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A homogenous editorial team was tasked with creating a thoughtful cover about diversity. It was not a short phone call.

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A New Theme Song

After hitting an unexpected low note, here’s how one association is championing diversity, inclusion, equity, and access in its organization and the profession it serves.

BY CARLA KALOGERIDIS
No matter how inclusive your content is, how you produce and present it might be excluding people.
Resource constraints, knowledge gaps, and competing priorities may prevent associations from prioritizing accessibility initiatives, but a few small considerations can go a long way to making content more widely accessible and more reachable and show that associations truly do care about inclusion.

**WRITING FOR INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCES**

When writing for international audiences, it is imperative to consider the backgrounds and expectations of global readers. Geographic and seasonal differences must be taken into consideration when writing materials that will be seen by global audiences.

For example, marketing materials sent out around December may refer to snow and cold, but for readers in the Southern hemisphere, December is summer, and content that references winter could alienate readers in that Southern hemisphere. Seasonal references could also alienate readers who are not near the association's headquarters.

In addition to geographic considerations, some readers may not want to read content in English, instead preferring to translate into another language with which they are more comfortable. Because readers may prefer translated content, it is important to write with these readers in mind.

Specifically, associations should avoid using colloquialisms, idioms, slang, and proverbs in their writing, as they are difficult — or even impossible — to accurately translate, says Peter Betts, director of global accounts at Globalization Partners International. He cites the example of the expression “birds of a feather flock together,” which could be translated as “birds with feathers stay closely grouped,” thus losing its original meaning. These considerations become especially important with the growing popularity of translation programs such as Google Translate.

The best way to avoid translation blunders is to work with translators based in the target market. “A local market translator will be in the best position to adapt the translation to the appropriate tone required,” Betts says. “A local market copywriter can also be included within the workflow.”

However, even accurate translation won’t save some colloquialisms and idioms. For example, the Russian idiom “where crawfish hibernate,” doesn’t make most U.S. readers think about a severe punishment. Likewise, U.S. idioms such as “cold turkey,” “a ballpark figure,” or “a broken record” will have little to no meaning for most international readers.

It can be difficult to evaluate the quality of a translated publication, especially if no one on staff knows the language being
WRITING ABOUT DISABILITIES

Associations that write about disabilities must ensure their content avoids common ableist tropes. Annie Segarra, a disability rights activist and content creator, identifies two common, toxic ways people with disabilities are often portrayed.

“We’re either an inspiration or we are better off dead, and they both actually stem from the same ableist beliefs,” she says. “It’s problematic to consume the narratives of ill or disabled people and subconsciously view them as such low status and have such low expectations of them that their joy, success, and their very existence becomes a circus of inspiration.”

The all-too-common trope of disabled people being inspirational can be detrimental and insulting to others who have the same disabilities, and associations must be careful to avoid this tone.

“This is fed by the belief that disabled lives are worse than abled lives, that they are not livable, and therefore just existing is brave,” Segarra says. “It speaks to how disabled people are perceived and the low expectations. It is a backhanded compliment.Editors may have seen conflicting guidance on using identity-first language (i.e., a disabled person) versus person-first language (i.e., a person with disabilities), with some sources arguing for identity-first language while others insist on person-first language.

To know which term is best and what the style guide should indicate, get guidance from disabled people themselves, not able-bodied people who claim to be representatives, Segarra says.

Associations should speak with the people they are writing about and use their preferred language, noting this in the style guide.

TECHNOLOGY IN ACCESSIBILITY

Technological innovations have made leaps and bounds in recent years, and while they can aid organizations’ accessibility initiatives, they are no substitute for humans.

“While machine translation (MT) has progressed significantly over the past 20 years, it is still not at the point of replacing human translation,” Betts says. “When using MT, it is very important that a qualified, native-speaking, professional translator performs a post-edit of the MT. At times, the MT can be so bad that it requires an entirely new translation.”

Betts notes that the more common the language, the better results machine
translation tools, such as Google Translate, get. He says Spanish is the most robust machine translation language, but has only 60-70 percent accuracy. As artificial intelligence (AI) grows, so will the accuracy of machine translation tools.

“The current highest-quality and most heavily funded MT is neural MT (NMT). Using AI, NMT’s ultimate goal is to mimic the human brain’s ability to learn from previous actions or mistakes,” Betts says.

The NMT tool builds glossaries, and, after regular use, can become a strong tool for translations. But Betts notes that even the most sophisticated NMT cannot replace human translation.

While technology still has some way to go with respect to translations, it is already being used as a powerful tool in other ways. “The Internet and emerging tech are making things accessible like never before,” Segarra says. She uses apps to create captions for Instagram videos, and she uses audio transcription apps when she is having difficulty with audio processing and hearing.

For associations with limited time and resources, AI and other emerging technologies may be a valuable way to begin making content more accessible.

MULTIMEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

While association publishing professionals may consider the accessibility of their magazines and newsletters, all content and association releases should have accessibility considerations.

It takes a few small steps to make social media posts, videos, and podcasts more accessible. Segarra adds captions to her YouTube videos along with subtitles in other languages. She explains that describing and explaining any visual information that is on the screen can make content more accessible.

Even something as simple as adding a caption on a social media image post makes a significant difference for a blind person or a person with limited vision. While the day will likely come when screen readers can consistently accurately describe images, for now, people who use readers don’t have access to your images without a caption.

For organizations just starting their multimedia accessibility journey, Segarra suggests beginning with captioned videos and strong image and video descriptions.

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), which Segarra recommends as a good starting point for organizations unfamiliar with making accessible content, provides guidelines for improving website accessibility, including labeling graphics and images, writing descriptive alt-text, and creating accessible links. The AFB advises looking at your website without images to see how it appears to verify that the website still makes sense.

There are also many free browser extensions and apps that will help you test content for accessibility for color-blind readers.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Before implementing any of the previous strategies, know your association’s audience. How do they access content? What are their physical limitations? In what language do they prefer to read content? A quick survey can provide answers to these questions and help guide your association’s accessibility journeys, ensuring that your valuable limited resources are being used on initiatives that will help members.

Though it adds some work to already-busy publishing teams, associations must take the time to make content more accessible to the diverse members they serve.

“Creating accessible online content takes just an extra moment of your time. It makes a world of difference to your disabled siblings who use the same Internet you do and deserve equal access to the content that is available.”

— ANNIE SEGARRA, disability rights activist and content creator

Safia Kazi is editorial coordinator for ISACA (formerly Information Systems Audit and Control Association).