability advocates talked about a print famine. That as few as 5% of books published hit minimum a11y standards. The following stats are from the BISG Guide to Accessible Publishing:

- Worldwide, way more people than you think have print disabilities:
 - 253 million people (19 million of them children) have a vision impairment.
 - 375 million people worldwide (more than the US population of 324 million) have severe dyslexia.
 - One in eight people in the United States struggles to read conventional print.
- There are more people with print disabilities globally than the total print sales for the Twilight and Harry Potter series combined.
- 54 million Americans have a disability.
- Over 34% of the world's population will be over 60 by 2050—and 21% of those will have reading impairments.

And this is a growing marketplace. I watch TV with the captions on from hearing loss. My mother read on a Kobo device with the font so large that there were about 20 words on the screen. These are minor examples that I'm sure you could replicate in your own circles. The marketplace is a going concern.

The phrase "print disability" is broad and is not just about vision. According to the International Dyslexia Association, between 15-20% of the population has some form of language-based learning disability. A chunk of the population has a physical issue that prevents them from holding and manipulating a book. And, I would add, this doesn't account for situational disabilities. Listening to an audiobook while driving, or having voice aids read text aloud so the reader can be hands-free are good examples of that. A breastfeeding mother needs her hands for other things,

for example. Someone who has a broken arm may have trouble navigating an ereader or website.

There is a very healthy market in readers with print disabilities. And there are some preliminary statistics that point to that group of readers being more voracious than the average. The Italian accessibility organization, Fondazione LIA, points out that where texts are accessible to them, readers with print disabilities consume more than three times the number of books than the non-print-disabled population.

[Slide 5: Usability.png infographic] According to Booknet Canada's 2018 *How Do Readers Use Ebooks* survey, approximately half of all digital readers use accessibility features of some kind, even if they don't realize that these are "accessibility" features. Font sizing, night mode, text orientation, reading mode, colour modifications, and screen magnification.

Those 54 million disabled Americans have friends and families with a disposable spending power of over \$220 billion. This is a very big, largely untapped market. In the UK, this enormous spending power has a nickname: the purple pound.

And beyond the disability market, 87% of consumers say that they value inclusion, and 92% of consumers are more likely to support a business that is both physically and digitally accessible. It's good for a publisher's brand! (From the Return on Disability Group website)

Accommodating this expanding market is simply a good business decision. Future-proofing, meeting accessibility standards, even very low benchmarks, means that your ebook content is ready for the next device, the format of the next screen, that is, it will be compatible with the next great unknown product innovation.

LEGISLATION

[slide 8] The provision of accessible content and technology to users with disabilities in a wide range of contexts is increasingly being motivated by legal policy, in addition to business and social responsibility considerations. Investing in accessibility will help mitigate legal risks and ensure that companies will avoid litigation – avoiding costs and the brand damage associated with legal proceedings.

I am no expert on American law in this space — like at all — but I point you to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These are the most impactful pieces of legislation in the US but don't directly require publishers to be accessible. They impact the business of procurement for the most part.

In the US, the number of legal actions continues to rise and courts increasingly decide in favor of equal access often citing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Mention NY School lawsuit.

THE MARRAKESH TREATY

The Marrakesh Treaty is an international treaty administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) that was adopted in Marrakesh, Morocco, in June 2013; the US signed on in 2013, Canada joined in 2016. It aims to facilitate access to published works for persons with print disabilities by providing the material in formats that they can easily use. The Treaty establishes international norms that require countries to provide exceptions in their national laws to facilitate the availability of works in accessible formats for persons who are print-disabled.

EUROPEAN ACCESSIBILITY ACT

Due to go into full effect on June 28, 2025, this is the most rigorous legislation in the inclusive publishing space. It directly impacts publisher's ability to sell or promote websites, intranets, apps, and documents. The guiding principle behind this legislation is to improve the functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services by removing barriers created by divergent rules in member states. If you want to sell anything into the EU, it is a good idea to get your house in order.

Before I switch gears, I want to re-emphasize the fact that publishing accessibly is good for business. It has the potential to open new sales channels which would positively impact the discoverability of a publisher's content, and it makes consumers feel good about spending money on your books. Because of the EU Act, French-language publishers are farther ahead of English publishers in Canada. Because of procurement issues — i.e. institutions that won't buy content that doesn't meet standards — educational publishers are generally ahead of trade publishers when it come to a11y.

ACCESSIBLE EBOOKS

[slide 7] A great deal of EPUB content is generated by Adobe's InDesign. Most publishers use software like InDesign to layout their print books, which is still the dominant market format. In a way, InDesign is a relatively democratic tool with which to make ebooks — not because it's cheap but because many publishers already have it and use it well for print.

I have worked closely with Adobe's engineers since about 2010 to try to make their EPUB output as fit as possible. The good news is that sometimes they listen. The bad news is that they see EPUB as a teeny-tiny sliver of what InDesign can do and their focus is most certainly elsewhere. As a consequence, I have spent a lot of time and energy and resources figuring out how to bend InDesign to my will.

But the technical debt created by our obsequious use of InDesign is real. Pausing and using InDesign more thoughtfully doesn't necessarily take more time,

particularly when you consider the long shelf life of digital books. And, honestly, folding accessibility considerations into a workflow at every step of the publishing process just makes good sense. If creators are thinking about image descriptions as they draw the pictures for a children's book, for example, we are ahead of the game. A non-fiction author can write an image description at the same time as they write a caption. The typesetter can build master pages in InDesign that are considering the needs of the ebook from before the book is even laid out. All of these basic steps aren't more work if they are a part of the process from acquisition through editing to finished books. Remediating an ebook long after production will be time-consuming and expensive, I promise.

InDesign does a couple of things poorly which impact the accessibility of an EPUB:

- Produces EPUB 2 unless you tell it otherwise
- Generic, overwrought HTML
- Coding problems like putting the language tag in the wrong place
- No semantics
- Print-corollary page navigation

If InDesign is the primary vessel for your books, I strongly suggest diving deeper into how to manipulate it to do a better job. I have an in-depth video on LinkedIn Learning on this topic. And you may be able to access through your local library.

[SLIDE 8] PRINCIPLES OF ACCESSIBILITY

- Separate style and content
- Navigation
- Structure
- Semantics
- Images = picture, not tables or text
- Image Descriptions
- PageList
- Define Languages
- Accessible treatment of Math and interactive content
- Accessibility metadata

[slide 9] [slide 10] [slide 11]

ACCESSIBILITY ADVOCATE

I sometimes refer to myself as an accessibility busybody. I've just taken a job as head of accessibility for a digital retailer. I joke that my job is to make everyone in the company play accessibility whack-a-mole as I pop up in every meeting, every product discussion, to say "what about accessibility."

But let me be absolutely clear about one thing: accessibility is everyone's job. Your office manager should be considering the built environment. The publisher should be finding books that have positive portrayals of disabled people. The contracts person should build accessibility into their work — covering accessible formats, for example. The publicists might consider building events with accessibility in mind — stage ramps, microphones, etc. Sales people need to understand the marketplace for accessible content and how and where to make your accessible books available.

When it comes to content workflows, the editorial staff must play a part by building manuscript source files that mark language shifts and content that is meant to be read with emphasis, in addition to taking charge of the important task of writing thoughtful image descriptions. I really think that the most meaningful change in accessibility comes from getting editors invested in publishing inclusively. Typesetters and production staff should understand layout nuances and how to build documents that are agile for both print and digital. And your ebook developers should get specialized training so that they understand accessibility considerations thoroughly.

I recommend having a person in-house whose job is to act as an accessibility advocate, your whack-a-mole, 360° a11y person. Just as you likely have a designated fire chief in the office that makes sure everyone leaves during a fire alarm, appoint an accessibility knowledge keeper. That person can mind state and federal guidelines, go to specialized conferences to keep corporate knowledge up-to-date. Accessibility is everyone's job but it's also worthwhile to have a specialist.

CONCLUSION

[slide 13] We are at an accessible publishing tipping point. The Marrakesh Treaty combined with the EU Accessibility Act requiring all commercial ebooks to meet strict accessibility guidelines by 2025 are likely to force change at a corporate level. The [business case](#) is, in my opinion, pretty clear. Publish accessibly and reap the rewards. [Slide 14]

RESOURCES

eBound/ACP Accessible Publishing landscape review

<https://www.eboundcanada.org/News/acp-and-ebound-canada-accessible-publishing-research-project/>

eBound/NNELS Publisher Workflows report

<https://www.eboundcanada.org/Resources/experimentation-project-for-accessible-publishing-publisher-workflows-and-ebook-accessibility-report/>

National Network for Equitable Library Services YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCXliqZx7va2RNE1iuy1mkg/featured>

→ Ka's 2022 demonstration:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWRLFmOG2as>

Accessible Publishing Summit: 2019 report and resources

https://www.accessiblepublishing.ca/documents_resources/

Accessible Publishing Overview

<https://inclusivepublishing.org/toolbox/accessibility-guidelines/>

EPUB Accessibility 1.0 (the baseline spec)

<http://idpf.org/epub/a11y/>

Inclusive Publishing — <https://inclusivepublishing.org/>

Pagelist — <https://epubsecrets.com/why-i-use-page-list-and-how.php>