



## Transcript: IABC PodCatalyst Episode 51

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**Voiceover:** You're listening to PodCatalyst, the official podcast of IABC, where communicators from around the world tell their stories. Let's get started with today's episode.

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**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** Hi, I'm Matisse Hamel-Nellis, an accessible communications and PR consultant and founder and host of PR and Lates, and I think communication creates inclusion and breaks down barriers when it's accessible.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** Well hi, everyone, I'm Kristin Frankiewicz, content manager for IABC and your host for today's episode. This is another installment of In Under 10, where we break down comms trends and news in under 10 minutes. So Matisse, really excited to have you here. Thanks for joining us.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** So excited to be here today.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** So let's get into it. I wanna start with the basics. How are we defining digital accessibility? And why does it matter?

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** For sure. So digital accessibility essentially means ensuring that everyone, including people with disabilities, can easily use and benefit your digital content and using their technology. Whether that's a website, document, social media videos, images or even a podcast, it matters because it breaks down barriers to information and communication which opens up the world of opportunities for inclusion, engagement, and of course, innovation

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** Great. I know, as we were kind of preparing for this conversation together. You know you brought to light. There's some interesting headlines. Case studies out there. Can you tell me a little bit more some examples of where organizations have maybe made those headlines or made that misstep over not maintaining digital accessibility standards

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** For sure. So an area where organizations tend to get themselves into a little bit about water. I'm gonna use that lightly. A little bit comes when it comes to their website. It's being inaccessible. So when websites are overlooked from a digital accessibility perspective and the standards aren't being met.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** Organizations tend to face a lot of backlash. So, for example, major brands like Fenty, Domino's, and even Queen B, Beyonce, have faced legal action because their websites haven't been navigable by people with sight loss which highlights the importance of compliance.

Another example is a well-known university's website that was scrutinized for insufficient alternatives for visitors who had hearing loss, and this led to a public relations crisis of their own.



But these organizations and companies aren't alone. In the U.S., for example, plaintiffs have filed over 4,500 Federal and State-related ADA, or Americans with Disabilities Act related digital lawsuits. And that's 500 more than 2022. So when it comes to Digital accessibility, it's definitely coming more front and center as it comes to the importance of being not just digitally present, but also accessible for everybody.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** Yeah, I mean so much of what we do is online, right? So much. Our world is digital and, and, for brands and organizations, that website is really, you know, front page, the, the kind of door that that welcomes you in or any kind of digital presence these days.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** For sure. Exactly. It's our first stop now, right? You're not going to the store. You're going onto their website to learn more information. And what is in what was interesting is that an organization called Webbing did some research recently, and it found something around the lines of 72% of individuals with disabilities when they access an inaccessible website will leave the website and not return and tell their friends and family to not go back either.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** So it, it, boils down to doing what is right in on one on one hand, and good business sense. Exactly. Exactly. Why would you, intentionally or unintentionally alienate what is considered the world's largest minority group, which is the disability community at over a billion people by simply not having accessible content or an accessible website. Yeah.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** So I wanna talk about the role of communicators here, right? That's, that's, why we're, we're, tuned in. So what can communicators do to ensure their organization? Stay compliant.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** So as communicators, we sort of lead the charge, if you will. We need to stay, educated ourselves on the latest accessibility guidelines and requirements. Now each country and region has its own legislation and requirements. I, for one, am based in Ontario, Canada. So I have to ensure I'm meeting the accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, or the AODA, plus the accessible Canada Act.

But if I'm working with clients or organizations from other countries, or even another province here in Canada, I need to ensure that I'm also creating content that abides by their regulations, too.

Right? So it's a big undertaking. But knowing your clients are, and ensuring that you are aware of what the accessibility legislation is in their country or region is really key as communicators.

The next is from an organizational perspective, is leading the charge in helping perform regular audits of your organization's digital content, from your websites to your social media videos, intranet, you name it. If it's digital, let's audit it, right. Identify and address any of those accessibility gaps.

And then also provide training to all your staff on your team, and also throughout your organization on inclusive design and content creation. This is essential, because if it can't just



rely on one person to make something accessible, it's everybody's responsibility. So by providing that training you're ensuring, you're not just ensuring that your content is accessible. But you're also building the culture of accessibility throughout.

And finally, staying engaged with that disability community and providing them with an avenue to provide feedback to pro that leads you to ongoing efforts to maintain your accessibility and compliance status on your digital properties, because it's the same goes nothing for us without us.

So, assuming that you are making everything accessible. If the disability community says we didn't need that, we actually needed this, then you've missed the mark. So ensuring that you're incorporating that community in what you're doing to ensure that you're being accessible, not just compliant.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** Yeah. alright. Well, I wanna leave our listeners with something they can, you know, kind of take on as actionable or you know little bit of a starting point. So when it comes to understanding digital accessibility, what are just a few resources you would recommend for folks to get started?

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** For sure, this is one of my favorite questions. I have to say so. If you are somebody who is managing social media, [accessible-social.com](http://accessible-social.com) — accessible hyphen social dot com — is fantastic for all your social media accessibility questions. Alexa Heinrich has done a fantastic job pulling together resources around image descriptions or alt text how to properly use your Ca hashtags how to write your captions. All that fun jazz. It's a great one. Stop resource for social media.

Then, of course, there is the W3C. That host and oversee the web, content, accessibility, guidelines, or Wacag, or WCAG, something that we've all heard in some variation or another, but these are essentially the guidelines that dictate how to make your website accessible, whether it is level A, which is the basic, level AA, which tends to be the minimum that most legislation require or AAA, what does that mean to be fully accessible according to these guidelines. Then there's a great resource through the International association of accessibility professionals. They host webinars all the time on various topics in relation to digital accessibility, how to help build a business case and assisting your organizations and becoming more accessible and building that culture.

And then another resource I find just fascinating and so helpful all the time is LinkedIn.

If you look up the hashtag #a11y, which stands for accessibility, you'll find a bunch of great content creators who are posting information about digital accessibility tips, tricks, insights, and this community of accessibility professionals is always willing to answer questions and help people become more accessible in the content that they're creating.



International Association  
of Business Communicators

And of course, when you are starting out, or even if you're well versed in this stuff, you're still gonna ask questions, so don't be afraid to ask questions. Be curious and be open to learning more.

**Kristin Frankiewicz:** That's really great advice, and we'll make sure all of those are in the show notes of this episode. So if you're, you know, tuning in on your phone, you can scroll down through and click on to those links. So, Matisse, thank you so much for your time and your expertise and helping us learn a little bit more about digital accessibility today.

**Matisse Hamel-Nelis:** Thank you so much for having me.

**[Music begins]**

**Voiceover:** Thanks for listening to PodCatalyst, the official podcast of IABC. If you've enjoyed today's episode, please be sure to subscribe, rate and review. Have a suggestion for a future episode? Send us a note at [catalyst@iabc.com](mailto:catalyst@iabc.com). To discover all IABC has to offer, visit our website at [iabc.com](http://iabc.com). Until next time!

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