

Interview with Maxwell Ivey

Trudy Rankin: [00:00:00] Here's a quick experiment for you. Close your eyes, and then, keeping your eyes closed, try to go online and find information about whatever you're interested in, or try and buy something. Can you even imagine navigating the online world without being able to see it? For many of us, it's as simple as looking, clicking, and going where we want, But for others, accessing the digital world takes specialized tools, patience, lots of patience, and grit.

Today, we're joined by Maxwell Ivey, who's known as the Blind Blogger. And Max shares his story of building an online business, overcoming the barriers of blindness with incredible resilience, and what it means to create a truly inclusive online experience.

From how he mastered screen readers to why he's passionate about accessibility in digital spaces, Max gives us an inside look at making the web a place for everyone. Max's journey from learning to code by necessity to [00:01:00] launching the Accessibility Advantage Consultancy is a testament to the power of adaptability and empathy in business.

Accessibility Advantage Consultancy And with his expertise and accessibility, he's here to help business owners understand how inclusion isn't just possible, but powerful.

Welcome to the Online Business Launchpad podcast. I'm Trudy Rankin, and I bring you stories, tips, and advice from online entrepreneurs who've overcome problems and challenges to get to success, because if they've done it, so can you.

I've been running my own business for over nine years. And I've become really passionate about helping business owners like you build momentum and successfully tackle the bumps in the road that will slow you down. And I've used my experience and the experience of others to help hundreds of people grow the online side of their business.

And my mission is simple. I want to help you solve the challenges you face as an online business owner so that you and your family can have more choices in how you live your life.

[00:02:00]

Trudy Rankin: Welcome to the Online Business Launchpad podcast. I'm your host, Trudy Rankin, and today I have got Max Ivey with me, and Max has a business called the Accessibility Advantage, and one of the things that Max did as soon as we both got on the call is that he was using his screen reader to actually help him navigate through the different choices so that he could unmute himself on the call.

And that is something that most people don't have to do. Most people, when you get on the internet, you can do pretty much anything. You just look, you click the button and you're there. But if you have got issues with sight, or you have limited vision, or even if you're blind, you can't do that, you can't see what's on the screen.

You actually have to be able to navigate around through what you hear, and you need readers to do that. Now, [00:03:00] for those of you listening, you may or may not know that I've got, actually got a little bit of a background in this space, because way back in the dark ages, when I was working as a chief information officer, I was working with the New Zealand government, When the internet was new and we were tasked with putting together standards for the use of the websites and the web and internet in New Zealand government entities, like the State Services Commission, all the different government departments.

We were expected to come up with a set of standards that covered a whole range of things, but one of those things was accessibility for people with low vision or who are blind. And it was interesting. I went down a rabbit hole talking to a lot of people about what they needed and how they needed it to be.

And it was the wild west back then. And the only types of things That were there as screen readers back then was something called JAWS. It was incredibly clunky, was hard to use. And now fast forward, however many years [00:04:00] it's been quite a long number of years now, and we have got a whole different world.

And so I wanted to just bring somebody on who is able to talk about what it's like in this day and age to be able to help people access your content through either screen readers or tools that are going to help them get to what you have to offer because they would like to have what you have to offer and do it in a way that's meaningful for them.

And so Max is an expert in this area. I'm going to just get him to introduce himself in a sec, but I just want to say, Max, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Maxwell Ivey: Thank you so much for having me. I'm shocked. You didn't tell me that you're famous. To somebody that does what I do, that's, you're like a rock star, we're going to have a longer conversation when this is over, girl.

So I started in, I started my first website in 2007. When were you working in New Zealand?

Trudy Rankin: Back in, right through 1998 through to 2011.[00:05:00]

Maxwell Ivey: Okay, so I was online about the same time you were working for them trying to make their government sites accessible. Cool. I can't tell you how rare it is for me to talk to somebody who actually knows this stuff and has had to work with it live with it, and breathe it, and maybe even sometimes be kept up at night by it, so I am Maxwell Ivy. My friends call me Max. I'm known as the Blind Blogger. I am the son of carnival owners in Texas, and I grew up wanting to be part of the business. I also grew up knowing that eventually I would lose most, if not all, my vision to retinitis pigmentosa. Thanks to help and encouragement from family, friends, teachers, and Scoutmasters, I graduated from a traditional high school and a regular college, and I'm one of the few blind Eagle Scouts.

I went, I attempted to go to law school, but my scores were not good enough. I trained at World Services for the Blind and became an automated [00:06:00] collection person for the IRS for a couple of years. When that got to the point that my mental health was worth more than the \$15, 700 they were paying me a year, I went back to the carnival and was there for probably 10 or 12 more years working games, helping in the food trailer, setting up and taking down rides, booking events.

I did everything but drive. And then in 2003, my dad passed away. By 2006, our carnival was out of business. And I needed something to do to keep me busy, so I started the Midway Marketplace where I still help some people sell their used rides and games online. However, in 2007, there really wasn't much in the way of accessibility, so just to get started, I had to teach myself to code HTML.

And I had to join forums where I could find people who would share PHP and JavaScript code with me for things I couldn't build myself. And I did that. I also learned how to recruit clients and set fees and write copy and a lot [00:07:00] of other things. So people said, Max, it is really inspiring the way you take on these difficult challenges with joy.

And we want to hear more about what it's like to be a blind entrepreneur. So I started a second site as The Blind Blogger, a name people had been using for me online as a form of shorthand for a couple of years. And since I started that website, I've written four books, Travel the Country Solo. I have been on hundreds of podcasts, I have spoken and sung original songs at national conferences, and I started my own podcast called What's Your Excuse?

I'm currently writing for three publications on accessibility, including Reviewed Magazine. I'm hosting a podcast called Hearsay Shorts for Audio Eye. One of those podcasters is living the dream of being a paid host, even if it's part time. And, let's see, I started, I also started my own website, as she mentioned, the Accessibility Advantage.

My goal there is to educate people as to why they should care about accessibility, [00:08:00] and then teach them how to implement it. I believe as a community, people with disabilities do far too poor a job at, So why? I say we, we use the carrot too much, or we use the stick too much, and we don't use the carrot enough, and for business people especially, you've got to show them what's in it for them, and so that's the mission of the Accessibility Advantage, to show them the benefits they will receive, either from business on their website, Or from improving the quality of the members of their teams by hiring the disabled, by showing them the benefits, then we can talk to them about how, and those that's what I'm doing up to now.

Oh, yeah. I also continue to face my fear of singing in public by creating original songs and sharing them on the internet, usually as part of my public speaking or my podcast.

Trudy Rankin: That is a lot. That is a lot, I have to say. I'm curious, I want to come back to something that you just said just [00:09:00] briefly.

You mentioned you write, you, did you just say you write reviews? Can you just talk about that just for a little bit?

Maxwell Ivey: Oh yeah it's, actually I'm sad to say that the Reviewed Magazine, which is part of the USA Today Network, is going to be closing in October or November because thanks to Google algorithm change, their income hasn't been as good as it should have been over the last six months to a year.

And they are not able to continue. But the point of the accessibility team has been to review products, the, or everyday products that you would buy or that anybody would want in their houses, review them to see how accessible they

are. And my last review that was published was really cool because I got paid to play with Legos.

Trudy Rankin: I like that.

Maxwell Ivey: I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to lean on that until they tell me to stop talking about it. But. The Lego Foundation created Braille Legos to use fun to help blind people learn to communicate in [00:10:00] words in written, in a written language, even if it's Braille on plastic bricks, hoping that will help them build their language skills sooner, and that they'll be able to communicate better with their classmates.

And they'll be able to do better in school and in their careers as they go forward, because a lot of visually impaired kids don't communicate in any type of written system until they get into school, and then when they start learning braille in school, they're behind the curve. The Lego Foundation that came out with them, they were available to schools for the blind and other institutions.

And then last year they decided to make them available to anybody that wants to use them. And since I was the only blind guy on the team, I got picked to play with Legos. And but it was really cool. They were actually invited to send some of their people to the Home Electronics Show in Vegas last year.

And they did a wonderful review of the top 10 most accessible products at, it's CES, Consumer Electronics Show, the top 10. Most accessible products and people [00:11:00] can still find their website. I don't know if they're going to leave the content up and just not create more content or what, but I would be happy to send you a link to to a couple of my articles that I wrote for them.

I think I've been told that I managed to weave in some great storytelling along with the product reviews.

Trudy Rankin: That would be great if you could do, if you could actually send through some links to those, that'd be great. We'll put them in the show notes. I want to ask a quick follow up question then on behalf of some of my listeners who actually are writers.

And that is, is that when you first got your first gig of writing a review for USA Today, the review section of USA Today, how did you actually get it? How did you find that first writing gig doing reviews?

Maxwell Ivey: Okay, I've got to go back a little bit and your writer friends are going to hate me.

Okay. I'll say that right now. Just write down spoiler alert, writers are going to hate Max. So here's what I was doing two years ago, two and a half years ago, I was on LinkedIn trying to expand my network among [00:12:00] people in the disability community. And so I sent a connection request to somebody in the audio team and they accepted it.

And I sent them a short thank you note. They replied back and said Mr. Ivey, we think we may have a job for you. And they sent me the link to the job listing, and I read it, and I'm not a Windows person, so I, I wrote back, I said, I can do the first half of the job, if you want somebody to write and talk I'm there if you want somebody to review websites, I'm there, but if you need somebody who can handle Windows based software, I'm not there, so they encouraged me to fill out an application, so they'd have my name in the system, I get an email back 30 minutes later, it says, Mr. Ivey, we appreciate you applying for the position, but you're not qualified for it.

Trudy Rankin: Of course.

Maxwell Ivey: And I got a good laugh over that. And we scheduled an interview with the person who sent the email and I had four interviews later, I was speaking to the COO of AudioEye, and we're having a good laugh over it as well.

Every time I tell that to somebody, we laugh about it because it's just the funny kind of stuff that [00:13:00] happens in bureaucracies, no matter how small they may be and so they ended up hiring me. They asked me to write articles about accessibility, leaning on the experience that I've gained living this stuff for, let's call it 13 or 14 years before I met them.

And then after they hired me to write, they asked me if I would do some supervised website reviews, which I did. And then they cleared me to do my own self self starting, self modulating, whatever you call it. Basically, I do the reviews and report the information without somebody being on the internet or the phone with me at the same time.

Whatever you call it. And I'm writing the articles for AudioEye, and since I'm grateful for the opportunity, and since they're paying me for it, and I want to keep getting paid for it, I was promoting the articles on social media, and the owners of PHP Architect Magazine, which goes out to over a thousand people

that are all developers and coders, They said Max, would you like to write for us?

And so we had, [00:14:00] we were, we had a meeting, it was going to be a one off column on general accessibility, and instead they offered me a column. It's a paid, it's a paid magazine, you can't read it for free, I'm sorry, but, the fee isn't all that bad, but the thing is, I love the name of my column, it's called Barrier Free Bites.

And I write short tutorials on accessibility. And then that led to Chris Sprouts from Reviewed reaching out to me again on LinkedIn and saying, Hey, Max, we've seen the stuff you're doing for these other people, would you be interested in reviewing products? And I was like, I don't know if I want to or not, but we'll try it.

So I reviewed a Roku TV and then I reviewed, what else did I, then I reviewed something and then I reviewed the Legos. And my last article, which I don't know if it's going to get published or not, was on a new type of collapsible cane, because apparently, if somebody thinks they've got a better version of a collapsible cane, and so that, I don't know if that'll get [00:15:00] published before they close or not, but it's been a really great experience.

I feel like there are going to be other opportunities to do product reviews, either if I instigate them by reaching out. Or whatever and then just one last thing, after, I've been writing for these other people, I thought, Max, what's to say you couldn't write for more people or different people?

So signed up for some email lists and I found this submission link for Writers Weekly. And unfortunately, when I reached out to them, their submission process was not accessible. So I sent them an email and I said, compute, the subject was confused, blind, writer, needs help. And I told them my problems with it.

And they said, okay, Mr. Ivey, here's what we're going to do. You just, Write it, edit it as good as you can, attach it to an email, send it back to us. We won't worry about our usual submission process. And I never framed it as this is an accommodation I need, it was just, [00:16:00] I want to submit an article.

Here's some things I can write about that I think you're, your readers could benefit from. And are you interested? They have commissioned me to write a post on how writers and authors. You can make more money from their books and their websites by making them more accessible.

Trudy Rankin: That's really cool. That is really cool.

And I think it's a really, that's a really important thing. So we look forward to that one coming out. And I have another follow up question that's related to this, but slightly different tack. And it's one that I think that is on a lot of people's minds, not just writers, but also my other listeners who are small business owners.

Of all different, shape, sizes, varieties in terms of the businesses that they have. And that is the role of AI in, in a writing business, in a small in and a other type of business. And I'm particularly interested in what kind of a role AI could play in making our work more accessible?

What's [00:17:00] your experience to date with working with AI?

Maxwell Ivey: Okay. I'm going to say a couple of things about just general impressions, and then I'll give you my experience. I understand that there's a lot of fear in the creative entrepreneur community over AI, about the possibility of it putting us out of work.

And in the disability community where there's already 75 percent unemployment and 85 percent if you have a developmental disability the idea that AI may replace you is out there. I don't personally worry about it myself, because I feel like as long as you are authentic and creating real, human, honest content, you're going to stand out in a way that they won't be able to replicate by AI.

Plus, what I've been seeing on the submission side of writing, I've been seeing website owners who are putting it in their submission criteria that they have a system for [00:18:00] determining if what you submitted was completely done by AI or partially done by AI, and if they find it, you never work for them again.

That makes me feel a little bit better about the future of work for us creative folks, and how AI is going to play a role in it. I feel like there are some great places where AI can help, but I hope that until we prove it, developers will continue to follow accessibility best practices until we prove that the AI is working.

The one place where AI is being used a lot, and it started with Facebook, is in recognizing images and writing the alternative text descriptions of them for people using screen readers, or people navigating the net using. Wireless Speech

Devices like Google, Alexa, etc. That's where, I think, that's where AI has made its biggest inroads so far is in describing images.

[00:19:00] Describing emoticons, GIFs, stickers I don't know how they're doing with memes because I'm not one of those people who gets a lot of memes, but if somebody wants to send me some memes, we'll try them out with chat and see how she does with them. And the other places where I think that the AI can really be helpful to people with disabilities is deciphering names of colors.

Better understanding of size charts when you're looking at purchasing furniture or clothing or physical electronics. If you know what I'm saying, I think that, being able to click a button or have some sort of AI thing loaded up on your device. Where when you get to an image, it can scan the image and give you the description of it.

But until we verify that those really work we need to, we need the developers to keep writing those descriptions and putting them in the alt text tag themselves. In fact, I was just sent a link, [00:20:00] a developer wants me to check out a app called Pixie that is supposed to be great at recognizing and describing images.

That's another new one I've got to try. So far, I've been pretty impressed. I think another place where AI is going to be very helpful to the visually impaired is navigating forums, entering information that you enter a lot, but may not be useful. May need to be a little different from place to place.

We met through PodMatch and I sent you a message on their system saying, Hey, this is Max. I think I should be on your show. I wouldn't send the exact same message to every podcast host. Being able to have AI adjust my outgoing message in a situation, I think that could be a big time saver.

And I think that could be especially helpful in job applications, because a lot of job applications, even for jobs in the accessibility field, can be nightmares for actual accessibility of the forms. I recently filled out the [00:21:00] form for Nike's game time program, and it was nine pages long of stuff, and every page had at least one accessibility error.

Trudy Rankin: Goodness me.

Maxwell Ivey: I had to figure out a way to navigate through. And the really sad thing is, it was a application that was connected to LinkedIn, so it grabbed a lot of my information from LinkedIn, and I still had to fight with it. For some

reason, big companies tend to be some of the worst offenders when it comes to accessibility, but back to AI, I think job applications, I think filling out forms of any kind, navigating forms from one item to another.

describing images, describing colors, and maybe eventually even doing the audio narrations for video to where the computer will tell you what's going on the screen when the actors aren't talking. But that's one of those things that makes me a little nervous because I have a lot of friends. Who make their living reading those [00:22:00] descriptions and so that one makes me a little nervous, but I can see how eventually AI could, watch the movie with you.

And when people aren't talking, tell you what's going on in the background. And so I think that one of the things we really need to do with AI, though, is we need to be, whoever has the contacts, somebody in the disability community has the contacts, to be speaking with people at ChatGPT, at Apple, at these various companies that are all racing to have the best AI, to make sure that they have people in their circle who live with disabilities.

Otherwise, the AI may decide, just like a lot of humans have decided, That accessibility isn't required because there's just not enough of it to make it worth doing.

Trudy Rankin: Which would not be a good thing at all. So I'm curious, so as we follow that sort of thought in terms of, The sorts of things that a small business [00:23:00] owner who's very, obviously very busy and not always up to skill, up to the state of play when it comes to working with the technology.

What would be some of the key things that a small business owner should be thinking about? And let's just start, let's start with what they should be thinking about and then we'll move to the why they should be thinking about it. But what sorts of things, just a quick list. The sorts of things that a small business owner should be paying attention to, maybe putting a little bit of time and money into making sure they get right, so that people who have got accessibility issues can actually access their material.

Maxwell Ivey: First I want to apologize for my long answer on AI.

Trudy Rankin: No, it's good. Don't apologize.

Maxwell Ivey: Okay. All right. I'm told that me and Brevity are not on good terms, as to what a web, what a business owner could do, I'm going to start with a couple that don't necessarily fall under any accessibility guidelines.

But I think they are really helpful in a business owner becoming more inclusive with their online content. So [00:24:00] first thing is, what is the main purpose of your business? What is the reason for your website? Why do you want me to visit that website? And we want to make the most important thing, the most important thing.

If you're selling products, then you want me to be able to search your site and find the variety of products, or maybe you only have a few products, you want me to be able to find them on the homepage and get good descriptions and decide if I want it or not, and then be able to smoothly go through the purchase process.

If you are a coach or consultant, then the things that will tell me your qualifications, Who you've worked for, whether or not I might want to hire you, or have an exploratory call, that's, those are the things you need to focus on. If you if you're a concert, or a movie, or somebody who sells any kind of tickets, then the most important thing is how do I quickly find what I want to go watch, see, or attend, and then how do I buy that ticket?

That's the first [00:25:00] thing, and try, and then the second thing is take a minimalist approach, take a simple approach. So if it doesn't have something to do with the main purpose of your business, it has no business being on your home page. It should be on some other page. But it shouldn't be on your home page.

The second thing is you want a minimalist approach, so you want as few links, pages, elements, whatever, on any screen, but especially the home screen, because when people are using adaptive technology, Whether it's somebody like me that uses a screen reader or somebody that uses screen magnification or somebody who uses a mechanical switch device because they're paraplegic or quadriplegic or people that are using speech speech devices that allow them to say, use their words to make things happen.

All of these people, it takes longer for us to navigate sites. So keep it simple. Go with a minimalist approach. And if you'll start with those three [00:26:00] things, it makes it a lot easier to build for accessibility. And then the two most important things after that for accessibility are your images. And I've already touched on alt text descriptions a little bit, but.

I find people have a habit of stuffing their key, their alt text with keywords and half the time the alt text just says the name of the company and what they do. It doesn't tell me anything about their artwork. It doesn't tell me anybody, anything

about the people who are in the art or why. I would want to look at it, and I like to remind business owners that you probably spent a good amount of time, money, effort, and stress creating the artwork.

Don't you want it to communicate to everybody who visits the website? I encourage people, I'm cool with keyword stuffing, but start with a description so I know what the heck the picture is of. For the alt text and eventually you may be able to depend on AI for that, but we can't depend on it yet.

The next thing is, and I should have put [00:27:00] this before alt text, design for keyboard use first. People with disabilities generally don't have access to a mouse. So the usual commands that most people will take for granted, such as a click or right click, a scroll. On the computer or some people can't do the swipe commands on tablets or phones, so start with your website in a keyboard based version on, that can be accessed on desktops or laptops, and then build upon that for the fancier ways of navigating, because the people who have a disability, they aren't going to have access to a lot of those options, and the other thing is, beyond people with disabilities, A lot of people that are older are just not comfortable with things other than keyboards.

It's what they're used to. So after designing for keyboards first and alt text, the last really important thing is test your [00:28:00] forms. If you are not 110 percent sure that you can design a form that is accessible, then don't do it. Use Google Forms or TypePad, or one of the other four or five top.

forms, building softwares that you can find on the internet and follow their directions as to what makes a particular item on a form accessible. And if you'll do that, you'll avoid a lot of headaches. And I'm here to tell you, it isn't just blind people. It isn't just people that are, that have a lack of motor control.

Your everyday customers are probably frustrated with some part of your forms for your. Email signup or your checkout process, but they're not going to tell you about it. They're either going to just suffer through it and buy, or they're going to, they're going to abandon the cart and go buy from somebody else.

So by making [00:29:00] the checkout process, the email signup process, whatever form it is we're talking about, you make that accessible. You make it better on everybody else. And the easier things are for people. The better we like it. Come on. Everybody talks about the short attention span on the internet.

We don't have time to fight with a button that says pay. And if it won't let me pay and I'll go somewhere else and pay,

there is nothing more frustrating than a funnel that doesn't work properly. That is a hundred percent true. And it's just interesting. I was listening to what you were saying about design for, design your website and your funnels and all of the digital assets and stuff, design them for keyboard first instead of mouse.

That's interesting. I don't know that many people would be thinking about that when they're doing their design. Because, these days so many people will use templates that are already there. And so they just go in and fill out the content rather than design it. That's interesting.

What would you suggest for [00:30:00] somebody who's going, oh, hang on I hear what you're saying, but I have no idea whether my site's been designed, pardon me, for keyboard first or mouse first? How would they, what would they do to check?

One thing they can do is to use their own forms. In my career, anytime I have built a form or had somebody build me a form, I was the very first person to use it.

And if I had any headaches with it, then we'd have to start over. There is a free site called Waves. The company that I'm contracted to, AudioEye, has a free checker on their website that will run a check. Now, they will want you to subscribe to their email list, but as we all know, we can always unsubscribe later.

But theirs will check up to 75 or 80 percent accuracy on how your accessibility is rated. I've recently found out that Wix has installed a accessibility checker in their website building option. I'm hopeful other companies are going to [00:31:00] follow. One of the great things about Zoom is Zoom was really the first company to go all in, and they built their app, their website, and their app, they built them for people with disabilities first.

And then they put in things that everybody else likes. And what's happened? Google Meet Skype, pretty much everybody has followed their lead when it comes to how they build. To build with the keyboard commands, there's. A place I can go on a website and get a list of them, or, I can use the menu keys, and it'll remind me what letter and keyboard key combination makes it do what.

Zoom was really good with that, but Waves is one, the site checker on AudioEye is another one. There are other things out there, but, There are two things I think we need to talk about here. One is something you brought up that is very important. We have a lot of people out there who are depending on

somebody else's forms, email [00:32:00] templates, website templates, and the owner just, the owner assumes that the company they're doing business with will make them accessible.

And I'm going to share an experience I had today. I'm going to leave the names of the companies out because I want to do business with them, and I don't want to get on a bad foot here. One of these companies that offers a full business solution for their clients. They can set up a website, email list, a calendar, forms, the whole thing.

They've got something for everything. I go to one of their clients to fill out a form for a grant application a few weeks back. And I couldn't complete the application. The select boxes weren't properly created. I could activate them, but this, but it wouldn't announce the selections as I moved through with the arrow keys.

And so I told them about that. I just had a conversation today with somebody from the company that has the grant, and that was what they said, Max, they said, Max, we [00:33:00] pay this company that has thousands of clients. We assumed that they were handling accessibility for us. And of course they're not.

And I call this compound accessibility where people are depending on pre made software products from other people. Not knowing whether or not the original one has a flaw in the area of accessibility. And the example I use is, if you take a prototype that has a dent in one of the parts and you set that up to be the prototype for a factory, every unit that comes off that assembly line is going to have a dent in the same place.

And that's what's happening with accessibility in the cases where people are hiring out companies and using their products and just entering their information. And what was really cool is the gentleman I was talking to today that has the non profit he gave me some contact information for the main company that I couldn't find on my own.

And so now I have an appointment to speak with [00:34:00] somebody in the development team. Now, I don't know if they're going to fix what I want them to fix. Or if they'll even understand what I'm saying, because sometimes the bigger the company, the less that they're less willing, they are to understand. But, it's just one of those things where this guy wasn't really doing anything wrong.

He actually cares about accessibility, but he assumed somebody else was handling it and now he knows they're not. So I appreciate that you brought up

that issue of how do business owners know, and the fact that you already understand the idea that templates can get people in trouble. If the themes, templates, and frameworks aren't themselves accessible.

Trudy Rankin: Yeah, I think that's really important. And for any of my listeners out there who are people who are listening who may be developing a software as a service or a SaaS. Platform or technology or software. Listen up and open up your ears because this is a really important part of keeping customers happy, making sure customers can actually use your [00:35:00] software because you have what you do when you're developing your software has a flaw on impact.

On other people and on your clients as well. I want to to just basically just touch on one more thing before we finish up. And that is, is that ages, and I know we could talk for hours about this, but back before Covid, I did some work with Vision Australia and ran a program with people who were blind or partially cited.

To basically teach them how to set up a business online, an online business. And it was really working with them because one of the, one of the guys that was part of the group, it was just a very small group, but he was younger than the others. And he was, he had an Apple phone or an iPhone. And he could look things up on the internet faster than I could look it up as a sighted person, and he had gotten it down to a very well honed art, being able to use Apple's [00:36:00] voiceover product to be able to search the internet. Now if somebody was getting started today. And they were wanting to explore this whole world of online business and they potentially have sight issues or disability issues.

Based off of your own experience and what you've seen and people that you've worked with, what would be the things that you would say to those people in terms of, Should they try it? Should they not try it? What would they need to do to get started?

Maxwell Ivey: I'm never going to discourage somebody with some, anybody from starting a business, if that's what's in their heart.

And for people with disabilities, I mentioned earlier the horrible unemployment rates among people with disabilities. So I applaud people that are wanting to start their own business, whether they're wanting to use an established program, like the vending programs, a lot of, places in the world have, or whether they're wanting to start their own, from the ground business.

And I would say [00:37:00] the most important thing I would tell them is, look, you are an individual with a disability. We're not people with disabilities. We are individuals. And so if you're going to start a business, you have, yes, you want to do, there are certain things you have to do the way everybody else does.

Every time you make a decision, ask yourself, Is this serving me, or am I doing this because people say I should, or am I not doing this because people say I shouldn't? Because there are going to be times, whether you have a disability, or whether you just have a lot of challenges in your life circumstances where your answer is going to be different, and that's okay.

And, in my opinion, finding your own solutions. is part of, can be part of the fun, depending on what your time pressures are at that point. If you're, if you have to solve something in the next five minutes, curiosity ain't really something you need, but I feel like finding your own solutions, being your own Edison.

is [00:38:00] really important to somebody with a disability because there are a lot of things people are going to say you need to do. And maybe you do need to do them, or maybe you need to do them, and maybe you need to do them the way they are telling you have to. But that doesn't mean that you, as an individual, have to do the way everybody else does.

I'll give a great example here, and I hope I'm not running you over time. In 2017, I think it was I was using a free podcast hosting platform, which never do that. Never do that. Same thing with website hosting. Never get a free website hosting package.

It just ain't worth it. The process of uploading my audio was so frustrating that I contemplated quitting because everybody said Max, podcasts are audio. You got to have audio. And I thought to myself, okay, Max. Our choices are, to keep doing the audio, to start my research and find a platform that is accessible, that is in my price range, or, what if we just [00:39:00] don't do audio for a while?

So my decision, in the short term, for about a year and a half, was to just post the video to YouTube and Facebook and elsewhere, and let people follow that and explain on my blog post why I was doing it that way, because I would embed the YouTube video back to the blog post. Explained why I was doing it that way, and everybody was cool with it, and then eventually I was asked to teach at a summer program for visually impaired kids.

And these kids blew my butt away with projects in Electronics and Aerodynamics and Culinary Arts. And I'm like, Max, you're totally missing this. You are not showing up the way you're, what's your excuse brand would say you need to show up. So I came back home the next day, I did my research.

I found a new home at Blueberry and started releasing audio again. But there was a time where it was. What worked best for Max. And I, if you have a business idea, go for it. If you have a [00:40:00] product you want to develop, there are programs out there, like Remarkable, that have cohorts that can help you with that.

There are universities that have cohorts that can help you with that. Build yourself a team of people that will support you, but who will tell you the truth. It will tell you're better than you are when you think you're nothing or will tell you ain't as good as you are when you've been reading too many of your own headlines, somebody that loves you.

It'll tell you, find those people. If you don't have one of those people in your life yet, send me an email. I might be that person because there are a lot of people over the years that have been that person for Max and Max wouldn't be here without a lot of people he's met along the internet highway. Those would be the things I would say, and of course, never be afraid to ask.

I have gotten a lot of what I've done over the years, because I wasn't afraid to ask for help, and I wasn't afraid to ask for opportunities. And I know that it scares people to ask, but I like to share this one important message with anybody, because asking for what you need [00:41:00] is very important, especially in the early days of starting a business.

You need that support from somebody, from somewhere, and if. If you're having technical challenges, like I did a lot of times, the only way you're going to accomplish your task is to ask for help. So here's what I tell people. Focus on the other person or the other company and think this thought.

When you refuse to ask, you rob the other person, you rob the other person of the joy they would have received.

Trudy Rankin: That, that is a really good point. And I reckon that's just, that goes across the board for everybody. I think that's fantastic, Max. Thank you so much for being on the podcast.

It's been an interesting conversation. As I said, we could probably talk for a very long time. If people were wanting to reach out and find out more about you or even get in touch, where's the best place for them to go?

Maxwell Ivey: Okay, they can go to theaccessibilityadvantage.com, or they can send me an email to [00:42:00] theaccessibilityadvantage@gmail.com. And they're also welcome to look at some of my previous work at theblindblogger.net. But the one thing I want people to know for sure, oh yeah I'm Maxwell Ivey on most all the social media platforms. The one thing I want y'all to know for sure is I am not one of those people that you have to be ready.

To book hire or buy something from in order to talk to some of the biggest blessings in my life started by having conversations with no agenda and very little information on the person I was talking to at the time, because if, when you lead with your heart and your mind, and you decide to meet the people that you expect to meet.

then, you can run into a lot of wonderful friendships that lead to great opportunities. So if I said something today that you really loved, send me an email. If I said something today where you thought Max doesn't know what the heck he's talking about, send me an email. We'll have a conversation either way.

And who knows, maybe I'll get on Zoom with you. Or if you prove me wrong, maybe I'll get you on my podcast.

Trudy Rankin: Sounds like a really good idea. [00:43:00] Great. Thank you so much, Max. And it's just been really fantastic and I'll put that in the show notes. All right. Thanks so much.

Maxwell Ivey: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate the time we've spent. And I feel like I was in the presence of a giant of the disability community.

Trudy Rankin: Thank you so much for tuning into this episode with Maxwell Ivey. I hope his journey and insights gave you a new perspective on accessibility in the online world.

Accessibility isn't just about compliance. It's about creating connections and opportunities. for everyone. And I want to leave you with a question. How accessible is your online business to everyone who wants to connect with you? And what steps could you take to make sure your site welcomes everyone?

If you enjoyed today's conversation, please subscribe and leave me a review. Your feedback helps me reach more listeners, grow my community and continue bringing these important conversations to you. Thanks for being here. And I look forward to seeing you in the next episode of the Online Business Launchpad podcast.

[00:44:00]