

WTSTalk - Siteimprove - Accessible Content Is AI-Ready Content | Accessibility, SEO & AI Search

[00:00:00] **Hannah Smith:** Hello, friends. Welcome. We're so excited that you're here. While you all arrive, if you'd like to pop into the chat and let us know where you're joining us from. I am in London and so is Areej. Areej is, is hiding behind the, uh, WTS logo right now. Diane, where are you joining us from, lovely?

[00:00:25] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah. I'm joining us from Minneapolis, Minnesota, so over state side where it's 10:00 AM.

[00:00:31] **Hannah Smith:** Yes, it's morning for you. Good morning. Good morning for some of you, good afternoon to others, good

[00:00:36] **Kacie Emeigh:** evening to yet more, I'm sure. Where are you joining us from, Kacie? I'm joining from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, so little bit down further from Diane.

One hour above Diane, just 11:00 AM my time, but yep.

[00:00:52] **Hannah Smith:** Nice. Oh, well, we've, we've already got some people telling us where they're joining from. We have a bunch of folks from the UK. We've [00:01:00] got Crawley, London, Dorset. Lovely part of the world. Everybody's part of the world is lovely, but Dorset is particularly lovely.

We've got Melinda, who's joining from Ohio. Uh, ah, someone else is in Michigan. I just love this- Calm as you. I love it. That's amazing. Um, the other thing I always want to hear, I was saying on the b- before we started this live I love to hear what snacks you have. Um, because obviously because I'm hosting, I can't be snacking.

Uh, if you'd like to tell me what snacks you have, uh, that will make me suitably jealous. And I will enjoy that. I will enjoy hearing about your snacks and enjoying your snacks vicariously through you, is what I'm here- ... that's what I'm here for. Oh, Oreet just l- Oreet just got a homemade iced coffee.

She's so fancy. So fancy. How nice. How nice. Um, welcome everyone. Whilst everyone's just arriving, [00:02:00] somebody... Oh, Renie's got a late lunch, chicken wrap. Yes, mate. Dishoom, delicious. Absolutely delicious. You're right. Dishoom, if you know, you know. It's brilliant. We should get Dishoom to sponsor us, and then they can send us all the delicious food.

I would love that. Mm. Before we start properly I am just gonna do a little intro, uh, just to let everybody arrive. So welcome friends to the latest edition of WTS Talk. We are so excited that you are here and that you've joined us. My name is Hannah Smith. I'm the head of content at WTS, and I will be your host today.

I know that many of you are WTS members, but for those of you who are perhaps unfamiliar with who we are and what we're about, WTS is a global community for people of marginalized genders in marketing and tech. It's a safe space to discuss, share, and learn from one another. Our aim is to empower each other in a positive, inspiring, [00:03:00] and beneficial way to build our networks and accelerate our careers together WTS is dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone.

Our community values are to be kind, to be helpful, to be respectful, and to be a safe and judgment-free community. We would ask that you adhere to our code of conduct, The WTS Way, throughout this event. If you're unfamiliar with it, it can be found on our website, womenintechseo.com. I'll be kicking things off shortly, but before we do so, here's a few quick housekeeping notes.

Here's how we're gonna be running the session. Diane and Kacie will present. I will introduce them in just a second. After they finish their presentation, we're gonna be taking questions from attendees. So if you do have a question, please pop it in the Q&A and we'll get through as many as we can. After the session, I'm sure that you will have tons of questions on this topic.

I know [00:04:00] I do. Um, so, I'm gonna do the introductions. Joining me today are Diane Kulseth and Kacie Emeigh from Siteimprove. Siteimprove is an agentic content intelligence platform that brings together accessibility, analytics, SEO, AEO, and content strategy into a single continuous flow. Diane Kulseth is Manager of Consulting Services at Siteimprove.

She specializes in creating search strategies that don't just check boxes, they elevate experiences. Her approach combines technical excellence with deep user empathy built on scalable processes that support teams who are stretched thin. Whether it's working with higher ed, healthcare, or enterprise clients, she brings structure to chaos while advocating for a more inclusive and human web.

Welcome, Diane.

[00:04:54] **Diane Kulseth:** Thanks, Hannah.

[00:04:55] **Hannah Smith:** Joining Diane, we have Kacie Emeigh, Senior Solutions Engineer [00:05:00] at Siteimprove. Kacie is dedicated to helping organizations craft inclusive, accessible, and data-driven digital experiences. With her expertise in web accessibility, analytics, and performance optimization, Kacie excels at transforming complex technical requirements into actionable strategies that enhance user experience and drive business results.

She's collaborated with diverse industries to elevate digital maturity, streamline workflows, and establish sustainable practices in digital governance and compliance. A passionate advocate for digital accessibility and continual learning, Kacie frequently shares her insights on inclusive design and the evolving landscape of web standards.

Welcome, Kacie.

Um, take it away, friends.

[00:05:52] **Diane Kulseth:** Thank you so much, Hannah. And fun note for anyone from the W- WTS crew, Hannah was actually my mentor for the last round of [00:06:00] WTS mentorship, so it's kind of special to have her doing the intros. And I see, um, some of my mentees in the chat too, so it's... everything's coming full circle.

But we're so thrilled to be here and to be talking all about really, um, topics that both Kacie and I are so passionate about when it comes to accessibility and how that really ties together now in this realm of AI search. So Kacie's really knowledgeable on all things accessibility and, um, my focus is primarily digital marketing.

And so we'll let Kacie kind of start things off when it comes to accessibility.

[00:06:35] **Kacie Emeigh:** Awesome. Thanks Diane, and thanks Hannah for the introduction. And really on the screen here, these numbers should really get your attention. Up to 50% of your organic traffic is at risk, and I don't mean that in a term of someday.

It's really today. Buyers are already turning to ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, instead [00:07:00] of scrolling through traditional search. ChatGPT

alone right now accounts for nearly two thirds of AI-driven traffic. So these really aren't niche tools anymore, like we were saying, whether it was six months ago, a year ago.

They're really becoming the first stop in your buyer's journey. So it isn't no longer a question of is this shift happening, it's whether your brand's showing up when it does happen. So Diane, if you want to, the, Apologies, my screen here. AI's really reshaping, again, how buyers discover you, and your competitors are already showing up in those AI generated answers.

Left unaddressed, it can create a cascading set of consequences which, over on the right-hand side, content teams really work blind. They have no visibility into how AI interprets and uses their work, so it's very hard to optimize for that. Brand accuracy slips. AI [00:08:00] shapes the perception of your brand without your input now, which could potentially misrepresent what you're offering.

Pipeline and revenue erode. Competitors become the default answers in high intent moments, directing that traffic and that trust away from yourselves. Leadership can't answer questions. They can't answer the board. Why is organic performance declining? And why is there no explanation for that reason?

Every quarter that we wait, competitors get harder to displace in AI generated answers, so that's why this urgency, this need is here today. But really with search, it's not the only industry that's evolving. We also see our accessibility industries starting to evolve as well. The requirements are continuously ever-expanding.

As we look at the United States, we have the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act. We have Section 508 which is an addendum [00:09:00] to that act, as well as ADA Title II. In Canada, we have the ACA, we have Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, as well as other evolving expansions within Europe and other countries.

So again, it's not just AI landscapes that are ever-evolving. Accessibility is also continuously evolving, which is why it's just as important to make sure these efforts are in place there as well And when you actually start to fix accessibility, there's more benefit than just compliance. When you fix accessibility in digital governments, this impact can show quickly.

So even just taking a look at the numbers that you see here on my screen, faster sites convert better. Clean, well-structured content drives more traffic. Accessible experiences increase your audience size, which ultimately can help

to increase conversion or goals for our website. [00:10:00] So it's no longer is accessibility separate from performance.

Accessibility is performance at the end of the day

This here on the screen is gonna be a short list of a few examples of needs people have in each of these categories. This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it meant to be, but it's at least able to show you both what are some of these different needs that users have, and the current statistics that we're seeing are that one in five and one in seven people of all ages worldwide have some form of disability.

In the United States, that number is one in four adults. So again, the urgency for making sure that we're having accessibility baked into our digital experiences are ever more important because of the amount of individuals who this may impact.

[00:10:55] **Diane Kulseth:** And I wanna chime in here. Like, you see here this top row, like, the permanent disabilities, which I think most [00:11:00] people are very well aware of.

When you think accessibility, you think blindness, you think deaf, you think non-verbal or physical limitations. But really, I don't think people think about, like, the temporary, like, if you do injure yourself, um, if you have an ear infection, if you have laryngitis, or a situation where your attention is distracted in some shape or form due to loud environments, due to driving, due to speaking to someone in a different culture that might have a heavy accent.

So you know, people think of accessibility and they think of those that are blind or deaf primarily, but really, there's needs for accessibility throughout, the whole realm of, like, the life experience. And you might not need accessibility right now, but your parents might. They might be struggling to use their mobile phone.

Um, or I have a colleague that just recently had a concussion. They need accessibility. We've had those ha- suffer injuries, and they all of a sudden can't use their keyboard the way they used to, or their mouse. So I think that's something that people really don't think about.

[00:11:57] **Kacie Emeigh:** No, absolutely, and I think [00:12:00] really common examples too that it's one of those where it's in your

You see it every day, but you really don't think about it until you take that step back. Think about an elevator, for example. How many people prefer to use an elevator versus the stairs? How many people here own an electric toothbrush versus a manual toothbrush? All of these at the end of the day are assistive technologies, but we find them to be more convenient if it's not in that dedicated purpose.

So when you really take a step back and take a look at the world, it's super interesting to see what really are assistive technologies, what do we even use in our day-to-day without even thinking about it too.

[00:12:37] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah. How many people like using captions on their videos or, like, you scroll on social media and you view something without the sound because you've got captions.

Assistive technology is everywhere around us.

[00:12:50] **Kacie Emeigh:** Absolutely. And I think the next screen that we have here is a great example as to really what are some examples of [00:13:00] these assistive technologies. When you're thinking about vision, hearing, speech, monitor, look at your phone. Think about what do we use on a day-to-day, like Diane and I were just thinking around.

Vision needs, blind, low vision, colorblindness, individuals with contacts, glasses. Hearing needs for the deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind, making sure that we have specific click functions within there. Speech needs, motor restrictive needs, cognitive needs. All of these we need to think and account for when thinking around accessibility and how our digital experiences can benefit all around. Doing good and making good business is one thing, but creating accessibility into your day-to-day workflows, it, again, it can expand your total addressable market.

Accessibility programs can address- increase adoption for users across. By creating a program versus a [00:14:00] project and having all individuals involved, it helps to really surface it across our ecosystems. And accessibility attracts more users, it widens that audience of who all are we able to present our information out to, as well as then who all is able to drive conversions for us.

So like I mentioned at the beginning, accessibility is one way of looking at it from compliance, but it's also just making a good, healthy website that includes all individuals, and at the end of the day, that's our goal here. So, accessibility and content and AI are really the foundation for a solid website, so that's really

why the conversation we're having today and what Diane's gonna speak through next here, so

[00:14:46] **Diane Kulseth:** Absolutely.

Yeah, so as we've been really delving into this over the last several years, we are seeing that accessible content and AI-ready content are really the same work, you know, and we'll be diving into some of these specific topics when we talk about this whole [00:15:00] playbook of structure, meaning, and clarity. And so really the work that you're already doing should be helping.

And so we're making the case for why accessibility is still important, um, because it really does impact everyone and everyone benefits from it, and we're now in a world where this directly influences how you show up in these AI answer engines. And when it comes to website accessibility, we really see that as part of, like, a strong foundation for how you rank well in AI search.

And here at Siteimprove, we refer to it as answer engine optimization. Certainly, there's also generative engine optimization. You can call it whatever you wanna call it, basically. But what it all comes down to is AI can't cite what it can't fetch, read, or understand. So the work that you're doing within accessibility really helps with that to ensure that your content can be discerned by assistive technologies, which do include answer engines or AI large [00:16:00] language models, and we view that as really foundational.

For folks that grew up around the same era I did in the US, you might remember, like, the food pyramid and how you wanted to start with grains as your foundation. Accessibility, really foundational there, and then really leans in well and, um, partners well with technical SEO so that way you ensure that your pages are fast, that they're crawlable, that there's nothing blocking from the search engines because we are seeing that, ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity are still pulling from the top-ranked pages in search.

So really once that eligibility is solved, we start to then shift into building authority and starting to figure out, like, what are the ways we need to structure our pages so that way AI can really trust our content and then summarize it well for extraction. But really our focus today are going...

is going to be a lot more on some of those foundational pieces and then delving a little bit into content strategy. So let's actually go into [00:17:00] then the playbook that we have. So we're, again, we're talking about structure. So we're

talking about is your website eligible for citation? Ensuring that your website is well-structured so that it will appear well.

Um, we're going into meaning, so can the answer engines and your visitors understand all of the content that you have? We're also then going to be going into clarity. So how do you go about removing roadblocks both for your visitors and your answer engines? So everything in this webinar is really resting on that technical foundation.

If it's shaky, everything else in that pyramid doesn't matter. You can have the best content in the world, but if the answer engines can't parse it, it's not gonna be cited. If humans can't access it, they're never going to get far enough to actually convert, and that's what really matters here. Like, we can...

Visibility is great, but being chosen is what we really want. We still want impacts to our business. So we're going to have several different sections, um, five to six components in [00:18:00] each section that talk about the dual payoff and the maintenance rhythm for accessibility and AI search. And speaking of those maintenance rhythms, we have a little handy visual key, um, for when you need to make changes to each of these elements.

And we'll also call these out for those listening in and not simply viewing the slides. But the calendar will indicate time-based improvements, so something you might be looking at quarterly, annually, we'll call that out. Um, or you'll see the lightning bolt. That's in- the event-based improvement. So do this when you publish a blog post.

Do this when you're going through a website refresh. So we've got a lot to get through in the next couple of minutes, so let's go ahead and dig in. Again, key thing to remember here is that all of these issues, um, do affect both accessibility and AI search. So without further ado, let's talk about structure.

And I've broken this out into two sections: so your technical structure, which is going to more or [00:19:00] less refer to your website as a whole, and your content structure, which will kind of be more on like a page-by-page basis. So I know several of you are long-term veterans of the SEO space, so robots.txt, you know it, you love it.

But from an accessibility standpoint, when this file accidentally blocks CSS or JavaScript, it actually breaks the page for your assistive technologies that are in like reader mode tools. And it really... You know, if you block it from bots, you block it from assistive tools too. So if you're loading in anything via JavaScript,

those with assistive technologies aren't able to read it, so definitely something to review.

From an AI search perspective, it's the first file that most crawlers request, and it's also now where you can explicitly decide whether GPT bot, Claude bot, perplexity bot can access and cite your content. So this is something that we recommend revisiting annually at the [00:20:00] minimum. Um, but if you're going through any sort of web migration, CMS platform redesign that you review it too at that time.

Similarly, obviously we know sitemaps, um, both XML and HTML we're talking about here. Um, from that accessibility standpoint, though, your HTML sitemap is the one that we really wanna call out because sometimes visitors can really struggle with complex menus. So having an HTML sitemap helps to really give them that table of contents, that easy to understand way of how to access their content.

This is helpful for those that rely on the keyboard as opposed to the mouse. They can just quickly tab over, as well as those with cognitive disabilities. So again, it's providing that direct overview of the site without navigating through nested navigation. And this is actually something that's called out in the WCAG standards, so this is an acceptable way to get multiple ways to your content.

From an AI search perspective, the [00:21:00] XML sitemap is the roadmap that the crawlers and AI indexers directly go to. They know what it's about, they know how fresh that content is, and when they can expect to see maybe updates from that. So this is something that we recommend auditing quarterly, and anytime you do some sort of URL migration or major content push.

Going into canonicals. So again, from an accessibility standpoint, this is ensuring that a user landing from search or a shared link is actually getting the m- most up-to-date content and going to a piece of content that's actually remediated and maintained. Um, they could be going to something else that, you know, a piece of content that is actually out of date.

Because duplicate URLs tend to lag behind on fixes because folks wanna focus on the content that they're actually trying to rank. So this is why canonicals are so important from an accessibility standpoint. Without them, from an AI perspective, ranking signals can then split across [00:22:00] duplicates, and AI may cite the wrong URL.

So certainly always great to have some form of canonical hygiene in place. Anytime you launch new templates, um, anytime you do URL parameters or restructure existing URLs, uh, make sure you're revisiting your canonicals. This also leads us to redirect hygiene. At the top of the call, we talked... or it was mentioned that I work a lot with higher education.

This is so common, especially with universities, that we see every time a new refresh happens, there's a new set of redirects, and we get, three to five redirects in. And every time there's a redirect hop, that adds latency to your screen reader users. So they hear an announcement or an interruption every time you hop.

So your page A, they're saying, "We're going to page A. Oh, wait, now we're going to page B. Now we're going to page C. Oh, we finally landed at page D." That's a very disruptive experience. From the AI perspective, the chains can really dilute ranking signals. So we really wanna make sure that at least quarterly, we're taking [00:23:00] a look at any sort of redirect chains that you have and really trying to flatten that.

So instead of having page A through D, you know, that you're really going, "Let's redirect straight to page D and keep our visitors from hopping and our assistive technology users hearing that interruption every single time." From a DOM perspective, so the document object model, this is so critical from an accessibility standpoint because this is where screen readers keyboard navigation, all of it follows DOM order, not just visual order.

So when you load a website and you're reading top to bottom if you're a sighted user, but those that aren't sighted or using assistive technologies are going based off of the DOM. So your CSS could actually rearrange things visually, so what you and I see may not actually be representative of the DOM.

So we wanna make sure that there's a consistent structure otherwise it really scrambles the meaning for your page or [00:24:00] your site. And from an AI perspective, AI systems process pages as a sequence of tokens that are pulled directly from the DOM. So again, that scrambled source scrambles what the models are thinking.

So here you wanna revisit this anytime you're making changes to your website templates anytime you're doing any sort of major layout changes. This is really a critical part of, like, your quality assurance pre-launch. And finally, when it comes to structure from a technical perspective, we also wanna think about language declarations.

Because here it's really important to ensure that the engines are citing the right language, that it's not confusing, that you're getting also, like, the right pages, um, so that way your visitors are looking at the right content at the right time. So, again, this is really our site level foundation.

These are just things, again, that you wanna check either at a on an event-based level. So t- with language declarations, we're looking at it after you refresh your [00:25:00] content. Some of these other ones like redirects, site maps, robots.txt, we're looking at more of, like, a quarterly or annual time-based check essentially.

So that's our site level foundation. And a key thing to note here, as we kind of talked about earlier, accessibility really isn't that separate discipline layered on top of technical SEO. It's now what technical SEO looks like when you start to take seriously that machine-readable layer, which is really the work that we've all been doing for years.

But it's really becoming more and more important when you are layering in the realm of large language models that don't crawl the same way, um, your websites typically crawl. So let's go into then the second part of that, so content. So we've got five pieces here. So think about this as like the floor plan of a single page.

What we wanna focus on is that AI systems read your page the way a screen reader does. So everything that you have as far as, you know, having good [00:26:00] you know, sequential content is what we are focusing on. So unique page titles. I feel like this is SEO 101 for a lot of folks. You wanna make sure that you have good clean page titles.

Again, from an accessibility perspective, this is the first thing announced when a screen reader lands on a new page. It's how they confirm that the user got to where they wanted to go and how they can start to tell tabs apart. So having unique values, making sure your brand is not first but actually what the content of the page is is first.

And from an AI perspective, this is really one of the strongest signals for relevance, and often is what's used to kind of start to label your ser- your source when you are starting to get cited in AI search. So whenever you're publishing content, we wanna be reviewing this. Um, going into your heading orders, this is really what screen reader users navigate, um, when they pull up a heading list.

So they're starting to see like, okay, what's most important here? What are some of the subsections? It [00:27:00] really gets them to where they wanna go. And similarly, that's what AI systems are using as well to identify those areas where they want to maybe cite a particular passage. So here we want to, you know, make sure that you have some sort of like, standard content audit.

So like annually, if you're going through and starting to look at your headings, but also if there's any time in which you're making dramatic changes to your content taking a look at your headings is also going to be an important part of that Similarly semantic landmarks. So what do we mean by that?

But, um, those are like the jump to content. If you see, like, those recipe pages where there's that whole talk about how someone's sister's aunt's brother, you know, neighbor made that beautiful chocolate chip cookie recipe, but then there's that jump to recipe. That's what we're talking about when we're talking about semantic landmarks.

And so here, this is really [00:28:00] helpful also f- that this is clearly called out for those using assistive technologies. Um, so that way they know exactly what regions exist on the page and which one they want to go to, to actually get to the content that matters. So this is one that you just wanna look at when you're building your templates and then check in on anytime you're adding new components.

So from an AI perspective, this helps to share, like, okay, this first piece of content maybe isn't all that valuable, but the stuff that we're saying jump to the main content is really what you want to focus on for for what's eligible for citation. And then we've got our proper list and table markups.

So here, like, when... for assistive technologies, users are getting a list scope. So, like, here's a list of five items. Item number one is XYZ, item number two is ABC, et cetera. So important to make sure that you actually are coding any lists as actual lists and not just [00:29:00] as items with line breaks or divs, um, div tags, that, um, you really do show that they are an actual list.

This is also something that AI systems reward as well, and they call out, um, and cite a lot more often the actual lists that you see, whether they're numbered lists or unordered lists. Um, but calling them out, whether it's bulleted or numbered, is going to help both the end user and those AI engines.

So something that you revisit anytime you're publishing content, just include that in your, final QA checks. And then proper table markup, similarly ensuring

that you have properly scoped headers so that way a screen reader can actually properly say, like, "This is what we're talking about. We're talking about this row includes this value, this value," and isn't mentioning the values kind of out of sorts.

You know, otherwise you have visitors who are hearing numbers with no meaning behind it, and so they don't really understand what they're getting at. And again, with AI [00:30:00] search, much like we saw with the proper list markup, this allows for that data to be properly extracted and summarized in those AI engines.

So again, anytime you're publishing any type of comparison content, pricing pages, um, spec sheets, those are the times that you really want to review that. So structure is so important because it's telling the machine s- what exists and how that information is organized. But knowing that a heading exists isn't the same as knowing what it means, and so that's really where we're going next as we start to go into the next part of this, which is really all about meaning.

So how do we convey that meaning to both your assistive technology users coming to your website and those AI engines? So first things first, um, we're talking a lot about descriptive link and, um, descriptive alt text. So the text that you use for your links, also known to some [00:31:00] SEOs as anchor text as well as the alt text or alternative text that you put with your images.

So here we really wanna focus on text that stands alone. And so the end goal for this whole section is does the reader understand what this is without seeing this, without seeing whatever element it is? So if they're looking at a video, for example, do- can they understand the video without ever watching the entire video?

Um, that's a discipline that really serves screen reader users and AI systems at the same time, because both are consuming your content through description and not sight. So from an accessibility standpoint, as we talk about descriptive text screen readers y- um, are pulling up these links in a list, and they're hearing the same thing in isolation: click here.

That's not helpful to hear that 10 times in isolation. So you want to make sure that you're actually [00:32:00] distinguishing, "Click here for our annual report" or, "Read more about how WTS, you know, is active in the community", for example. Um, if you just have read more, read more, read more, like on a list of articles they're not gonna know, like, which one is actually talking about, this week's news.

So try to include that where you can. Same thing with your images. If you just see like image, that's not really helpful. Or if there's image of Diane and Kacie talking during the 1- latest WTS talk. Okay, then they know this is what we're focusing on. It could be, image of Ariege, and Aaron, and Hannah at a retreat or whatever it might be.

But really being able to distinguish so that way those, again, who aren't seeing that visual content are able to speak to it. Again, this is something that you want to revisit as you're publishing a piece of content. But you can also do, you know, a full site audit annually. Content pathways. So [00:33:00] what we're talking about here, internal links.

How your content is discovered. Those of you who have worked a long time in SEO are well familiar with internal links and their benefit from SEO. But- it's also very important for content, especially if you have anything where you have, like, JavaScript-based content. You want to make sure that you can at least get to the content via your links.

That's just another thing that's very helpful, especially for those that are coming in via your keyboard, um, navigation. AI search. Um, again, internal linking is one of the strongest signals for traditional search, and it's also a strong signal for AI search to really show that related content and show your topical authority for that particular content.

Breadcrumbs. I like to say, like, this is like when you're looking at a map and it's like, "You are here." Breadcrumbs help to show you that story, and that also reduces, like, the working memory for visitors coming in from screen [00:34:00] readers. So it's able to kind of show that hierarchy of, like, where does this page particularly belong?

And screen readers then are also able to then announce, like, "Hey, you're coming to this particular page, which is sourced or, like, part of these other pages." When with AI search, if you use like breadcrumbs list, they explicitly, tell the AI systems how your content is organized hierarchically.

So again, building in that topical authority, um, and showing that you do have a lot of content around a particular subject matter. Um, accessible pagination. So being able to have you know, real clear indicators of what page you're on allow keyboard and screen reader users to be able to navigate paginated content.

So if you've got a list of articles, we're on page one, and there's five pages, um, then they're able to keep track of, okay, we've made it to page one, now we're

going to page two. And from that AI search perspective, it helps to make it clear, hey, there's more content behind here. Otherwise, it's [00:35:00] less likely that your page two, page three, page four content gets discovered and indexed at all.

So a lot of these are oftentimes, things that you're really doing on that event-based framework. So anytime you're touching particular content or you're looking at listings pages, that's when you're really focusing on a lot of these elements that we're talking about here. And then the last two that we have here are transcripts and captions.

So transcripts and captions, you know, very similar to your descriptive text, um, and your like link text, your alt text. This is so important for any type of audio files that you're doing. So if you think of like podcasts or videos, um, that you're doing, making sure that you do have transcripts and captions on all of your videos that you put out there because these are so essential for deaf and hard of hearing.

And as I said at the beginning I like to watch videos on Facebook when that have no audio or like I don't wanna click into the audio because I might be out and about, and I don't wanna [00:36:00] disrupt people. So the fact that they have captions, I can keep on top of like what's actually happening. Um, so it's not just beneficial for those using assistive technologies, but also really beneficial for those that don't, that just, enjoy it for convenience.

And from an AI perspective, this is, you know, really converting that otherwise invisible audio and video into actual indexable, citable text. So it's really one of the clearest AI visibility wins out there right now. So anytime you're publishing content that is visual in nature, video or audio you wanna make sure that you're doing this.

This isn't something that you can just like opt out of. It's absolutely critical, both from that accessibility perspective and from that AI perspective. And then structured data. One of my colleagues, uh, for those of you who've met Jeff Coyle, I know some of you met him at a London-based center, he always says, like, "You can't, um, fact your way out of good content."

So, like, using FAQ schema [00:37:00] always, you know, something that people, especially right now in AI search, are talking about all the time. But from an accessibility standpoint, the benefit's really indirect here. Um, it gives the visitors more context before they click. Helping with cognitive load, helping with screen reader list navigation.

The schema is important but it's not necessarily, like, going to be something that's going to be, "Oh, this is a quick win to the top of AI search." And again, you know, we all know that it can also provide additional context for those AI answer engines as well. So these we recommend looking at...

Of course, any time you publish content, you want to make sure, like, does this content type benefit from having some sort of structured data markup and providing that vocabulary in a vocabulary that the search engines already understand. But then also we t- we recommend every year going through and auditing your structured data markup so that way you can check, like, is this still relevant for this piece of content, or did we possibly add in, you know, a module that [00:38:00] talks about questions that are commonly asked and we want to add an FAQ schema there, et cetera.

So really, you know, meanings tell... meaning tells machines what something is, and then we move into clarity and going into will this actually work for our visitors. So when we're thinking about clarity, something that people aren't thinking about a lot yet is that AI agents are increasingly interacting with the web.

Um, they're tabbing through forms, they're reading labels, they're following focus modes. So all of these practices aren't just helping those with screen reader usage, or they're not just helping, you know, your standard large language models, but this is also helping, um, for AI agents because they're going to be navigating...

A lot of times, like, this automated agent is going to be navigating the same way like a keyword... or excuse me, keyboard user is navigating your website. So things here we want to [00:39:00] talk about, um, from a clarity perspective, readability. So being able to say what you mean plainly. This helps visitors with cognitive disabilities, dyslexia.

I mention a lot of times I have a loved one with long COVID. Um, the way that she reads a document now is completely different than it was five years ago. So you know, people around you, you know, really are looking for easier ways to understand your content. Um, and AI systems are also n- no different.

They want to be able to really clearly understand the sentences that you have. So this is something with every content refresh that you're doing, you want to address your readability Keyboard accessibility. So we just talked about this, but that ability to navigate through a page by just tabbing. Um, not everyone can use a mouse, so, if you can tab through and access all the pieces of content and

that they're in the right order, again, that's where that DOM reading order is so important.

Being able to then [00:40:00] see, like, are we going left to right, top to bottom, or are we going left to right on this subsection and then going over to a sidebar that we have? Um, this is essential for those, like I said, with motor disabilities, um, that need some sort of control outside of their mouse. And from the AI perspective, those that are navigating on a user's behalf are op- really operating programmatically.

So they're really going through and tabbing to find what they're looking for. Content that's behind only, like, hover-only or gesture-only interactions is really going to be invisible to both of those, um, your AI agents and those with assistive technologies. So any time you're launching any sort of interactive component or widget, that's when you want to address it.

Focus states and focus order. I am seeing hands popping up. Yep, we're just wrapping up here. Perfect. Visible focus is really answering where am I, um, and the tab order is really looking at where am [00:41:00] I going. So you want to make sure that you're keeping your focus visible and keeping, um, your site operable for both users or agents.

So here you wanna revisit your focus states every time you're doing a design system update or a component refresh. Form labels as you're building out forms, you wanna make sure it's clear. Like, if this is for your first name versus your email definitely call that out, otherwise you're having...

it's gonna be hard for the agents to know, oh, I need to fill this out for this particular person, oh, I need to schedule an appointment for them, but where do I put their name? Where do I put their phone number? Um, so every time you build a form, you wanna check that. Um, and then the last two are really content related.

So, topic to page mapping. So those with cognitive disabilities focusing on one topic per page really helps them to associate that content well and it really helps the AI engines to be clear about their att- [00:42:00] intent. So it's very common right now that we're seeing with our customers a lot of content where it's like, oh, let's answer absolutely everything about this particular topic on one piece of content, and it might be, like, 2,500 words.

Here, this is something that we really recommend focusing on one topic, one page where possible and making things clear with headings. So something that

we would recommend reviewing at least quarterly so that way you can show that you are answering questions very clearly. And then finally, content freshness.

So this one's pretty clear. Is your content up to date? This helps, you know, reduce the burden on users using assistive technologies to understand whether this content is still reliable and they don't have to, like, search around for a publication date. And from an AI perspective, it shows this is definitely something we want to then focus on.

This one, this type of review cadence is really going to depend on the content type. So monthly for anything regulatory or statistic heavy, um, but annually for your evergreen [00:43:00] content. So what is... As we kind of recap here, the thing I want to leave you... Oops. I jumped one slide ahead. But the thing I wanna leave you with here is that structure is what makes your content parsable.

Meaning helps to make it interpretable, and clarity helps to make it operable. So that's really what we want you to think about. As we mentioned, all of this, you know, all of these really go hand in hand. And then as a little bonus, we do have, um, two, um, different types of readiness or maturity, um, scores.

So if you think, like, accessibility is something you wanna check in on for one of your clients, for example, um, or a website that you directly are influencing, um, you can check out f- um, that QR code for your accessibility maturity. Um, and if you wanna see what's your answer engine readiness score for, again, another website that you might touch, um, we have that QR code as well.

So with that's pretty much all of our content, and I think it's now time for Q&A. [00:44:00] We'll keep this, um, slide up here for a little bit.

[00:44:02] **Hannah Smith:** Yeah. I was gonna say, please do keep that up 'cause I'm sure lots of people would like to play with those tools. I would like to play with those tools. I'm gonna have a go too.

Um, thank you so much. That was brilliant. So, so, so interesting, so thorough, so deep. Loved it. Um, we have a bunch of questions, so I'm just gonna go straight to them 'cause I'd like to make sure that we answer as many as we can. Mm-hmm. Um, we have a question from Katie who asks, "Can AI machines and assistive technologies understand the meaning behind things like bold and italic text?"

[00:44:37] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah. That's a great question. If it's properly done, yes. Um, so if you are using, like, proper HTML, um, and it says, like, bold or, like, what is it, B? Yeah. Yes. It is able to pick up on that. So absolutely.

[00:44:50] **Hannah Smith:** Amazing. Really interesting. Laura asks "At what point do you engage a screen reader in your pages?"[00:45:00]

[00:45:00] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah. With Siteimprove we're looking at we're testing out our content on a regular basis. We have an, a team that literally uses screen readers. Kacie, I don't know if you have any recommendations when, you know, you're talking to customers when they might engage on, like, manual testing.

[00:45:16] **Kacie Emeigh:** I really think it comes down to the readiness of the organization.

I always say there's a, a walk/run approach, or there's just that run approach of when you're ready to embed accessibility, because to be fully compliant, you still have to have that manual testing component. Mm-hmm. It's just do we wanna start with automation and add in manual later, or kind of gear all up at one point.

So, I don't think it's a question as to when. I think at any time it's important. It's just- Mm ... up to the organization when you're ready to. But earlier- Mm ... always the better.

[00:45:50] **Hannah Smith:** Yeah. Strong agree. Strong agree with that. And I imagine it's really revealing, like actually just using these technologies.

You... [00:46:00] And you're then experiencing it as someone who is using these technologies. I bet you suddenly go, "Oh, no. This, my beautiful website is horrible." I imagine it's really revealing. Really. Um-

[00:46:14] **Diane Kulseth:** We've, we've actually had that at Siteimprove. We've had our designers create some, like, really gorgeous websites, and then our accessibility team comes in and they...

And I'm, I'm feeling bad 'cause Rinnie's on our marketing team, so she's definitely dealt with this, where it's like marketing creates this beautiful thing, and then our accessibility team comes in and they're like, "Well, actually- Actually ... you need to do this and this." And they're like, "Why?" And they're like, "Because it's actually helpful for our visitors."

[00:46:40] **Kacie Emeigh:** It's one of those, too, when you actually hear the screen reader giving the- Mm ... input of what it sounds like. When you hear it for about a minute, you're going to go back and say, "I'm never gonna make this problem again." Yeah. Because if my head hurts, you can only imagine. So they're very- Yeah ... impactful use cases.

[00:46:55] **Hannah Smith:** Yeah. Definitely. Another question from Katie. Do the machines [00:47:00] read a page from top to bottom like a human? Do they look at it all in one go? Do they hop from heading to heading? How does that work?

[00:47:08] **Diane Kulseth:** That's such a good question. I mean, sometimes it's the document object model, like really- Yeah

how that's bringing it up. Kacie, anything you wanna add? I saw you nodding along, so...

[00:47:17] **Kacie Emeigh:** It's really going to be based off of how you have that structured in a lot of within the DOM. So it's really important to make sure you have the proper headings, aren't having those missing so that it can read it properly, because in most cases it's going to take it from that order.

Yeah.

[00:47:31] **Hannah Smith:** Okay. Cool. Thank you. Um, I have an anonymous question. Can you expand on how internal links- Mm-hmm ... positively impacts AI visibility? Like, so what's the, what... Yeah. What's the deal with AI visibility and internal links?

[00:47:47] **Diane Kulseth:** Absolutely. Yeah, and I see they're also saying, like, linking via node instead of URL.

Yeah. Um, you know, the key thing here is that you want to make sure that, you know, it's very clean and that link is very accessible so that way you're showing the [00:48:00] relation of content to one another. Mm-hmm. Um, especially if you're building out any sort of, like, content clusters. So if you're talking about, like for example, Siteimprove, we talk about accessibility a lot, so we have, like, our c- core accessibility page, we have blog posts on accessibility, accessibility checkers.

We wanna make sure that those are all linked together so that way our visitors know, hey, we are talking a lot about accessibility. Here's some other resources

that may be beneficial to you. But then from that AI perspective, as- these engines, like we'll say ChatGPT, for example, is learning more about Siteimprove and they're ingesting information about Siteimprove from their, you know, topic retrieval.

They're able to understand, okay, Siteimprove is talking a lot about accessibility, and here's some other resources that we may wish to retrieve if someone's asking about, a very particular accessibility need.

[00:48:49] **Hannah Smith:** Yeah. Fantastic answer. Thank you. I have a question from Sarah. Sarah asks, "Do you have a recommended, like, word or character limit for regular pages [00:49:00] and article pages, or, like, a maximum?"

Um- Mm-hmm ... I feel like this is a question that people ask a lot, so I'm really glad. Thanks for asking this, Sarah.

[00:49:09] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah, and I see it's... There's also the very next question is also, "Do you have any recommendations around content length?" So- Yeah,

[00:49:14] **Hannah Smith:** it's the perpetual question, isn't it?

[00:49:17] **Diane Kulseth:** Yeah. So common. Um, I know, like, within Siteimprove, like, what we are doing is we're encouraging our customers.

We have what we call, like, our SERP x-ray, so search engine results page x-ray. And this is not meant to be, like, a plug for Siteimprove, but, like, where it looks at, here are, like, the top 20, um, websites ranking for this particular term, and here's what that average length is.

[00:49:37] **Hannah Smith:** Mm-hmm.

[00:49:37] **Diane Kulseth:** Um, because it really does vary based off of each type of content.

If you're asking about, you know, what's the impact on, you know, this latest medical research, the search engines and the AI engines are really gonna be looking for something very thorough. You know, they're probably looking at, thousands of words, if not more. If it's something around, what time is the next, you know, World Cup match, you know, you're probably looking for, like, [00:50:00] a very small piece of content.

Sorry, Areej, I know that's a sore spot. Also a sore spot for those of us in the States. Um, I know Areej is going, "Here we go." But yeah. So I mean, it really is going to vary. So- Mm ... if you don't have a tool take a look at, you know, start asking, like, both your, you know, large language models and your search engines, you know, what that particular query is, and starting to look at, okay, what is ranking top, what is being cited, and how often.

Like- Mm ... is it, 300 words versus several thousand words?

[00:50:31] **Hannah Smith:** And I guess, like, a- and, you know, to your point, like, how long does the content need to be useful? Do you know what I mean? Like, you mentioned earlier in your talk about semantic landmarks where you're like, "Jump, jump into the good stuff," essentially- Yeah

is how I think about semantic landmarks. And it's like, yeah, like, even, even if a particularly long page is ranking, is the bit that's being cited very, very small question. Mm-hmm. Do you know what I mean? Like, there might be some other ways of, uh, thinking about this too, I'm [00:51:00] sure. Um, Laura- Well, and

[00:51:01] **Diane Kulseth:** also...

Whoops, sorry. You're all

[00:51:03] **Hannah Smith:** right. No, go.

[00:51:03] **Diane Kulseth:** We're also in the game of we- we're citing passages now instead of- Yeah ... pages. You know, in the past it was we're ranking pages, and now we're citing passages. Mm-hmm. So it's really making sure, like, if you're looking primarily at AI, you wanna make sure, like, okay, whatever that particular passage is, it's got a clear heading, it's got a clear answer to the question.

Everything's well-cited in terms of, you know, if you're the best university in town, do you have a third party saying that as well? Yes. Yes, definitely. Um, Laura asks, and I love this question as well. Honestly, such good questions today. "What's the strongest argument that you've used to get accessibility work prioritized?

[00:51:42] **Hannah Smith:** For example, when the business case for SEO alone wasn't enough." Like, obviously we w- we all wish that, uh, accessibility work

was prioritized just because it's important, but have you used any other arguments to push things through?

[00:51:57] **Kacie Emeigh:** Yeah, I think when you take the word [00:52:00] compliance out of it and go more towards that user experience value- Mm-hmm

'cause it benefits more than just having a compliant website. Like we were talking through earlier, it makes your audience broaden, it's allowing more individuals to have access to your content, to your site, drive conversions. So I think there's a multitude of different levers almost that you could look through, whether that is just general traffic, organic search results because of using alternative texts and those types of examples.

So a lot of analytic values, I believe, are going to be skewed once accessibility is starting to be put in place, and just monitoring that over time and saying, "Hey, now that we've made one of our landing pages more accessible, we're now starting to see traffic increase 5% this month," or whatever the case is.

So I think it's when you take that compliance word out of the picture and you go more user experience- ... that's ultimately what's going to get people more attention driven to the project because user [00:53:00] experience then drives conversions, drives traffic- Yeah,

[00:53:02] **Hannah Smith:** talk money ... talk every- Talk money to me.

Talk money to me, always.

[00:53:06] **Diane Kulseth:** Well, and I see Renny brings up, too, like, you know, in the chat, like, when you hear customers' experiences with inaccessible content, you definitely start taking into account... I went on site with a very large customer here in the United States, um, very large agricultural brand that a lot of folks here would know.

They actually brought someone in, um, they found someone, you know, not really to site improve at all, they just hired someone to come in who was using assistive technologies, he was blind, and he tried to make a purchase of one of their w- like, primary products, and they were like, "Wow." When we actually saw, like, just how much he struggled to actually do one of, like, the most core foundational pieces on our website, they're like, "It was a no-brainer."

We saw, like, okay, if this is what other folks are dealing with every single time, how much money are we missing out on here? Right. So sometimes being able to get that real-life experience is so important. [00:54:00]

[00:54:00] **Hannah Smith:** Exactly. We are about to run out of time, I'm afraid. I wonder if I might be cheeky. Could I, um, send these questions to you and maybe you could drop me a, a quick couple of responses?

We are out of time. Mm-hmm. Um, thank you so much for this presentation and for the fantastic answers to, um, all the questions we've managed to get through. I'm so sorry if we didn't manage to get to your question, but I will... i'll send them on to Diane and Kacie and, and uh, I'm, I'm sure they'll be able to, like, drop us a couple of notes or thoughts.

That would be amazing. Thank you so, so much to both D- Diane and Kacie for sharing their knowledge with us and giving us this framework, which yeah I think is an incredible way of thinking about this stuff. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. And, um, thank you all attendees for attending, for your wonderful questions, for your thoughts that you shared in the chat.

Please do go and, um, [00:55:00] give the tools a try that Diane shared QR codes for. Let us know how you get on. I'm excited to have a play with those. Yeah, and w- we will see you next time. Thank you so much.

[00:55:10] **Kacie Emeigh:** Thanks, everyone. Thanks, everybody.