Getting Mainstream Publishers onto the Accessibility Bandwagon

Why STEM and Commercial Publishers Avoid Accessibility.

And how we can find solutions.

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About the Presenter

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About the Presenter

30+ years in all phases of publishing
- Writer and editor
- Publishing production manager
- Subscriptions, fulfillment, and marketing
- Art Director for magazines, books, and academic journals
- Digital media developer
- Programmer and technologist for publishing tech and digital media

Clients include
- Federal and state governments
- Publishers large and small
- Design and advertising firms, large and small

And one more …
- 20 years as adjunct faculty member

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Why you're not getting accessible materials

Schools don't get the accessible materials they need, whether from their faculty, from textbook publishers, government, or other publishers.

Here's why:

- It's very difficult to produce them with today's tools
- Accessibility is shoe-horned into the traditional publishing workflow. Publishers have to undergo costly revamp of their multi-channel publishing workflow
- WCAG is overwhelming and confusing to publishers
- PDF/UA isn't yet fully developed
- AT manufacturers haven't kept up with publishing requirements

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1. Difficult to Produce

It's 2015, and we still can't get a fully compliant PDF from MS Word or Adobe InDesign.

It's 2015, and we still can make a compliant PDF from Word/Mac.

- MS Word and Adobe InDesign are the source of nearly all commercial and government material, regardless of the final format – web, print, PDF, EPUB.
- Their accessibility tools are minimal and buggy.
- Forces publishers to spend too much money and time to fix accessibility problems in the final formats, such as remediating non-compliant PDFs.

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Solution:

Work with Adobe and Microsoft to create better tools in their programs.

- Writers, authors, designers, developers must be able to more easily create accessible digital formats.
- Submit your ideas to Microsoft and Adobe's online "wish lists" and request more and better tools to create accessible files.
- Keep your software current. Only current versions will have the latest tools.

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2. Shoe-horned into the Workflow

Accessibility is tacked on at the end of the workflow.

- Very costly to make documents accessible at the end.

- Expensive tools.

- Expensive training for the designers and developers.

- Costly for publishers.

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Solution:

Accessibility starts with the very first word that's written.

- And it trickles down throughout the workflow.
- Make accessibility everyone's job—writers, editors, designers, media developers.
- The overwhelming majority of authors, writers, and editors do not know how to use Word's styles—the tool that produces an accessible Word document as well as an accessible PDF exported from Word.
- Get everyone a Word 101 refresher course.

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An Accessible Workflow for Publishing

A Better Workflow for Sec. 508

Writer / SME ➡️ **Editor**
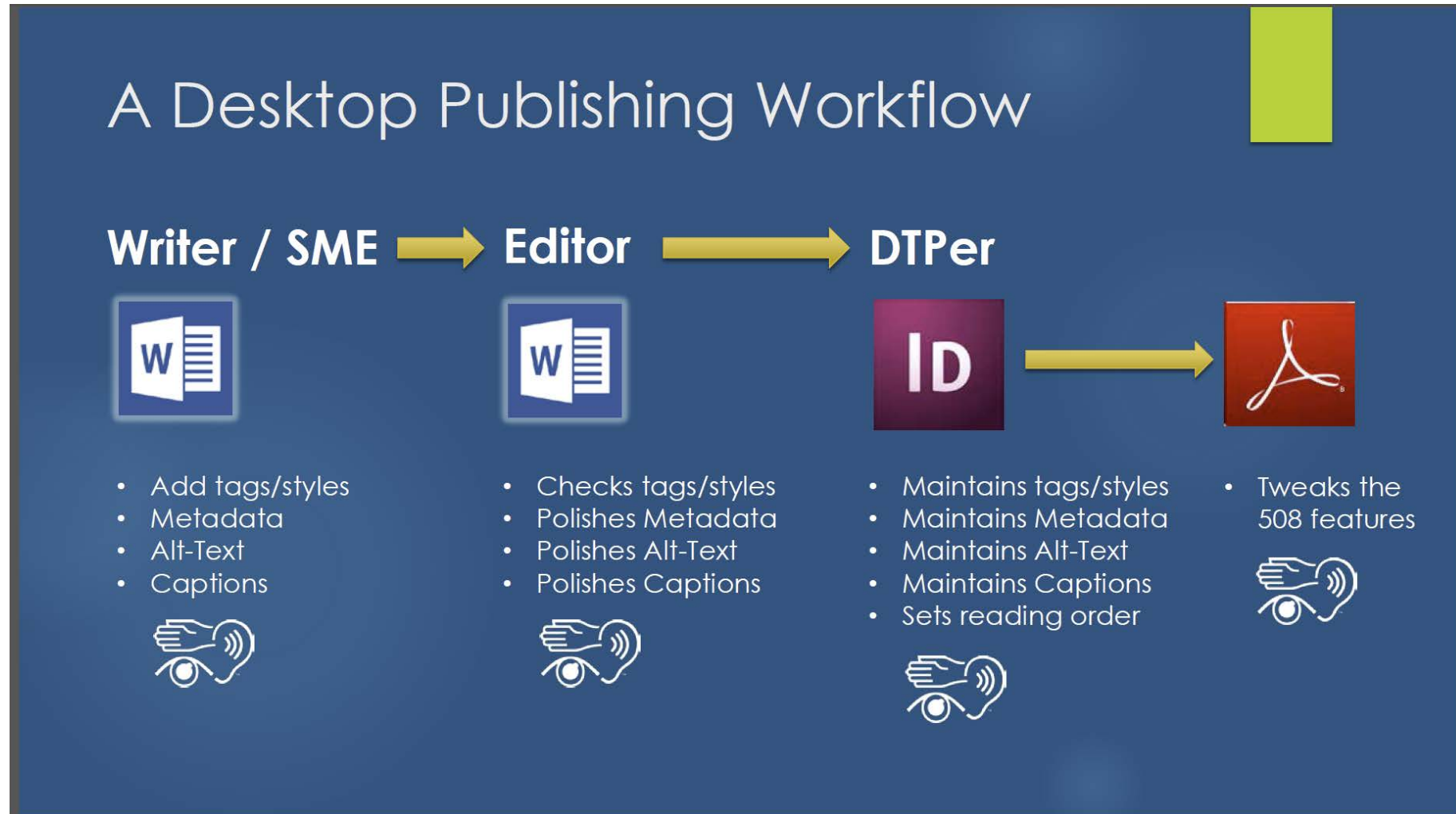
- Add tags/styles
- Metadata
- Alt-Text
- Captions

- Checks tags/styles
- Polishes Metadata
- Polishes Alt-Text
- Polishes Captions

- Tweaks the 508 features

An Advanced Workflow with InDesign

A Desktop Publishing Workflow

Writer / SME → **Editor** → **DTPer**

- Add tags/styles
- Metadata
- Alt-Text
- Captions

- Checks tags/styles
- Polishes Metadata
- Polishes Alt-Text
- Polishes Captions

- Maintains tags/styles
- Maintains Metadata
- Maintains Alt-Text
- Maintains Captions
- Sets reading order

- Tweaks the 508 features

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3. WCAG Doesn't Work for Publishers

Publishers must publish in multiple formats, not just the Web.

- Web/HTML coding and techniques don't work for other media.

- WCAG is NOT media neutral. Out of the 200+ items in WCAG, only 17 apply to PDFs.

- Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and other common office apps aren't mentioned.

- WCAG's presentation is overwhelming and incomprehensible to ordinary authors, editors, and designers. It was written by programmers for programmers.

- WCAG contradicts **publishing standards** in place for hundreds of years.

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Solution:

Speak to your audience...the publishers and content authors

- If you want mere mortals to make accessible files, then redesign WCAG's presentation to be more understandable by them.

- Have a plain language version of WCAG.

- Specify what's needed for web, PDF, EPUB, and other digital formats.

- Don't make people discern WCAG's tea leaves: tell them what they need to do.

4. PDF/UA

It's on the right track to get us better PDFs.

- But it's only in its infancy.
- Standards aren't yet complete.

Solution:

Fast-track PDF/UA.

- Flesh out the forthcoming version and get it quickly through the ISO.
- Create resources, training to help publishers understand and deploy PDF/UA.
- Do this for the other digital formats, too, such as EPUBs.

5. AT Manufacturers Aren't Keeping Up

It's 2015, and common sections of UNICODE still aren't recognized by AT.

- Example: Screen readers miss the minus sign. STEM and financial materials are misread because negative numbers are voiced as positives.

Alt-text has clunky controls.

Too many "traps" for the user.

Other AT just don't work well enough.

Publishers don't have any control over the AT used by audiences.

- So correcting AT shortcomings and flaws rests on the AT users.

Solution:

Pressure AT manufacturers to do better.
- Submit feature requests.
- Log bugs into their "bug bases."
- Join their beta-testing teams.
- And if that doesn't get what's needed, consider lawsuits as a last resort.

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Q&A and Review

1. Very difficult to produce accessible documents with today's tools

2. Accessibility is shoe-horned into the traditional publishing workflow. Publishers have to undergo costly revamp of their multi-channel publishing workflow

3. WCAG is overwhelming and confusing to publishers

4. PDF/UA isn't yet fully developed

5. AT manufacturers haven't kept up with publishing requirements

Your thoughts?

Thank you for your time!

Let's work together to make accessible documents do-able.

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melding technology + design for successful communications across all media

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