



Westchester Publishing Services

Publishing Now Fall '22: The Impact of Accessibility and Sustainability on Your Business – Questions for Panel

Accessibility

Q: For Bill - can you recommend a reputed service/business that can provide a testing service for ePUBs to assess accessibility levels? We make the majority of our ePUBs in house and are still learning about standards mainly via online webinars and our own online research, but it would be good to get some detailed feedback from professionals.

A: This is a bit awkward for me to reply to because this is a service I provide as a consultant. But I am by no means alone. However, since you make a majority of your EPUBs in-house, your best resource is the DAISY Consortium and their [Ace by DAISY free software](#). It will give you very detailed feedback and guidance on how to fix the issues, linking to the DAISY Knowledge Base. Another good thing to do, when you feel you're getting pretty good at accessibility, is to apply for [Benetech's Global Certified Accessible](#) program. They will give you feedback on what issues need to be addressed in your EPUBs.

Q: For Bill – would it be reasonable to ask for feedback on your company's epub specs from the vendor with whom you're working to make sure both the vendor and the company are up-to-date?

A: Absolutely! Treat your vendor as a partner. It is likely, if you're with a good vendor, that they will know a lot about accessibility and can help you update your specs.

Q: Generally, big tables in Account titles have big images with data. if an author writes alt text and captures all the data points then it is really difficult to understand by a reader, in such situation how can we write alt text?

A: The solution is simply publishing the data as an HTML table with column headers and row headers marked up. Assistive technology is programmed to understand that and let the user navigate the table properly--thus eliminating the need for an elaborate extended description. (If you need to publish the table as an image for sighted user, the HTML table can be the extended description.)

Q: Related to accessibility, is it all at the document level or does it extend to the platform/device provider? Where the platform/device provider should build out tools in their platform to take advantage of the accessibility features built into the Epub?

A: Absolutely, the platforms and devices need to be accessible too! WCAG addresses all of that, not just the content itself. And the new [EPUB Reading Systems 3.3 spec](#) will be very helpful in this context as well.

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Accessibility – Continued

Q: I'm an accessibility consultant who also happens to be deaf, so I cannot speak into mic and need to type. I'm well familiar with digital accessibility and it's my job to teach my clients on this. However, I have questions about accessibility in publishing. One is about making Kindle accessible. I've seen enough info on how to make epub accessible, but nothing about Kindle. Kindle offers books in mobi format. Unless they started to accept epub? Second question is whether there's a program you can see how an ebook looks on different platforms? I have my epub pass tests by both epub checker and ACE accessibility checker. However, it looks different in Apple for example from Nook. I made my font left justified for example and disabled hyphenation in CSS. I'd like to use a program to see what an ebook looks in all platforms. Is there such a program?

A: Unfortunately, there isn't such a program. However, all of those retailers do want books to be submitted as EPUB 3--even Amazon, which then converts it into their various Kindle formats. Those big players--Apple, Amazon, Google, Kobo, etc.--are all working on accessibility, so stay tuned, improvements are on the horizon.

Q: For Bill – As a literary agent, how can we make manuscripts more accessible because it's usually a word doc or pdf and not an epub format, but making them more readable and functional for editors to review feels hugely necessary.

A: One thing most people don't realize is that the current versions of Word actually provide accessibility guidance. It's on the ribbon at the top of the screen. PDFs are harder to make fully accessible; it's best to go upstream to the Word file and get that accessible. This was a topic of a recent PW column by me.

Q: Which ebook is most popular - epub or mobi? Which platform is most popular for e-books? I don't like selling books on Amazon very much and try to avoid selling Kindle if possible.

A: Actually, Amazon is moving away from Mobi and now wants publishers to provide EPUB 3. While the resulting Kindle formats may not retain all the accessibility, they're working on that--as are all the other major ebook retailers. So, a good accessible EPUB 3 should be what you send to all of them, even though they convert it to their proprietary formats.

Q: Is DRM useful to protect your books?

A: In trade, DRM is usually applied by the retailer, not by the publisher. I don't know of any publishers that actually apply DRM to their content. The retailers need it to keep content within their "walled gardens." It is a somewhat vulnerable protection--DRM is commonly hacked, but it is still relied on in retail contexts.

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Accessibility – Continued

Q: Does DRM cause accessibility issues for screen readers?

A: Definitely! DRM will prevent assistive technology from working in many cases. Many people don't realize that it's perfectly legal to provide a book without DRM to qualified users. In colleges and universities, there are Disability Services Offices that act as the gatekeepers to make sure only qualified users get the DRM-free versions. Benetech does the same for the books they distribute to qualified users in Bookshare.

Q: Could speakers discuss current minimum accessibility standards/criteria in addition to fuller accessibility possibilities? For attendees who are beginning to improve ebook accessibility, we need to define reasonable improvement stages/targets and time frames. For a publisher that is just beginning to improve accessibility of ebooks and wants to do this in stages, what are suggested stages for implementation of features? Alt-text first? Alt-text + metadata? And then what?

Q: What are small steps I can take in my workflow right now to start futureproofing my books for accessibility?

A: The best resource is the new EPUB Accessibility 1.1 spec from the W3C. (We made sure that aligns with the new EU Accessibility Act, and vice-versa; so if you do that, you're good to go for the EU.) That doesn't prioritize some things over others, though; and most accessibility folks will resist doing that. However, I understand that from a practical point of view it's helpful to know where to start. Providing ebooks as EPUB 3 with proper HTML markup is fundamental, and most conversion and prepress vendors can do that. That ideally includes ARIA and DPUB-ARIA attributes that refine the inherent semantics of HTML (your vendor should know what those are). But first, making sure the heading structure is correct (hierarchical, no skipped levels) is important and also fundamental. So is making sure links have accessible labels, which isn't hard to do. If there are images, at a minimum they need alt text, which is a simple 150-250 character plain text description that does not repeat the caption. (Captions typically identify images; alt text `_describes_` the images.) Images that convey a lot of information need what's called Extended Descriptions; these are more of a project. Math should be MathML. If you have MathML for math you don't need extended descriptions of equations, and if you have proper HTML tables, with column headers and row headers tagged, you don't need extended descriptions for tables. Ideally, your EPUBs should have pagebreak markers (which document where the pages in a referenced print version occur), but those are often missing. Again, a good vendor will do that routinely. And the metadata is admittedly in early stages; while we have done some crosswalks between EPUB accessibility metadata and ONIX (and we're working on MARC), the reality is that retailers and libraries are not yet doing much, if anything, with that metadata.



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Sustainability

Q: What can publishers do to incentivize paper mills to produce great quality recycled paper? Are there complexities we should consider about whether we are using raw material stocks versus recycled stocks? Are any paper mills using responsible, complex forestry practices in sourcing lumber?

A: FSC certification is a good starting point: <https://bookchainproject.com/resources>

Q: If we're printing in Asia, specifically China, how can we check on and confirm fair labor practices?

A: I am unsure if it covers China, but please check out Book Chain Project
<https://bookchainproject.com/history>

Sales

Q: For NPD, regarding the Audio reporting, correct that PRH is the big 5 publisher NOT reporting audio sales?

A: Yes, that is correct. They are the only one of the big 5 not yet reporting.