Being an 'a11y': Increasing Accessibility in Born Digital Preservation

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Being an 'a11y'

- You will see a11y or #a11y.
- Pronounced ‘ally’.
- Abbreviation on Twitter for the word accessibility and accessibility ally.
For me, accessibility means that everyone, including people with disabilities, should have access to born digital material, whether online or in archival storage.
Born Digital Preservation

- Processing born digital files (ie: this PowerPoint), converting and/or migrating them into preservation/access files and then storing all files (ie: server, hard drive, etc.).

- This is long term preservation.
Do We Consider Accessibility in Born Digital Preservation?

- In the long term born digital preservation process, do we consider accessibility?
- Not yet.
Why Haven’t Archivists Worked on This Issue?

- It isn’t because we are mean, uncaring people!
- We care, despite what the cat thinks!
- Here is why I think we haven’t worked on it.
Online Access Has Been Around for 15+ Years

- We have provided online access to digital materials through websites, online exhibits, etc. since the late 90s.
- Accessibility guidelines and laws governing this online access have been on our radar since the late 90s.
- International accessibly guidelines, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 1.0/2.0, since 1999.
- Laws such as Section 508 for US govt. websites.
In contrast, preservation is relatively new for most archivists.

We are still grappling with many major preservation issues. Enough to make one scream!
Now is The Time!

- We have been trying to figure out so many issues with born digital preservation, that accessibility hasn’t even been considered.

- I want to change that!
Let’s Look At Accessibility & Born Digital Preservation

- I am focusing on one aspect.

- I am looking at whether we should be using the PDF/A format for our preservation file copies.

- For example, we convert an original PDF into PDF/A for our preservation copy.
The Question

- The question I am asking is:
- Can we increase accessibility by using PDF/UA instead of PDF/A?

Note: We are talking about PDF/UA-1.
PDF/UA Is Focused On Accessibility

- PDF/UA was created specifically for accessibility. UA=Universal Access.
- It is based on international website accessibility guidelines, WCAG 2.0.
PDF/UA Will Hold Up Over Time

- I believe that PDF/UA files may last longer and be 'better archived'.
- Why?
- They are designed to be strict, and this is what makes them so accessible.
- I equate this to archiving accessible websites.
- Accessible websites (with strict code/standardized code) are 'better archived', or more fully and accurately preserved, and thus hold up over time.
Library of Congress says:
“Since an unencrypted PDF document compliant with PDF/UA may also comply with requirements for PDF/A, files that conform to PDF/UA in addition to PDF/A are considered a preferred format for page-oriented content by the Library of Congress.”

(Library of Congress PDF/UA Formats Page)
The Problem With PDF/UA

- We can likely only use PDF/UA on textual documents.
- Digitized material (if not OCR’ed), images, videos, sound files, etc. are still problematic.
I need to do more testing to see whether PDF/UA can increase the accessibility of born digital materials that we are preserving for the long term.
Thank You

- Thank you for listening!
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