



Interview with Debra Ruh Founder and CEO, TecAccess

[Announcer] This podcast was presented by the NTAR Leadership Center, helping state leaders help adults with disabilities to employment and better economic opportunities through collaboration, innovation, and change.

[Laurie Harrington] Welcome to Lead.State.Gov, a feature podcast of the NTAR Leadership Center. I'm your host, Laurie Harrington. Debra Ruh is the founder and CEO of TecAccess, the leading provider of accessible information and communication technologies for the world's largest and fastest growing minority group, people with disabilities, baby boomers, and veteran's with disabilities. Debra created TecAccess in 2001, she has grown the organization into a profitable, multi-million dollar company, and it is the most awarded provider of professional internet communication and technology accessibility, testing, training, and remediation. Known for creating targeting and cost effective solutions that impact an organizations bottom line, TecAccess has proven a measurable business value of reaching this untapped demographic. By making your business vehicle fully accessible and usable to all, TecAccess effectively turns what could potentially be a lethal pitfall into a marketplace advantage. Thank you for being with us today, Debra. Why is website accessibility so important?

[Debra Ruh] What accessibility is, it's really important for a lot of reasons. When an organization builds a website, they are building that website to provide information that provides maybe information on their services, or your products, or you know, how you are going to, or maybe data for people, I mean, there's a lot of different reasons to build a website, but websites are built so that people can access data, and so depending who you are, say that you are an agency, state and local, federal agency, well citizens need to get access to that information. If you were a - a company, a corporation, a Dell, a Target, or Walmart, you're building, you are putting that information out on that website because you want your clients, your customers, your employees, so - if that information, no matter what that information is, you know, a checking account, a, you know, just being able to purchase something, if it is not accessible to everyone, then you are going to miss out on an opportunity to sell your services, to provide data to customers, clients, citizens, and so by that information not being accessible you leave out on quite a few people, not only people with disabilities, but people that are aging that are having accessibilities issues. If they age, people that were English might not be their first language, and it also can impact your usability of your website. So, it's important because that information that you are putting on the website that was important enough to create, you need to make sure that it is accessibility to anybody who needs or wants to get access to that information.

[Laurie Harrington] What can our listeners do to ensure that their work products and websites are accessible to the greatest number of people?

[Debra Ruh] Well, the best thing to do to make sure your website is accessible to the widest audience possible, is to make sure that when you're building your website, that you are following the rules that are out there. That, you know, it doesn't matter if you are following section 508, the Rehabilitation Act, if you are following that as a guideline, or you are following WCAG, you



know 1-0 or 2-0, we recommend right now look at 2-0, because section 508 is being refreshed and it's going to harmonize with that, but, so you decide for your organization which policies, which legislation you are going to follow, and then not only do you consider right then when you are building or you are maintaining that website, but you put it into your policies. Whenever you are building a website, most organizations will create authoring guides, style guides, and actual policies and procedures on that website's going to be built and maintained, and so if you take accessibility and you put it in as a policy process level, then accessibility becomes part of the lifecycle of that website. Lifecycle as I'm building it, I'm maintaining it, I'm adding to it, and it's become just one of the things that you have to do to make sure that the website is, you know, everything that it can be. Whenever you are building a website you want your logo look a certain way, you don't just say oh you can put that logo out there however you want. You know I think that logo looks better in blue. No, I like it in red. No, you have policies that you follow, so if you take and you make it accessibility to just part of the process and you train your developers ongoing, it then, it's not that big of a deal to keep it updated and fully accessible to the largest possible audience.

[Laurie Harrington] What advice would you give to a department or organization that wants to improve accessibility? Are there specific organizations or websites that they should visit?

[Debra Ruh] You know, that is a great question. Of course, anytime you have to retrofit anything, whether you retrofit an office space or a bathroom for the Americans with Disabilities Act, or you retrofit a website, or a pdf document, or an e-learning courses, it is always going to be more expensive, but there are so many places that you can go and get support. You can go to companies like TecAccess, which that's what we do for a living. You know, we help organizations make sure that their websites and all their other technology is fully accessible and as far as websites, the entire website too. A lot of organizations forget that like your HR systems, your HR online systems, when you go and put a resume in, that has to be accessible too and any documents, or links or anything that when I'm jumping to different places, all of them have to be accessible. But there are a lot of ways you can do it, you can, there are a lot of universities doing this. You can go to www.section508.gov, they have about 9 different free training courses out there that you can use. You can go to, you can go to the US Access Board, which is www.access-board.gov, or access-board.gov, you can search on the internet, there are different free classes out there, webinars, there are so many ways that you can get information. You can go to WCAG and they have free information, WebAim has information, so there is not a lack of data out there, I think sometimes it's overwhelming because there is so much data out there and, and to be honest, sometimes the data sort of conflicts with each other, so it sort of depends on the organization. That's why a lot of organizations will come to a company like TecAccess to sort of hold their hands as they walk down the process, but there's a lot that don't do that, and there's a lot of universities, including Rutgers, that are stepping and saying listen we can help you with this. Let's make this part of the curriculum, we are out there teaching people to be web developers, why don't we start imbedding how to make websites accessible and into the curriculum and we are starting to see that happen as well.

[Laurie Harrington] Are there certain challenges that are common to many organizations as they try to become more accessible? And if so, what are some ways to address these challenges?



[Debra Ruh] I would think that the greatest challenge is that it just seems overwhelming. You know, you take a look at a really large website we've worked with clients that have websites that were millions plus pages and the content is constantly changing. And I would say most people just feel overwhelmed by you know, the project, how big it is going to be, and okay I am going to do all this effort and then it is just going to get kicked out of compliance the second somebody adds some data, so we see people just getting overwhelmed by where to begin and so a lot of times people will say well, I'm just not going to think about it today, I will think about it tomorrow. So, we see a lot of procrastination happening. So what we encourage is do it like anything else. You know you create a project plan, take it one step at a time, you know, do training, education yourself, update your policies and procedures, start working on the parts of your website, figure the most active, the ones that are getting the most hits, you know, so instead of looking at the million plus pages of your website for example, just look at the top ten pages of your website that are getting the most hits. We also recommend to clients, look at your risks. Where are your risks? Alright, your homepage is a risk. If you're bank, and say that you want us to be able to open up a checking account or savings account, well, not only is that a risk to you because the people cannot go in and sign up for your services, you're not going to sell your services so that's a risk. Also, there is a risk to your organization and the person with disabilities cannot successfully use your services because maybe they think that oh I guess you don't want my business, maybe they don't care about people with disabilities. There's a risk to your brand, but we always try to break it down into bite-sized pieces and say okay, where should we begin? And then we will follow the plan and then work through and then as you are success with each phase, you can expand it out to include other phases. But, most websites, I would say 99% are built templated, most people template their website, websites should, most of the time are used for branding purposes you are going to want them to look very consistent, the design all the way through, so if you include the accessibility into the templated design, you are going to have more success of not only making it accessible, but keeping it accessible, so I would say the most common thing is that people get overwhelmed by all the pieces of it, including oh you mean all the pdf documents have to be accessible? And people just get overwhelmed by what they have to think about.

[Laurie Harrington] Thank you Debra Ruh. I've been speaking today with Debra Ruh, founder and CEO of TecAccess, the leading provider of information and communication technologies. This is Laurie Harrington, for Lead.Sate.Gov with the NTAR Leadership Center. For more information about the NTAR Leadership Center and its research activities, visit www.NTARcenter.org.

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