# From doing to consulting: How Indiana University transformed the alternative media process

## Introduction

Hello everyone. My name is Michael Mace. I am the manager of the Assistive Technology and Accessibility Center at Indiana University. I’m also an Associate Faculty member of the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Welcome to our presentation on how IU transformed our alternative media process.

Some quick housekeeping. The text of this presentation is available on the AHG website. Like many of the instructors we like to curse under our breath, I didn’t put the finishing touches on this presentation until last night. So as Taylor Swift says on her new album, “It’s me. Hi. I’m the problem it’s me.” (Ok, I must admit one of my staff members put me up to that quote. Being Gen X I wasn’t sure how many people would get it.)

Unlike our many of our faculty though, I did endeavor to make my document accessible. And that’s what we call a sick burn.

I kid. I kid. Moving on.

## My contact info

Here’s a lovely picture of me in front of the tree in my yard. We joke in my household that if I wrote a book, this would be the cover. It’s also pre-covid19 (pounds). Darn that whole sourdough fad…

Feel free to reach out to me directly or to our group mailbox if you have any questions I don’t answer today or want to chat more about the things I cover in this presentation.

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## A few questions

Before I begin, I like to get a sense of the audience. I have a few questions. Please raise your hands.

* How many of you process alternative media?
* How many of you are in the disability services office?
* How many of you are in Information Technology?
* How many of you are in some other office?

Ok great. That will help me in the Q/A part of the presentation.

## What we will cover

Now that I have the introduction out of the way, here’s what I plan to cover in this short time we have together.

* Who we are
* What we do
* Where we were
* The journey to our current state
* The benefits we are seeing
* The tools we use
* What the future holds
* Kudos
* Questions

## Who we are

I want to start my providing some information about my team and the scope of the support we provide. I have a team of eight incredibly talented individuals who work to make IU a more inclusive environment for all students, but especially for students with disabilities.

We are part of IU’s University Information Technology Services. UITS provides services for the following campuses:

* Bloomington
* IUPUI
* IUPUC (Indiana University Purdue University Columbus)
* IU Southeast
* IU East
* IU Kokomo
* IU Fort Wayne
* IU South Bend
* IU Northwest
* IU Online

In terms of people, that includes

* 78K students
* 6K full-time faculty
* 2.6K part-time faculty
* 3.2K graduate assistants

## What we do

The ATAC provides the following services:

* Accessibility Conformance Report reviews for software purchased by Learning Technology
* EPUB, Hybrid, and Braille conversions of student textbooks
* Purchase, management, and support of assistive technology software for students, faculty, and staff
* Purchase, management, and support of Anthology Ally
* Captioning and audio description of instructor-generated content
* Accessibility consultation and support for faculty and staff on educational materials and systems
* PDF remediation of sourced material\*
* Embossing of instructor material when appropriate
* Tactile graphics production also when appropriate

PDF remediation is limited to materials instructors source from the library. Content created by the instructor is the responsibility of the instructor, including any PDFs created from a source document, such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, etc. We will show instructors how to use the accessibility checkers in Word, PowerPoint, Ally, etc.

## The stats

To give you an idea of the amount of content we manage, here’s some stats from this semester (so far):

* 533 hours of video captioned
* 23 hours of video described
* 138 Bookshare accounts provisioned
* 13 EPUBS produced, several STEM
* 117 PDFs remediated
* 258 Glean accounts provisioned
* 700 Braille pages embossed
* 387 tactile graphics created

All while meeting or beating our service level agreements for material delivery

Obviously, my team of eight individuals didn’t do all this work themselves. We have some excellent vendor partners who assisted with this volume. I’ll talk about them in a bit.

## Where we were

When I hired in to the ATAC in July of 2017, we operated with roughly 30 student and part-time workers and 9 full-time employees. Instructors would receive an accommodation notice from the disability services office and essentially dump all their content over to us to fix. That included:

* Word documents
* PowerPoints
* Excel documents
* PDFs
  + Sourced
  + Instructor created
* Video (of all kinds from all sources)
* Canvas pages

## Why this was a problem

This approach presented several issues:

* Instructor timeliness
* Material timeliness
* Student worker availability
* Reusability
* Lack of a workflow system

The ATAC attempted to do much of this work in-house due to a lack of funding. Unfortunately, I think everyone in this room knows that relying on faculty members to give you materials far enough in advance to work into your remediation workflow is an unrealistic expectation at best. See my Taylor Swift comment earlier.

The sheer volume of material the ATAC was expected to process was causing delays in content delivery to students. Trying to process every piece of material was a large ask, and the delay experienced with faculty members who work one week (or day) ahead of their course (see my Taylor reference again) made task management difficult, if not impossible.

Hiring students to do this work also presented a huge problem. To ensure subject matter mastery, we would have to recruit students who were junior level or above. By the time we trained these students, they would only be able to give us a year to a year and a half before they graduated or were offered GA positions.

Remediating one time for one student in one format didn’t allow for real reusability. If we had a visually-impaired student in a social work class, the work we did for them would not be reusable for a student with a print impairment.

Finally, the ATAC struggled for years to get data stewards to allow the department to use any type of workflow system to track their work. No one wanted to take responsibility for the FERPA data related to disability details in their system. So instead, most things were tracked in Excel spreadsheets in highly secure shared drives.

This was not sustainable, especially as IU experienced an increase in students with visual impairments who wanted to pursue STEM concentrations and majors.

## Starting with vendors

The ATAC already had a basic relationship with vendors. We had utilized services from CIDI (Georgia Tech) and others to have braille textbooks produced. Additionally, IU participated in Kaltura’s REACH program. However, the ATAC budget remain constrained, and the impression was given it could not send work out to be completed. By the fall of 2019, the volume that the ATAC was asked to remediate simply exceeded the capacity that an organization staffed primarily with student workers could possibly meet. We had to start sending materials out.

We reached out to several Braille vendors to assess their capacity to augment the services provided internally and with Georgia Tech. The decision was made to send all textbook remediation services to our three vendors.

With the obligation to remediate textbooks removed, we were able to focus solely on the remediation of instructor materials. With these moves, we were able to move the delivery window and started to get ahead of courses instead of being behind.

## Beginning the shift left

Towards the end of 2019 we were able to meet the service level agreements we set for ourselves. However, we were still burdened with the knowledge that our services we were providing only served one student for one course. Reusability was low, and we were quite aware that we had a silent majority of students who couldn’t or wouldn’t apply for services. We needed to do more.

We also were able to convince the data stewards to allow us to start using the help desk tool to track accommodation requests. This took some convincing and some agreements on how to document those requests. However, it was a giant leap forward and allowed us to start tracking requests.

In spring of 2020, we started a new process. We came up with the idea of remediating courses in place. We would copy each course into a shell in Canvas, make the changes, and then use the built-in Canvas function to send those pages back to the instructor.

That was a disaster.

Period.

One of the worst ideas I’ve ever had. Quite possibly the worst idea in higher ed accessibility since a certain publisher’s lab product…

So we needed to regroup. Right idea, wrong execution. So let’s look at…

## The pandemic

Yeah, so that happened. Huge lift to online. Luckily, we were remediating all the documents anyway. We just shifted to sending them to the instructors to integrate into their courses instead of trying to use Canvas’s built-in tool. Ok. So we’ll look at…

## Staff reduction

“So yeah, we’re going to need you to uh, reduce your budget by 5% for FY 2021.” So there goes my student workers.

Time to rethink again.

## Shifting more left

So here we are in the fall of 2020. We are now down to 6 hourly staff members. We must shift work outside of the department to survive. What do we do?

* Use the pandemic
* Sell self-remediation
* Continue consultation

We decide to use the pandemic in our favor. Using the fact that everyone had staff cuts, we informed instructors that we could no longer process much of the content they produced. However, we sold this a bit differently to instructors.

Let me ask you a question. What is the most common complaints you get when asking instructors for their content? (We are back yet again to Taylor…)

For us, it was that they didn’t have their content done far enough in advance for use to process. So we said:

If you don’t have your content ready, we can show you how to make it accessible when you create it. Then you don’t have to give it to us ahead of time.

We used the instructor’s tendency to do things last minute to our advantage. We agreed to stay out of their hair if they agreed to follow our seven simple steps (basic accessibility guidelines). Instructors were happy to keep with their schedule, and we were happy to not process the content they created.

We continued to provide services to instructors that included:

* Evaluating their content using UDOIT
* Providing captioning and audio description for instructor-created content
* Remediation of PDF content

## Continuing the shift

Now that instructors were (mostly) willing to remediate the digital text material they created, we realized that we needed an easier way to train instructors on content remediation and identify the content they needed to remediate. While UDOIT was great on identifying content created IN Canvas, it couldn’t identify issues in sourced content loaded to Canvas. We needed a tool that would reduce our consultation work so we could service more clients.

We also realized that the way we were processing textbooks was not a sustainable process. We need to find a format that could be used my multiple students with different disabilities.

* Began Anthology Ally Pilot fall 2021
* Standardized on EPUB in fall 2021
  + Accessible Word
  + Large Print
  + Print impairment
* Hybrid EPUB w/physical tactile graphics

We entered into an agreement to implement Anthology Ally in the fall of 2021. We determined that the instructor feedback was just the tool we needed to enable faculty to make just-in-time improvements in the accessibility of their courses. In the spring of 2022, we started a voluntary pilot to get instructors into the system. In the fall of 2022, we decide to drink our own champaign, and start using Ally in our course accommodation consultations instead of UDOIT.

From a book perspective, we start standardizing on EPUB for a large portion of our textbook accommodations. We removed most of our options for alternative formats and instead offered only EPUB, Hybrid EPUB with physical tactile graphic supplementation, and Braille as options. Additionally, we established a working relationship with Bookshare to reduce the amount of content we had to remediate. We also pushed and received a new, more accessible player for our eText program. This has resulted in the remarkably low alternative format request volume for this semester.

## The benefits

So what did this journey net us?

* Increased awareness
* Serving more students
* Content reuse
* Reduced spend

Moving to this model got instructors talking. Once we made instructors responsible for the accessibility of the digital text content they create, they started talking to their peers about the importance of getting this done ahead of time. No one wants to do this while teaching a full load. Moving to this model has done more to raise awareness than any communication campaign.

We are also helping more users. We all know that 1 in 4 students now suffer from some diagnosed disability, but don’t always apply for services. Remediating these courses using our seven simple steps and following the guidelines in Ally improves content for everyone, including our first generation college students, students that aren’t native English speakers, and our silent population.

We’ve also seen increased content reuse. Since moving to this model, we’ve seen our Master of Social Work program admit and graduate several students without any need to remediate content past our initial consult.

Finally, the cost curve of accessibility efforts has started to flatten. We’ve been able to arrest the recent year over year increase in accommodation spending. (Pandemic not withstanding)

## Our toolkit

We couldn’t do our work without the following tools:

* ServiceNow
* Microsoft 365
* Kaltura REACH
* AST (now Verbit)
* Anthology Ally
* Bookshare
* Equidox
* Thorium

ServiceNow is our work tracking system. We utilize the Service Catalog feature to manage requests from students, faculty, staff, and disability services office personal.

We use several of the tools in Microsoft 365 to help our students. We recommend Edge for their built-in PDF reading features as well as Immersive Reader for web pages. The Microsoft Editor plug-in provides grammar and spelling checks as well as predictive text. The accessibility checkers in Word, PowerPoint, and Excel help instructors make more inclusive documents.

Kaltura REACH provides a built-in workflow for captioning. Captions can be requested by ATAC staff and are automatically delivered to the instructor when completed.

AST (now Verbit) creates Audio Description for our video content

Anthology Ally checks our Canvas LMS environment for accessibility issues and provides just-in-time feedback for instructors on how they can make more inclusive content.

Bookshare provides alternative formats for textbooks, many supplied by the publishers directly.

Equidox makes PDF remediation much easier with an intuitive interface that doesn’t require knowledge of tag trees.

Thorium is our preferred open-source EPUB reader. It can read math content when marked up correctly.

## Our future

So where do we go from here?

* Bookshare partnership
* MS Learning Tools Education
* Full Ally rollout

We are working with the Bookshare team so that we can eventually upload the EPUBs we create to their library, thus enabling content sharing across multiple universities.

We are also starting to promote Microsoft’s Learning Tools and abilities built into the Edge browser to possible replace some of the digital literacy tools we currently purchase.

Finally, we are rolling Ally out system-wide to all campuses starting in December.

## Giving thanks

Before I open this up to questions, I want to thank a series of individuals. Without their input and support this transformation would not have been possible.

* My team
* Nate Evans
* The EPUB working group
* SeeWriteHear

First off, I have one of the best teams at IU. Brian, Mary, Tomas, Sarah, John, Christopher, Destin, and Scott are fantastic team players who really care about the work we do.

Second, a former peer at Michigan State, Nate Evans, planted the seed of our consultative process into my brain. He helped me bring this transformation to life.

Third, the EPUB working group has been instrumental in helping us move to a truly universal format for text accommodations.

Finally, our vendor SeeWriteHear has been a tremendous help with their flexibility and willingness to help us navigate our EPUB transformation while processing our textbooks.

## Questions

So with that, what questions do you have?