

Creating Accessible Content with Sean and Semih

Zelena Khan: From TransPerfect and A to Z productions, this is NEXT. I'm Zelena Khan, your host. Support for this podcast comes from TransPerfect, a family of companies providing language services and technology solutions for global businesses. Connect your brand to the world and visit transperfect.com.

Here we are with season three, with a brand new set of guests to give you insight and information on growing and evolving businesses and industries. Hopefully, these discussions will help make you a better leader, a better employee, and all-around a better person.

So what does it mean to be accessible? I've heard this word a lot over the last year and a half, probably more than I've heard in the five years before that. On this episode of NEXT, we address this with Sean McCurry, Accessibility Specialist, and Semih Altinay, Senior Director of Software Globalization Solutions, both at TransPerfect.

We break down what accessibility means, how we all use accessibility features without even knowing it, and we discuss some of the work Sean and Semih are doing here at TransPerfect with their clients.

Guys, thank you so much for joining us. I think we should just start with Semih, can you tell us your name, your title, a little bit about what you do at TransPerfect, and then Sean, can you do the same? And then let's just jump into it.

Semih Altinay: Hi there! Semih Altinay based in Denver, Colorado, and my title is Senior Director Software Globalization Solutions. Been with TransPerfect for 10 years.

Sean McCurry: I'm Sean McCurry. I'm an Accessibility Specialist at TransPerfect. I'm in Boulder, pretty close to Semih actually.

Zelena Khan: Both lovely cities. Sean, you're an Accessibility Specialist, not really something that's thought of when it comes to the TransPerfect world of services. Doesn't really sound like it's directly relatable to language. Can we

talk a little bit about accessibility in general? I think that word has been getting used a lot.

Right? I think people often have different misunderstandings of what it means to be accessible. And, I think it's been kind of difficult to have good conversations if everyone has a different definition. If I hear, "Oh like, well, you know, let's make this website accessible," it can be used for someone with a disability.

So can we just maybe start off with what the definition of accessibility is?

Sean McCurry: Yeah, sure. It's kind of in left field for most of the stuff that a translation company does, the design practice of making stuff, any technology, whether it's websites or a kiosk or a mobile application, whatever, usable by anyone and everyone, regardless of any disabilities that they might have.

So you're talking to someone who's blind or deaf or hard of hearing, but there are large piles of different situations that someone might be in that we'd like to help them through.

Zelena Khan: Thanks for that definition, Sean. Semih, can you tie in the impact of accessibility on the larger business world and the growth of its importance?

Semih Altinay: Absolutely. I think we know when we talk about making a global website, right, in 10 languages, 20 languages. We're trying to bring different audiences around the globe, different business or target audience if you will, to our business so that we would make sales. We wouldn't have otherwise, this is the same exact concept.

So you may have a website that's in 10 languages so that you can sell your product in France, in Japan, in Russia. But the same concept applies to selling your product or services to people with disabilities. So if your website, for example, is fully accessible, you now open the door to so many more people, people that might not have access to your services otherwise.

So the concept that applies from a business perspective, it's such a smart thing. One, you're bringing in more revenue. But two you're actually presenting the world with a better product, a product that's easy to use. It creates that loyalty with the folks that have disabilities.

Sean McCurry: We're still trying to provide for more people. It's like, okay, well, we're only going to provide for people who speak French. Well, great. Well, we're also gonna provide for people who are blind. It's like a similar sort of avenue as far as opening communications.

Zelena Khan: Yeah, and I mean accessibility doesn't necessarily mean that it's only for people with disabilities, right? Can we touch a little bit on that as well?

Semih Altinay: Right. So for example, if I am trying to buy a luxury watch from a Swiss watchmaker, I can go there and select different languages and that's fine. But what if I'm in the older demographic? Maybe I just finally went through my retirement and I have some disposable income; I want to spend a lot of money on a luxury watch.

Yet, I can't even see the words that are just so small on that website or the background is gray and text is white. It looks pretty, but I just can't really easily access all the product information, make a purchase. Just imagine that for a minute. Or maybe I have some motor function disabilities in my hand; I cannot use a mouse.

I need to be able to navigate with the keyboard, and still buy that product. Can I do that? So I think that's the piece that's really critical for this demographic.

Sean McCurry: Yeah. We like to say in the accessibility world that accessibility stuff is essential for some, but useful for everyone. So yes, someone who is older and their eyesight is going has certain requirements; the text needs to be bigger, it needs to be nice and sharp. But, me, who doesn't have any vision disabilities. Oh, wait actually I do because I'm wearing glasses if you can see. Let's say I'm on my phone and I'm outside and it's not cloudy like it is today. And the sun is shining brighter from my shoulder and it's hitting the phone. I can't quite see. If I have a site that's built for someone with low vision, I can see it way easier on my phone. It works better for everyone in general.

Zelena Khan: I enjoy all the features that come with it. And I don't feel like I fit any of those buckets.

Sean McCurry: But you definitely benefit.

Zelena Khan: Yes. For sure.

Sean McCurry: Subtitles are another one. Like most of us are sitting there next to a partner in bed it's like midnight or something.

They're sleeping, but we're watching something, I don't know YouTube, Netflix, whatever. Okay, captions. Just turn the captions on and I can still watch a show or whatever built for people originally for the deaf and hard of hearing community. But super useful for everyone, as it turns out. There are piles of examples like that.

Zelena Khan: Do you think maybe with like the growth of video during the pandemic, I kind of felt like a lot of things were growing with accessibility too. Right? Video usage went up and even on social media, right? Like Instagram, someone can talk and the captions just flow with it. What do you think the pandemic's impact has had on accessibility?

Sean McCurry: Well, things exploded with the pandemic. As far as technology went like everyone started working from home. Everyone started doing anything. For a little while, there's been this whole use of any device from anywhere. Like a lot of us have to log into an officially sanctioned office machine. But, the world is kind of moving past that and we're kind of moving to, "Oh, it's 3:00 AM and I'm on my phone let me just check this email real quick." Like that's becoming more and more common and it only increased with the pandemic. Like it really, really drove the point home. And because of the accessibility requirement, like you have employees who have a disability and they must be able to work from any device from anywhere.

It made technology companies have to implement stuff where people could actually do that. It was always possible, but we're on zoom right now recording. Captions are just a feature to be enabled with one click. It used to be some sort of complicated saying you used to have to say, "Okay, we'd like captions for this. There's a plugin for that." But there's been a lot more technology just brought forward because of the pandemic, because of the requirements that brought with it, which is by and large, a good thing.

Zelena Khan: What have you guys have been noticing with clients that are coming to TransPerfect for accessibility needs? What are some of their big challenges?

Semih Altinay: Well, I think from a business perspective, let's say you have a CEO that wants to do a town hall with all the employees that are on the globe.

Again, you may have a meeting, not only in English, maybe that's the natural or the original language, but they're inviting interpreters so that it can be translated, live on the phone for those that don't speak English very well and still need to get that information.

We're now seeing this request come in for all kinds of live captioning, machine-translated subtitles for all kinds of different languages. And I think it's a great thing because now, not only are you having a meeting in the original sounds interpreted into different languages, but you're seeing the subtitles so to speak, or just captions in all these languages too.

And honestly, I think sometimes we just kind of think of one business case and completely ignore some of the other most important things. Imagine how much information was out there in protecting ourselves from this once in a hundred-year pandemic. People had videos. People had information, PDF documents online, how to keep yourself safe, you know, social distancing, masking, and washing your hands.

How much, how many seconds you should wash your hands, all these things. It all went out everywhere. But some of the stuff really didn't make it to a lot of the people that need it the most. People that have certain disabilities, you didn't have the videos with the subtitles. You didn't have the PDF documents that are readable by a screen reader.

So those are the things that we noticed throughout this pandemic. If there's some critical information that you need to disseminate to audiences around the globe, please make sure to include people with disabilities. And this has been so great. I think because now, not just that information, but just your average corporate communication, maybe a quarterly business report or whatever, is all being interpreted and captioned live.

And when people put these things on demand, they now include the timed caption files to go with all the PDFs now being made accessible. So we just saw this tremendous shift so to speak. So in the last year and a half, I think things changed for the better for the folks with disabilities.

Sean McCurry: Yeah. And Semih, you hit on a good point there saying that you have important information that needs to be disseminated to everyone.

That's kind of the basis for a lot of the legal framework and a lot of the drive to make things accessible. It's like, okay, you have a product you're trying to sell. You can talk about business case and talk about reaching more people. But if you have like federally mandated information this must reach all people, oh, well guess what, you don't make it accessible well you're not reaching all people. You're reaching this many people, but you're excluding this slice of the pie that has a disability of some sort.

Zelena Khan: So I have a two-part question. I think we use subtitling and closed captioning. For people that know nothing about this topic that might be listening, can we just talk about the difference between the two?

Sean McCurry: There's subtitling. There's closed captioning. The captioning that appears as texts. There's a caption that's like burned into the video itself. There's a pile of different ways of doing this. And it mostly comes down to technology and requirements. I think for people that don't know anything about it, I think you can, for the most part, use the term synonymously.

The important part is that you have texts available for people that need it. The rest of it honestly is nitty-gritty. Let's say I'm blind and deaf, so I can't hear the video, so I need captions, but I also can't see the video, so I need to get the captions in some sort of way outside, the video. Well great, if the captions are stored as actual text on the screen, not visual text, but like there are characters that some sort of application or interface can get access to, great. I can pull that off and maybe I can see it, maybe have like a braille reader or something. So the differences come down to the technologies and the various standards and, ways that people are going to add those.

Zelena Khan: Thanks for that. And the second part, we've talked about light mode versus dark mode.

Sean McCurry: I love dark mode.

Zelena Khan: Same, same. I do enjoy it, but we talked about closed captioning versus subtitling. What are a couple of other ways that people are making their content and their technologies more accessible that we probably haven't talked about?

Sean McCurry: Well, there's everything. There are a couple things that, like you said, that kind of pop up, everyone kind of tends to know about. But there is a whole massive list of things and features to do for people with disabilities.

Kind of the two that I tend to jump on immediately, like my two personal golden rules for accessibility is that if you have a thing, the thing must be in text somehow. So, if you have an image or something, that's like a visual thing, there must be text associated with everything in your technology so that someone who can't see or someone who has trouble or whatever, they can get the text somehow.

If they can get that text, there's some tech out there that they're gonna be able to interface with to actually get the information. And the second thing is whatever you have must be able to be controlled with just the keyboard. Semih was talking about someone who might have some sort of tremor or some sort of fine motor control issue; they can't use a mouse, or they let's say using the mouse for too long starts to hurt, it hurts their hand for a while.

So they must be able to use the keyboard. Or we have someone like the late Stephen Hawking, who didn't have really any much use of his body at all, had some sort of cool technology that allowed him to emulate the keyboard in some way. It wasn't a keyboard, but like it was some sort of technological thing like eye-tracking software, things like that. You talked about light and dark mode. So we would also have a high contrast mode for someone who has trouble distinguishing between the two different things.

Semih Altinay: And again, to support that from the business side of things, right, just imagine kind of like a financial application. Green is good. That means the stock is going up. Red is bad. You know, that means the stock is going down.

Sean McCurry: And they only have green, orange, red. They have like a dot on the side or something, that's it. That's the only indication.

Semih Altinay: And I know from my grandpa, you know, we used to play games when I was a kid. And, you know, he couldn't see between red and green.

Like he couldn't distinguish between those two colors, you know if you're colorblind. If you're color blind, then usually that is the issue you can't

distinguish between certain colors. In this case, that's a dramatic functionality issue right? Like I can't literally tell what's happening on the software.

So over the years, people have started putting the numerical values, as well as the colors. Just little things like that. We're missing sometimes just that one tiny little thing is gonna make or break this product for somebody who may have that disability.

Zelena Khan: A lot of the things you described are just such small, they seem like just small little efforts that can be taken right? And now I'm thinking back even growing up and thinking about textbooks and different experiences I had and like, wow. Some of these things could have been so helpful. You brought up a couple of other services at TransPerfect, we provide video interpretation.

How does accessibility tie into the other services that we have?

Semih Altinay: Well, we try to be one-stop shop for our clients. So if somebody comes in and says, look, we want you to translate our website or mobile app into different languages. Our immediate questions are okay, fine. So we're going to do the translation.

We should probably do some testing afterwards to see what the language looks like on the translated website. Is it still going to look and feel the same way? Is it translated properly for the context? But what about accessibility? Is it going to be accessible to somebody who may use a screen reader for example, or navigate with a keyboard?

So this has really worked out well because we're basically spending the same amount of time to go through the site to read it in a different language. It really doesn't add much at all. We're just making sure that now it's accessible. At the same time, we talked about those video conferences and things like that.

And now we're offering sign language. Now we're offering live captions, but not only in one language, we can machine translate that into a hundred plus languages. And these are the things that our clients didn't even know existed. So when we come up with these solutions, it really makes a difference in their, you know, expected outcome from that particular meeting or, you know, the website launch or whatever. So they really appreciate that.

I find that clients tend to fall into one of three categories. They're either good for accessibility. They have a team, they're on it. They're like, maybe not perfect. I mean, as with all things communication, it's never like perfect, perfect. But they're like really, really good. Or they're clients that they're like, "Oh yeah, accessibility yeah. We should probably look at that. We had some guy do a few things a couple of years ago and we haven't touched it since. Eh, maybe we should. Can you guys help us? Can we do something with that?" And there are clients who like, can't even spell accessibility. Like they've never heard of it and like, totally clueless.

Zelena Khan: For this third type of client, what are some common misconceptions they have maybe?

Sean McCurry: So the most common misconception by far is that either accessibility is for blind people, period end of story. That's it. Or that accessibility is this dumb thing that they have to do for legal reasons. Their legal team told them they have to do this accessibility thing and they're going to drag their feet. But it's not really very useful, right?

Like it's just a legal thing. Let's just check this box and move on with it. And, the most common accessibility we see out there, in fact, there are articles and research that's been done all over the place, the most common thing by far is the color thing we were talking about like light mode versus dark mode versus high contrast.

So there are a lot of types of disabilities from visual stuff to hearing stuff to physical stuff, cognitive. It runs the whole gambit, and it really needs to be kind of like a holistic look at things in order to really do it right.

Semih Altinay: And don't you think that it makes you look better as a company? Like, you know, in this day and age of corporate responsibility, you know, there are so many initiatives, right?

Like women should get paid the same as men if they're doing the same exact job, right? There are so many different things about diversity and inclusion. And I just think that in today's world, the consumers are way more conscious than they were 50 years ago. And if they realize you're trying to do the right things, if you're having a meeting and having that meeting, being captioned, or if you're, you know, having a website or a mobile app, and simply adding that

light mode or dark mode or, you know, high contrast and things like that, it doesn't really cost you a whole lot.

In fact, it's funny because companies will fight it through the courts saying, "No, I'm a pizza company. Why would I make my website or mobile app accessible? Who cares? If you can't see my website, just go to a pizza place and just order it." Right? And they'll literally pay millions of dollars to fight it in courts all the way up to the Supreme Court in the U.S. And guess what, you could've literally spent a fraction of that cost and basically no time at all, like maybe a few weeks, to get your content accessible in the first place. And you would have gained this huge loyal group of people that are enjoying your product, right? The folks who have certain disabilities, they really try hard to get to a particular site for a particular product or service. They can't get it. Then they go find somebody who actually is accessible. Would you agree with me that they'll probably be the most loyal customers that you'll ever have?

Sean McCurry: Yeah. From my experience like the friends I've had and the things that I've heard, people with disabilities tend to be dream customers, as far as things go like for good and bad.

So if your website is bad, like word gets out. Like, don't go to that one, don't even bother. But if your website is good, they're like, "Oh my God guys, I actually found a website that works. Then they tell their friends. They're loyal customers. Like they're with you for life kind of a thing. And all people are like that. But from what I've seen, because people with disabilities have such a hard time getting like basic goods and services, when they find something they're like 10 times as good. It's just really cool.

Zelena Khan: Yeah, brand loyalty. You want to give your money to a company that you like, to a company that cares about you.

Sean McCurry: Yeah. We have companies that come to us that are like, "We want to do this because it's the right thing to do. We want to be able to reach everyone. We don't want to discriminate. You know, we want to be able to build this thing the way it should be built in the first place." And we're like, "Oh my goodness, thank you. Yes, that's the right attitude." Versus companies that are like, "Well, legal told me I have to do this, what's the absolute bare minimum I have to do? And I guess maybe I'll do it, but I'll fight you every step of the way.

Zelena Khan: Well, what is the absolute bare minimum?

Sean McCurry: So what has come out of it is that there are standards you can follow. There's either Section 508, which is the US-based thing. So, 508 basically says that if you are a U.S. federal institution, your stuff must be accessible because you cannot discriminate because you're a federal agency. Under Section 508 and 504, that kind of go hand in hand on this. If you're a fed, you are just flat out required to be accessible. Also, if you are taking money, that's also like that third-party service is also required to be accessible. Or globally there is WCAG, which is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

The current version is 2.1. 2.2 is coming in a couple of years. That is a set of standards that lists here are all the things that you must do for your website to be accessible. You must have the following contrast between text and background. You must have the following controls for keyboard. And I have seen websites that follow that exactly to the T they have met the bare minimum versus people who actually cared, who were like, yeah, I want to really do this properly.

And it's a dream.

Zelena Khan: We actually pulled up a stat. About 98% of homepages were detected to have Web Content Accessibility Guideline Failures, and that was February 2020. Does that sound about right?

Sean McCurry: Yeah, that sounds about right. That's from the WebAim 1 million study. But they have a tool and they send it at the top million web pages and kind of see how are things doing. Now to take that with a grain of salt . . .

Zelena Khan: I think it got better though. I think it got better.

Sean McCurry: Ok good!

Zelena Khan: Between February 2020, it was 98%, to this year, it's 97.4%.

Sean McCurry: Hooray. Cause for celebration.

Zelena Khan: It got a little better.

Sean McCurry: But I don't know. It's hard for a website to be perfectly accessible. Cause we're talking about this answer to communication. It's hard to be like flawless because communication is more of an art than a science, right?

So can't be perfect. But yes, most websites out there have serious issues. I think the number from that same group from, from WebAIM was 80 or 90% of websites have color contrast issues, the most basic, easy to fix issues that affects the most people. Most websites have not done that properly yet.

Zelena Khan: Yeah. Low contrast text, empty links, and buttons, missing input labels.

Semih Altinay: So listen, you know, again, coming from the business side, okay. How much money do marketing departments spend every year on digital marketing, social listening, SEO, right, search engine optimization? Just imagine all the money that goes into that every year with all these organizations around the globe.

Yet, no one really, well, I shouldn't say no one, right, maybe 2% of the people out there, maybe understand. Listen, you have an accessible product. You're going to rank higher in search engines. That's how these algorithms work. They actually track how much a person will spend on a particular page or site. And guess what?

People are jumping ship. As soon as they get to a website, they can't use it. They go to another one. You're going to lose business. But if you're spending all this time and energy on SEO on digital marketing, trust me, you want accessibility to be a part of that.

Zelena Khan: How do you see the laws evolving around accessibility and where do you hope that they go?

Sean McCurry: So things are only going to increase. So this thing sort of started back in 1979 in the U.S., the Rehabilitation Act. And then the A.D.H is the Americans with Disabilities Act revised in 2008. The rest of the world lagging a bit further behind, not as much of a strong legal foundation. And as much as I don't like the whole litigation-heavy U.S. thing, it's kind of nice at least to give people with disabilities some sort of avenue.

So what we're seeing is that in the U.S. and all over the world, the legal case is growing more laws are being passed. We have the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act that came into effect beginning of 2020. We have a couple in the E.U. There are basic accessibility laws in pretty much every country in the world, but they're pretty basic and basically only apply to federal stuff. But it is growing year by year and it's going to continue to grow. So I expect this to one day, just be a standard part of every design of every tech out there.

It's going to take us a little while to get there because currently companies are like, "Ah, we don't need to think about that."

Zelena Khan: It's still an afterthought.

Sean McCurry: It's an afterthought.

Zelena Khan: As opposed to of core value. Right?

Sean McCurry: And it's an expensive afterthought. Like if it was just a part of the stack, it would be way more efficient and way more easy and cheap. That's where we're going. That's the way the wind is blowing and everyone kind of sees it.

Semih Altinay: You know, I'm a true believer of change coming from within, rather than your hand being forced. Yes, these laws do definitely help this very, very fragile, if not at-risk population.

So that's important, I think, to have these laws to protect them. But you know, a lot of the times when we're seeing some amazing initiatives across all kinds of different, like the whole spectrum of different industries banking, high-tech. What we're seeing is these companies do want to be accessible. They come to us and say, "Listen, hey TransPerfect, if your GlobalLink technology is not accessible, then we don't want it.

So if you want our business, you gotta make your own product accessible. Like it's amazing to me, right? So I think that's going to drive much bigger change than some of these governments that are just kind of slowly coming up, right? The tier two tier three countries around the globe. When I put these tiers, I'm talking about accessibility.

Not everybody cares for it. Not everybody has strong laws for it. But some of the key companies within these countries, some of the global companies are now coming out and saying, "Well, we want our stuff to be accessible. We don't care about the law. We just want to be accessible because of X, Y, Z reasons."

Honestly, even if they're doing it for business purposes, even if they want to get more revenue or they want to look good with corporate responsibility, I'm fine with it, because again, the most at-risk population is now able to benefit from these things. And I think the more corporations are becoming responsible for all kinds of reasons, then I think this trend is going to keep going upwards for the better.

Zelena Khan: Yeah for sure. What are your personal hopes for the world of accessibility? You know, in the next five to 10 years?

Sean McCurry: Yeah, in five to 10 years, I'm hoping that more and more companies are going to jump on the bandwagon of not doing this because they have to, or avoiding it.

Like for the past five years, I've seen a lot of companies that are like, "Oh yeah, accessibility. We've heard about that. We probably ought to jump on that. Oh boy, look at the time, got to go." And I'm hoping that more and more companies are going to start taking that initiative, start jumping on this, whether or not they have to, and start really making their content work.

I don't have hopes that the entire world is going to be perfectly accessible in five years. Maybe 50. I think 50 is, or maybe 30 is kind of a good shot for that.

Semih Altinay: I agree with you. Honestly, you know, think about that pyramid, right? Food and shelter in your brain are like the most important thing, instincts, right, in human life.

Some of the other things like emotional intelligence. That's just one of the last things. But first, you got to have the basics, you know, sleep food, whatever. Same thing I think across the globe. You know, there are certain countries out there that things are just bad in general, for diversity, for inclusion.

So I think that there are so many countries where they have become a more civilized country in general. They care about their people more maybe through

social programs, equality, whatever. I feel like they're now trying to be even more inclusive and adding some of the additional populations that might've been forgotten until now.

So I think there's a shift around the globe, but that shift requires the fundamentals to change first.

Sean McCurry: Yeah, and something else that just occurred to me as well. The other thing I would like to see as far as the next five to 10 years is legal advancement. So the U.S. right now has pretty strong laws.

Could be better, could be more detailed, but not too bad. I would like to see every country in the world, and I think 10 years is not too bad of a guess for that, to have some sort of basic kind of anti-discrimination for disability laws, for private-sector stuff. Most of them have the federal stuff, but that tends to be such a small slice of what actually goes on that I would love to see legal stuff improve across the globe as well.

I think that's very possible.

Semih Altinay: Agreed.

Zelena Khan: Another follow-up question for you Semih when it comes to the future of the industry and, you know, TransPerfect's impact and how we can work with clients on making their businesses more accessible and their technology more accessible. How do you see that evolving as well?

Semih Altinay: There are certain things that companies can do on the smaller scale and they can do things on the big scale. First of all, what I'm seeing right now is websites have been a priority for everyone. So we're seeing more and more requests for their websites to be accessible. If there's a mobile app that ties to it, they're kind of adding that in there as well.

As they find out more and more what's possible, they're now adding those solutions like live captioning, their meetings, right? It could be a client meeting. It could be a symposium. It could be some kind of big conference for their clients, but it could be a CEO address to all the employees around the globe.

Now, I think also it's important to, you know, let the companies know out there, I think there are little things they can do. There are automated tools out

there, you know, we created our own. But there are a hundred different types that you can actually simply do a quick check. And you can do this on a periodic, you know, like every month, every week, every quarter, every year, however, often your content changes, you can have these tools, tell you at least 50% confidence that you're doing okay or you're really not doing great.

The reason I say 50%, and Sean can explain this better from a technical perspective, the tools will not give you everything. You still need a human being, an expert going through the site, like a tool may tell you certain things, but then that may actually be a false flag.

You know, for example, with AI and machine learning, coming into the picture, you have these companies training their AI engines, artificial intelligence, to recognize certain things, understanding what the context is. So if there's an image on a website, can AI pick that up and be able to actually caption it?

You and I may not be able to see it, but there are technologies that see what's behind that picture, which is an alternative text. If somebody can't see the picture, they'll be able to use a screen reader that reads the description. It's not perfect, but AI is definitely helping these companies kind of just identify certain things. Maybe it's just a workflow versus a picture of an animal versus your logo, your company logo.

Sean McCurry: Sorry. I think one of the big ways that AI is helping is with captioning. So for a while now, auto-captions in like YouTube or something has been the bane of my existence. The auto-captions, if you've used them, are . . . okay. They're like fine. Maybe 85% accurate, which is as far as like a letter grade goes, that's not going to be horrible. But they're really good at picking up things like, "And" and, "The", and "For", but maybe not so good at picking up someone's name or like a specialized industry term or like the word that actually matters in the sentence.

Like, they'll get all the fluff words perfect. But then the real word they mess up and it's bad and everyone in my field is like, "No, don't use auto-captions. Please use a real, you have to use a real person.

Zelena Khan: I'm also intrigued to learn how that might affect people with accents, too.

Sean McCurry: Exactly. It depends on the accent. Like if someone has a really strong accent or the bot is trying to pick up like American English and they're from Ireland or something, it's going to get all twisted. So, that is something that is improving by leaps and bounds. It's improved even just in the past couple of years, from what I've been watching, like how these things are getting better and better.

Still not totally functional, just like turning on auto captions and leaving. But to the point where we're going to expect to see them like nearly 100% accurate in what Semih, I'm going to guess like 10 years.

Semih Altinay: I would probably agree with that. Even today, right now we have technology where we're doing these meetings. We're actually feeding glossaries or important terms that will be discussed in that particular meeting into the AI engine so that it can pick up these things.

If I feed that into the AI engine, it now knows to watch out for that sound. As soon as it hears it, it will only caption it this particular way.

Sean McCurry: And it's like context-sensitive too. I'm like, "Hey, zoom in on that", lowercase. "We're on Zoom today. We're using the Zoom platform," capital Z.

Zelena Khan: What were like our first signs of accessibility?

Semih Altinay: Eyesight is one of the first things that, like it's for everyone it's for us. Like once you hit your, I don't know, I don't know what the age is like thirties, forties.

Sean McCurry: Let's say 60 or 70.

Semih Altinay: Sure. But what I mean is not complete blindness, right? Just not being able to see so far, you know. I see, for example, when I'm driving around, I see that, you know, somebody in the car could see a sign way farther away before I can.

I'm not wearing glasses, maybe I should. But my point is when we're doing these live captioned events, for example, we're purposefully making sure that everything is adjustable. We do the high contrast mode if the user chooses. We give them the option, but guess what? The text size, the font size, the user can

go into our system and actually increase the font size if they choose to do so, because it could be too small.

You don't even know sometimes that, you know, you're getting to a point where you do need some accessibility assistance. Let's call it that. I don't know. What do you think, Sean?

Sean McCurry: I think that it was just flat-out ignored. I would love to believe that it started somewhere and people were like, "Oh, we need to help out people for one reason or another."

But I think by and large people were ignored for a long time. So remember my golden rules there's text and keyboard access. So for a while, computers were like text only. Like there was like DOS and stuff like that back in like the early days. Windows didn't exist, Mac didn't exist. There was the DOS operating system.

I don't even know what DOS stands for, but it's like this command line.

Semih Altinay: Disk Operating System. That's literally what it stands for.

Sean McCurry: Okay. So, because text is pretty accessible people weren't looking at it then, but then, you know, kind of late 90s, 2000s, the internet started to become a thing and people started to be. Everyone was connecting and there was rich media, there was video, there was audio, there were images, all sorts of things which introduced a lot more accessibility issues. So that's kind of when I think when it became more intense.

Semih Altinay: And that's the change that I'd like to see, right? Going back to our earlier topic. The change I'd like to see is companies not just relying on the laws and making that bare minimum for the legal purposes, but really, truly caring about the people. And again, I want to say I'm hopeful; I see this trend right now. I think if the companies can do this on their own, because it may be the right thing to do, they may have, you know, employees, but also clients that need these services and they provided without having that government just beating them up and saying, "You've got to do this or else." I think that's the change that I'd like to see.

Zelena Khan: Yeah I mean it's nice to be hopeful about the future of technology and for people to be able to access more things.

Sean McCurry: So, TransPerfect is in this cool spot where we do translation and accessibility. I know a lot of outlets that do accessibility. They're great. They're really cool. I like them a lot. And we know a lot of people who do translation. We're the only ones who actually do both of them and are able to deal with the interactions that happen there. So it's really neat. It's a good spot.

Zelena Khan: Yeah and I think it's really cool because the two seem to go so hand-in-hand together.

Sean McCurry: Exactly because it's all about communication.

Zelena Khan: Yes for sure. Guys, thank you so much for your time. I mean, when I think about, you know, all the different services and technologies that TransPerfect provides, this is the one I'm really excited about the most because I think they just tie in so well together with all the other things we have going on. So I'm really excited to see where it goes. Actually, if any of our listeners want to learn more about TransPerfect Accessibility Services, or to find out a little bit about the both of you, where can they go?

Semih Altinay: So they can just go to transperfect.com/accessibility. There's all kinds of information there. And if they want to contact us it's accessibility@transperfect.com.

Zelena Khan: Thanks again, guys.

Semih Altinay: Thank you.

Sean McCurry: Yeah this was fun.

Zelena Khan: Take care.

Sean McCurry: Take care.

Zelena Khan: If you made it to the end of this episode, thank you! We hope you keep listening. Make sure you hit the like button and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen to the latest episodes of NEXT. And if you have a question, comment, or suggestion, or if you just want to tell us how much you enjoyed the show, we'd love to hear from you.

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