All In

Accessibility & Inclusion @ Telstra

Action plan highlights Telstra's accessibility journey

The launch of Telstra's eighth Accessibility Action Plan has provided customers and employees with renewed confidence in our efforts to be more inclusive in our work and service delivery.

The FY21 Accessibility Action Plan builds on the achievements of previous action plans, with a more practical focus to 'check in' on progress in developing accessible technologies, creating a diverse workforce, and delivering more inclusive customer experiences.

The plan identifies specific teams that own the delivery of each of its 27 priority actions and provides key measures of success against which to monitor their progress.

To underscore the importance of the plan, in the same week that it was formally launched CEO Andy Penn officially signed up to The Valuable 500 – a global movement that aims to get 500 of the world's largest businesses to commit to placing disability inclusion on their leadership agendas.

Jason Triolo, Senior Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist at Telstra, said COVID-19 has highlighted the communication challenges that people with a disability face. But he also believes the pandemic presents an unprecedented opportunity for change.

"More than any other event in recent history, COVID-19 has shown us the importance of looking after each other and making sure that none of us are left behind," said Jason. "If you look at the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, you can see that while digital inclusion is growing in some parts of Australia, in other parts progress has essentially stalled. The status quo needs to change."

[The 2020 Digital Inclusion Index](#), a joint effort from Telstra, RMIT University and Swinburne University's Centre for Social Impact, measures the impact of Internet access, affordability and digital proficiency on Australians' online participation.

Although Australia's digital inclusion score increased over the 2019 figure, the rate of growth has been slowing for the past two years – with inclusion scores in Victoria and the ACT essentially the same.

"We can see that millions of Australians are still missing out on the value of the internet, either because they cannot afford it or cannot access it," said Jason, "and unfortunately, people with disability are disproportionately affected."

Telstra's FY21 Accessibility Action Plan

"Telstra has already done much to bring down the cost of its services and to deliver internet coverage to remote and regional areas, and we aim to support greater inclusion by providing products, services, information and training that are genuinely accessible for people living with disability."

Jason Triolo

How designing the My Telstra app opened up a world of accessibility

There are small wins and big wins. And once in a while there are significant mindshifts, which can change the way an organisation works. This was the case with the development of the My Telstra app – the new digital interface that helps customers connect instantly with their Telstra services.
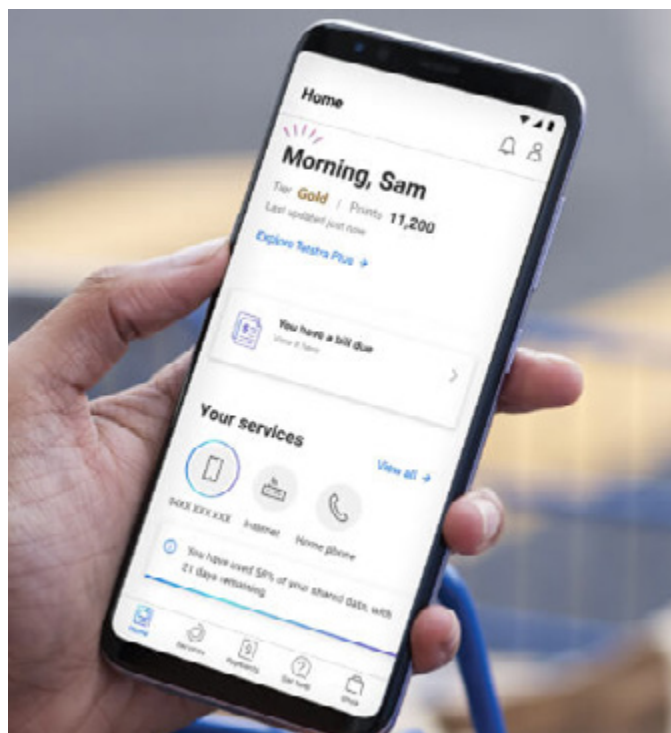
What began as an exercise to make the app easier to use for people with disability – and to align with the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) – wound up cementing a new link between the design, development, quality assurance and accessibility teams in Telstra Digital. More importantly it bolstered a broad realisation of the benefits of a truly inclusive and collaborative working culture.

This evolution began accelerating in late 2019, with the appointment of Sean Murphy as Telstra's first dedicated Digital Accessibility Manager. As well as providing a focal point for practical user perspectives, Sean and the Accessibility team have launched a program to train all Telstra Digital employees in accessibility, and a user experience (UX) pilot to find ways of 'road-testing' new products with people with different disabilities.

"Digital inclusion has long been important to our purpose to build a connected future where everyone can thrive," said Ben Pintos-Oliver, manager of Telstra's Digital Systems. "But our journey to build accessible products to international standards, with the right mix of policies, training and executive buy-in is gathering steam – thanks to the efforts of a number of passionate individuals who are pushing for a more formal approach."

A new app for a new age

The creation of the **My Telstra app** has driven home to product development teams the oft-quoted fact that making apps and websites more accessible for people with disability can actually create better user experiences for everyone.

In the run-up to the app's launch, a number of defects were identified and worked through to ensure all content would meet 30 distinct criteria outlined under WCAG version 2.1 (Level A). The journey of My Telstra – which is now being further refined to meet the standards of Level AA – has been "a massive learning curve" for Telstra Digital employees on the importance of building accessibility into every stage in the design and development process, Sean said. "My Telstra has certainly inspired a mindshift across our teams."

"As well as working more closely with our accessibility team, our designers and developers are committed to the idea of undertaking regular accessibility reviews on all major digital assets, as well as independent external audits to build in benchmarking on new projects," he added.

Prior to the launch of My Telstra in March 2020, developers faced significant challenges, with details on bills not being interpreted by screen readers and the bill history page proving difficult to navigate for people with limited mobility.

"By simplifying the bill information and adding a button for scrolling, you can move around and jump between the different months more easily," Sean explained. "This has made navigation easier for all users."

Ben Pintos-Oliver said the bill history refresh was an "a-ha moment" for collaboration between the development and accessibility teams.

"The teams used to work in a very siloed manner, but with this process they came together and worked around Sean to listen to the navigation voiceover – going through the old bill history bar-charts and seeing precisely why they weren't accessible to people using assistive technology".

The same was true with the Device Locator feature in My Telstra, where representatives from the accessibility and design system teams "leaned together" to provide support for those users with limited mobility to navigate the map easily, and those using screen readers by presenting the location information as text.

"We're in the middle of an important step change right now," Ben said.

> "To shift accessibility from a small group of specialists into an organisational mindset that will guide our work across the whole business. We're very excited about where this holistic new approach will take us – and what it will do for our customers."
>
> **Ben Pintos-Oliver**

For information on how to install and use the My Telstra app, visit: **telstra.com.au/support/ account-payment/ install-and-use-my-telstra-app**

TelstrAbility ERG puts accessibility at the centre of employees' lives

Amid all the uncertainty of the past few months, there is one thing we are happy to say for sure -- our TelstrAbility employee representative group (ERG) has continued to grow and evolve. Since the beginning of 2020, membership of the group has nearly doubled, with our monthly online meetings now attracting up to 50 employees. In July the group took a significant step when Michael Ackland, who heads the Consumer and Small Business team, began attending meetings as executive sponsor.

"Having Michael attend our meetings has made people realise that we have serious support from the leadership team, and given us all belief that change is possible," said Stacy Evans, who has been a champion for the ERG for the past year.

TelstrAbility meets monthly to discuss issues of accessibility and inclusion that touch the lives of its members. These may range from ways to make new apps and customer experiences more accessible, to employee channels for sharing information, to ideas for participating in events that promote awareness of the challenges facing people with disability.

Earlier this year the ERG established a series of 'work streams' for employees to share their passions and ideas for events and communications to support employees and customers living with disability. While still in their infancy, these streams have already produced a host of ideas – from livestreams and thought-provoking social media activities to accompany International Day of People with Disability on December 3rd (watch this space!), to frank 'frontline stories' from customers, and to videos featuring employees with disability sharing their stories.

COVID-19 deepens needs

Stacy Evans said the heavy impact of COVID-19 on people with disability has dramatically elevated the importance of accessibility across our operations – from our workplaces and recruitment practices, to public health information and all-important personal communications.

"The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the importance of digital technology in all our lives, but it's also underscored the importance of human connections, and reminded us how easily people living with disability, rural communities, elderly people and others can fall through the gaps when it comes to communication," Stacy said.

Michael Ackland clearly feels a deep personal commitment.

"It's critical during times like these that we focus on issues like true accessibility to ensure their importance isn't lost," he said. "I believe COVID-19 has actually led to an increased focus at Telstra on accessibility and inclusion, and particularly mental wellbeing during these difficult times."

While thanking the "passionate ability champions" at TelstrAbility for inviting him to be their sponsor, Michael said hard work lies ahead – and Telstra has a serious responsibility to the 4.4 million Australians who live with a disability.

"It's absolutely critical that Telstra leads in this space and doesn't just pay lip service to accessibility and inclusion," he said.

"As we move increasingly towards a digital future, people with disability play an important role in helping to create that future.

"We're determined to keep driving a shift in the people we have coming in the door at Telstra as we continue to attract, recruit and retain a diverse workforce. This in turn has meant that we are able to gain more insight into their skills and lived experiences, in order to make the experience better for our customers and to build our customer knowledge."

"The accessibility community is anchored to so many other marginalised demographics, and if we can get it right with them, we can get it right with all these other vulnerable groups as well."

Stacy Evans

If you are a Telstra employee and interested in more information about TelstrAbility or how to join, please email **! TelstrAbility**