Naralo Monthly Call: Focus on Accessibility within ICANN

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History

- Prior to 2014, accessibility was never on the front burner for ICANN

- However, there were a small number of At Large Members who fought to change this
  - These early members were Gunela Astbrink, Glenn McKnight and Cheryl Langdon Orr

- In 2014 when I joined At Large I joined with this team to advocate for accessibility issues and changes with in ICANN.org

- We worked with the Technology Task force initially on several early initiatives and then launched our own initiatives

History (cont)

- Our first initiative was to review the current we meeting software and see what improvements could be made

- We then created a Working Group on Accessibility issues.

- We brain-stormed some suggested and possibly projects and decided that a stocktaking survey of awareness among ICANN Org staff would be the most useful
    - We then worked to create a survey to provide us with some baseline of the awareness and use of accessible software and other accessibility issues among ICANN.org

Stocktaking Survey

- A small team was created in late 2014 to work on the stocktaking survey.

- Survey was finalized in 2015 and presented to HR Staff at a working group meeting

- We had a very difficult time getting traction on the survey as Staff had a very low awareness of the use of accessible resources and were not able to fully answer the survey. These non answers also showed us that awareness of accessibility issues was very low and that significant work was needed to raise awareness within ICANN on these issues

Early Initiatives

- Another of our initiatives was to create a series of best practices on accessibility issues and this is what led us to do a review of conference software and determine which ones had better coverage of accessibility issues

- We started with accessible websites and then moved on to accessible videos, learning platforms, forms and captioning

- We worked with Staff who were beginning to start work on the At Large website to ensure they employed accessibility testers in building the website.

Early Initiatives: Website Review

- We began working with Laura Bengford's staff on the At Large Website making sure they followed the W3C's Web accessibility Initiative

- ICANN Org's first RFP for a web accessibility Assessment of ICANN.org in December 2014

- A volunteer team was recruited to work with the vendor chosen to review the website

Early Initiatives: Captioning

- Our next effort was captioning. As this required funding we began to explore using the Additional Budget Process to procure the necessary funding to provide the necessary data to show ICANN Org the need for captioning on a permanent basis.

- This was the beginning of our captioning pilot. We demonstrated the need for captioning not only with At Large, but with other constituencies as well.

Captioning of Videos and Learning Platforms

- Our next effort was to work with ICANN Org Staff in charge of the ICANN Learn site and advocate that all videos be captioned.

- We also advocated for past videos to be captioned and taught the staff on best practices of captioning events that had occurred already

- It took several years of discussion but after a few years Org Staff finally worked to prioritize these issues

Meetings applications

- We worked closely with the ICANN Org Meeting's technical staff to ensure that all apps and other applications would be accessible from the get-go and this became a priority for them when purchasing software for the new ICANN applications

Accessibility within ICANN

- Accessibility was a major theme topic within the Cross-Community Working Group on Enhancing ICANN Accountability, Working Stream 2 (WS2), which occurred during 2017-2018 timeframe.

- Numerous reports and meetings were held but recommendations are still not acted upon

- At Large Operations, Planning and Budget is ranking the priorities of these recommendations that have still not been acted upon.

- We welcome your involvement in this process.

Major Challenges

- There is no one at ICANN Org who has as one of their job requirements accessibility concerns and thus it is always an after thought. We hope to change this and make sure that there is an awareness of the importance of these issues

- The only way to ensure this is to have accessibility be criteria of staff performance, but as yet this has not happened.

- There are no staff at ICANN Org who are blind or low vision or deaf. We encouraged staff to hire people with disabilities but have not been successful in this

- As such, we need to find volunteers to test different improvements to the ICANN sites as new enhancements are after not tested to see if they are accessible.

Major Challenges (continued)

- Some examples of these types of problems is that when ICANN went to a single sign on for the learning platform the single sign on ICANN Org used was not accessible and people with screen readers could not use the site.

- Volunteers then troubleshooted and found a solution which while implemented by ICANN Org and made the site more accessible it should not be the responsibilities of volunteers to troubleshoot.

- ICANN should hire more accessibility testers to continually test and audit all ICANN websites and wikis

Major Challenges (cont.)

- ICANN Org site is not trained on the importance of using ALT Tags for tables, text, images and other material.

- As such when documents are produced, they are not accessible

- Today's software allows for easy tagging and adding in alt tags and staff just need to be trained but they are not

- At Large staff have filed comments in the public comments section about these issues and we continue to hope these are resolved but again it should not be the volunteers checking but a company paid by ICANN to do this and also awareness training of Org Staff on how to produce documents that are accessible.

- Staff should go through training on how to ensure all documents are accessible for all people with disabilities whether they are blind/low vision/ have cognitive disabilities or color blindness

Major Challenges (continued)

- We are still fighting for captioning even though the benefits has been proven
- After 5 years we are finally approved to have captioning in French and Spanish
- Sign language options still do not exist
- We have never succeeded in having Org Staff appoint and/or identify Accessibility Champions amongst ICANN staff
- Staff still are not trained on proper formatting for documents and the importance of tools to ensure accessibility.
  - Both Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat have built in accessibility checkers but these are never used by staff

Major Challenges (continued)

- Significant work still needs to occur to Build a culture of accessibility
  - There are often no Keynote speakers at ICANN meetings that include representatives from disability community
- Very little movement among Org Staff to encourage employment of staff with disability
- There is no published ICANN policy on web accessibility or other accessibility best practices
- There has been no encouragement of registries to use the best practice guide in relation to registrars - in particular, to alert registrants to use WCAG v2.0 when developing websites.

Training and Awareness

- Zoom Screen sharing is not accessible to people with screen readers and so staff needed to be trained on how to enable participants to engage and interact and retain the same capabilities they had before
  - Putting documents in the agenda so participants can click on it and view it
  - Putting helpful links and URLs int the chat for participants to click on and view
- Staff were never trained on these issues, and it remains a struggle for people with disabilities if things are not linked to the agenda.
- Staff should implement procedures so all documents are linked to the agenda so can be viewed by anyone
- Staff should be trained on how to create accessible documents

Accessibility Improvements

- Staff are interested in making improvements and solving accessibility issues if brought to them, but our volunteers should not be the only ones doing this.
  - It should be the org's responsibility, not volunteers
- Gradually ICANN Learn is being made accessible but it was only after a huge effort over several years on the need for accessibility improvements and when they were ready for a new platform and not before.

Warning Signs

- Automated captioning helps but human captioning is 100% better and still preferred.
- Machine captioning should not replace Humans, but that seems to be the way they are going
- Captioning should be available in all languages and at all times including during ICANN Meetings

Other recent presentations on Accessibility

- Greg Shatan has given sessions on Accessible Documents and color contrasts
- Jonathan Zuck has given sessions on Presentations

Thanks
Questions, Comments,
Suggestions

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