

Neurodiversity Unleashed: Transforming Accessibility for a Richer, Inclusive Experience with Erin Perkins (she/her)

I'm Erin Perkins, and I would love to introduce myself. I am a deafblind person. Basically, I can hear with the help of my hearing aid and cochlear implant. Without them, I'm profoundly deaf. I have no peripheral vision, so I can only see about 50 degrees around.

I am the CEO of Mabely Q. With that company, I am an accessibility educator and I am a disability advocate and speaker. I also am the founder of the platform membership called Successful.

I would like to also begin with a description of what I look like. I am a white female with shin length, dirty blonde hair with a side shave on my right side. I'm wearing a black loop around my neck that is basically my headphone, and that is about it.

Here's what we're talking about today

We'll talk about the business benefits of being neurodiverse.

We'll also talk about the accommodation and technology, and then we'll go into making your business accessible and making your offers accessible. You might think they go hand in hand, which they do, but they also have quite a bit of distinction.

I also want you to share the love and educate others.

Making Businesses More Accessible for the Neurodiverse Individual

It's really important for all of us to know that we have unique brains and recognize the wealth of cognitive diversity in our society.

All of this is very essential to creating a welcoming and inclusive business, so whether you are an owner that is neurodiverse, or whether somebody, one of your clients, is neurodiverse as well. We want to take those two things into account.

Business Benefits to Being Neurodiverse

There's definitely business benefits to being neurodiverse.

1. Unique perspective

Neurodiverse individuals often have unique ways of creative thinking and problem-solving, which means that you can bring a fresh perspective and innovative idea to your business that other businesses may not have considered otherwise.

2. Increased Empathy and Understanding

Neurodiverse individuals often have a deep sense of empathy and understanding for others who may be struggling or face challenges. This will often create a more compassionate and inclusive workplace culture that values diversity and supports all contractors, other businesses, your employees, or even your clients.

When your client reaches out and they say, "I have this issue," you definitely have a deeper understanding.

3. Enhanced Problem Solving

Neurodiverse individuals have the ability to approach problems in a unique way which can lead to more effective and efficient problem-solving. This will help you, as a business owner, overcome these challenges and find innovative solutions to complex issues.

Accommodations and Technology

Let's talk about some accommodation and technology that you can do for yourself as a business owner and really just think about it. I know one of the challenges can be thinking, "but everybody else does things a certain way".

I want you to get out of your own head and develop something and create something that works for you because I think that's really important for you to be able to formulate something, a system, and rely on accommodation and technology that works best for you.

Not everything is going to work well for everybody, so definitely experiment. For me, I work best with not being able to hear everything. If I have my hearing aids on, I can hear my husband, things outside beeping. I can't focus because I don't know how to filter out sound. I just take off my hearing aids.

1. Sensory Accommodation

These can be noise-canceling headphones, adjustable lighting, or ergonomic furniture that can help you stay focused and comfortable.

Some of the things that I like to talk about is the sit stander. These are great because I can adjust it to sit or stand because if you might be fidgety.

Another thing I've seen very common that a lot of people have been buying into are the walking pads. A walking pad might help you keep your emotions going and get that fidgety out of your system.

2. Assistive Technology

There's a lot of assistive technologies such as screen readers and other talking software that can provide audio feedback. This helps individuals who struggle with reading, writing, or communication.

We can think about how I rely on my watch to basically alert me to certain things. For other people, you can have Siri or Alexa, or Google Home. You can have all of those just to help you get through things.

You can also use screen readers on your Chrome profile and have it read aloud things to you. You don't always have to read things if you don't pick up things well by reading. If you'd rather listen, then lean on the audio aspect to make it work for you.

3. Time Management Tools

A digital calendar, task list, or a productivity app can help you stay organized and on-task.

For example, I have to have my watch set every day to remind me to take my dog out for a walk. If you know that you can get in a zone and forget about eating, use technology to tell you, "Hey, you need to go take a walk."

Build in those breaks in your calendar. Build in certain things.

You don't have to work from 8:00 to 5:00. This is your business. Work on a schedule that works best for you. I mainly work from 10:00 to 6:00 most days. That's also not to say I'm at my desk from 10:00 to 6:00 every single day. There are some days where I might not even start till one o'clock and just work until four o'clock because that's what works for me.

4. Communication Tools

There's video conferencing software, instant messaging, and email. It can help you with face-to-face communication or social interaction.

Some people might prefer not to have video conferencing software like Zoom or Google Meet because if you need to meet with a client, and a client gets social anxiety from meeting a new person virtually, maybe you just chat through email or just do a phone call.

I also want to encourage you to keep in mind, you need to give your clients options as to how they want to communicate. I always prefer to meet someone face-to-face, visually, so that I can see them and understand what they're saying and also be able to pick up their facial expression because I'm not able to pick up things as well if I were on the phone with somebody. It's thinking about those things.

5. Flexible Workspaces

You can design and designate a quiet, sensory-friendly workspace. You also might have to consider that if your home is a space of distraction, that you might need to go to a co-working space, or you thrive better by working at a coffee shop. Think about what type of environment works best for you.

6. Mindfulness Apps

Meditation, breathing exercises can help you manage stress, anxiety, or sensory overload.

By utilizing all the different accommodations or technology, you can really be able to optimize your productivity and creativity while also reducing and minimizing your stress and sensory overload. That's just a general thing for you as a business owner.

Making Your Business Accessible to Yourself

Now, what can we do to make your business accessible? When you prioritize accessibility and inclusion, you can create a more diverse and inclusive business that celebrates the unique strengths and perspectives of all individuals.

Know Your Routine and Flows

I want to encourage you to know your routine and flows. You need to evaluate what is the best routine for yourself and use that to make a plan.

Here are some questions that might help you.

1. When do you feel most energized and focused during the day?
2. Am I more productive working alone or do I thrive in a collaborative environment?
3. How do I manage distractions and what strategies work best for me?
4. Do I need breaks throughout the day to maintain my focus and energy levels?

I think a lot of this can actually apply to any business owner. I would take a week, maybe even a month, and just figure out what the answers are to these questions.

Once you figure that out and you know the answer, you should be able to establish your hours and work towards setting up a system of how you work.

For instance, it took me a while to get to the point where I feel like I work best from 10:00 to 6:00, but there are times where I'm like, "I need to deal with distractions. I need nobody to email me and I work best from nine o'clock at night to midnight." Bad habit but it means that I get so much more done, but I am not sending emails during that time. I schedule those emails.

This leads me to the next actionable tip.

Give Yourself Grace

Recognize that you are human and you are allowed to make mistakes. Learn from them and prioritize self-care and well-being. Even when the demands of running a business can be overwhelming, I want you to:

1. Practice self-compassion.

Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you will offer a friend, another peer, and remember that making mistakes is a natural process, a natural part of the learning process. Try not to be too hard on yourself when things don't go as planned.

I didn't realize that I had set my Zapier app for this summit, and I had started it up incorrectly. I wasn't hard on myself because I was like, "Oh, good thing I caught this before the summit started so now it's set up correctly."

2. Set realistic expectations.

Recognize your own limitations and expectations for yourself and your business.

There might be a time where you'll be like, "Oh, but I want to take everything on at once." It's so easy because maybe you have this money mindset of scarcity. Don't take on too much at once. Prioritize the most important task to avoid feeling overwhelmed or burned out.

3. Prioritize self-care.

Make time for self-care activities that help you reduce stress, recharge, exercise, meditation, spend time in nature. When you prioritize your own well-being, you'll be better equipped to handle the demand of running a business and avoid burnout.

I take my dog for a walk on a regular basis. Every quarter or twice a year, I go get my hair done and I'm like, "I'm going to sit here and just chill." For you, it might look like going and just reading a book or it might just be like, "I'm just going to lay outside and do not a thing." Self-care looks different in every aspect, in every person.

4. Celebrate your successes.

Take the time to acknowledge and celebrate your successes no matter how small they may seem. Recognize the hard work and effort that went into achieving your goal and allow yourself to feel proud of your accomplishments.

One of the things I like to celebrate is like, "Oh yes, I got an email out." Writing an email where I actually was able to create a whole email sequence with appropriate callout, call to action and celebrate that. Celebrate the little stuff.

This will take us into the next step.

Find Your Container of Support

I want to encourage you to seek out support from network groups, cohorts, memberships, coaches. It's really important to surround yourself with people who understand and support you for who you are. They can look different to everyone.

It can be a network group that meets once a month or every quarter or a cohort that is run by a coach that has you working towards something in your business. You can find membership groups to be part of.

- 1. Start by asking what groups your peers are involved with.**
- 2. Try them out.**

Do not feel like you have to stick with the first group of people you meet. The reason why I would like to share is because when I first started my business, owning your own business is lonely. You got to find your people because you still need people to bounce ideas off of or just to vent or whatnot.

- a. Attend as many different groups as possible.
- b. Join different Slack channels.
- c. Join just to try to find my people.

There were some that right away I was like, "No, not my people. I'm backing out of that room," and then there's others that I'm like, "Oh, they sound amazing." Started out amazing but then that group died out and I was like, "All right, okay." There were like four of us that still stuck together. We were able to continue keeping our momentum going on our own.

- 3. Find your people. Lean on them for support.**
 - a. Attend the co-working sessions.

- b. Ask anything
- c. Do not feel like you have to reinvent the wheel.

Owning a business can be lonely and stressful, but it doesn't have to be. Be a part of something that allows you to thrive and be who you need to be.

Making Your Offers Accessible

We talked about our business, but now we're going to talk about your offers. There's a lot of things that people do not think about.

Your Sales Page and Frequently Asked Questions

I want you to make sure that your 'Sales' page is easy for someone to understand what it is you are offering. You also want to make sure that you include a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) on your 'Sales' page.

I have seen so many 'Sales' pages that do not even have a FAQ and I'm like, "Well, they've already lost a buyer in me because how do I reach out to know if you have accommodation for me?" Within the frequently asked questions, you always want to have a question related to accommodations.

I want to encourage you to share what you are able to offer within your budget. Usually, I feel like the number one thing is you can say that all the video and presentation captions will be available.

If you are able to offer more than just that, say it. Mention it. If you are not sure of what you can offer, have your client, your attendee, reach out to you with a specific request. They can email you and say, "Hey, I have this request. Will you be able to do blah-blah-blah?"

Sometimes you might not know what your audience needs and for you to open that door and say, "Please come to me and tell me what you need, and let's work together to make this happen."

Visual Noise

Cluttered website and social media posts lead to so much frustration from a user if a site is crammed with video, images, and pretty heading. Keep your layout simple and easy for the user to navigate. Content needs to be easily digestible. This number one piece, bite-sized pieces, is necessary.

Transcripts should always be edited and broken down into smaller blocks versus walls of text. I've seen so many transcripts at this point in my life that I would say 80% of them I never finished because it's literally a block of text. It's not broken down so that it's consumable. Like I say, you would want to keep it between two to four

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sentences per paragraph up to where it makes sense. This allows for the user to quickly scan and understand what they're looking at.

Time Limits

If you have established a time limit on your website or your form, think about extending the time limit to give more flexibility.

The same thing applies to fast-action offers. If you launch something, and you put a timeframe of 15 minutes or 24 hours, you will want to consider the following. When you have a time limit, it can actually create additional stress and anxiety which makes it difficult to complete the task efficiently and accurately.

I will say there have been many times where I've wanting to participate in something but I couldn't because I didn't have the full depth of information which is why it's important to keep everything super clear, bite-sized pieces, have these answered in the 'Frequently Asked Questions' and if someone had asked something based on their accommodation, you should honor that fast-action price to a bonus or whatever you get.

Share the Love and Educate Others

As a business owner, this is what you can do to educate your own peers. This is what I want you to understand, if it's not a part of your business and it's not part of your core being, it's just who you are and you don't want to share your experiences, do not feel obligated to do so. It is necessary to at least communicate and advocate for your needs and accommodation.

For instance, if someone had created a course that is all tech and for you, you need the audio part of it because that's how you learn, you can **mention that to them**, say, "Look, the way I learn is better for me to hear by audio," but you can use the screen reader as long as the screen reader works with that technology.

If you are comfortable, **share your experiences**. It can help your peers understand what it's like to be neurodiverse. It will also help reduce stigma and promote understanding and inclusion.

If you have resources, **share educational resources** like articles, videos, books, even social media posts, anything that explains the strength and needs of what you have as a being, this can help others learn more about neurodiverse conditions and how best to support those individuals.

If it's part of your platform, **start hosting workshops or training sessions** for your team or your colleagues to help provide them with more in-depth knowledge and strategies for how to promote and support neurodiverse individuals in your environment.

Always, always, always **advocate for accommodation**. If there are accommodations that can help you to succeed in your business, advocate for it.

Foster a culture of inclusivity. I want you to also think about creating a culture that welcomes and values diversity, inclusivity, and equity.

By educating your peers, you can really create a more inclusive and supportive business environment that really benefits everybody, because the more people learn from you and they're like, "Oh wait, maybe my sales page is too cluttered," they can clean it up and shrink it down and just make it a little easier.

Progress Not Perfection

I always want to say it's about progress not perfection. The reason why I say this is because you are never going to get anything right on the first try, and you will wait until you get it perfect.

You might be waiting a very long time.

With that said, I have a free [Social Media Accessibility Scorecard](#) for you to download and this will help you be able to create a more accessible platform on whatever social media platform you're on.

All these tips were for any social media platform and I feel like you can use a lot of these tips and apply it to your business as well.

Please download it and let me know what it's like. How do you like this scorecard?

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I can't wait to see you on the inside.