



CultureShift: Reflecting on 33 years of the ADA

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SPEAKERS

Amanda LeClaire, Rob Reinhart, Mark Pound

Rob Reinhart 00:00

And we're going to open up the show by noting an anniversary. It was 33 years ago today, a groundbreaking win for the rights of millions of Americans was made law. July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA, was signed into law making equal access to employment, transportation, public spaces and more a legal right. But advocates say those rights need to evolve with the changing times. And joining me now to further along the discussion is *CultureShift's* Amanda LeClaire. Hello.

Amanda LeClaire 00:34

Hey, thanks, Rob. Happy Wednesday. That's right, with the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, July 26 has become National Disability Independence Day. And it's a really good opportunity to revisit what else needs to be done to protect those who are disabled. Now, this is an important conversation for me personally, as someone with a disability. I am so thankful that the ADA exists and really thankful to all those who fought to make it law. And we're gonna talk right now to with Mark Pound, he is the CEO of CurbCutOS, they are an organization making the digital world more accessible for people with disabilities. Hi, Mark, welcome to *CultureShift*.

Mark Pound 01:14

Thanks for having me.

Amanda 01:16

So let's get right into it. With the Americans with Disabilities Act being signed into law in 1990 on this day, what did that essentially cover at first and how has it evolved since then?

Mark 01:31

To the best of my knowledge, you know, it covered the physical domain, but since then, you know, now we're a digital world. And it is transcending or moving over into the digital world. However, today, if I were to go outside into the public domain and mentioned digital accessibility, most people would look at me go, "What? What is that?" It is widely unknown. However, it's trending in the right direction.



Amanda 01:59

Well, let's get into that a little bit more. So with the Americans with Disabilities Act made sidewalks be changed so people who are have that physical disability of walking, they could be able to access more places. It protected employment rights for a lot of different people and opened up a lot of different opportunities in that way. But you know, as you said, now that we're in 2023, we are decades since some of us began having the internet in our homes, we are completely living a different world than we were in 1990. So describe what is missing in your specialty, which is the world of digital disability rights.

Mark 02:44

It's all encompassing. I mean, if you think about it, the latest statistic, let me just kind of cite that. And then I'll get into you know, what this applies to. The latest statistic: 96.1% of digital content globally is not compliant. It's a huge number. Education and government is not immune to it either. And so what is digital accessibility? We go into websites, apps, documents, even design, and basically audit, remediate and maintain those digital assets. And, for example, if someone has a screen reader or voice recognition, if the navigation isn't set up correctly, it's not going to work for them. If there's a color contrast issue, people are not going to be able to see the colors and be able to differentiate between that on any of those digital assets. And it just keeps going on and on beyond that. But I think those are the high level key points.

Amanda 03:50

Mark, I'd love to give you some more specific examples of why you created your organization to push for rights for digital disability rights. So go into more specific examples, something that you come across in your day to day life, maybe.

Mark 04:08

Day to day life, you know, I've got an invisible disability. I live in chronic pain, I've got a lot of spine problems. So I don't necessarily deal with anything directly other than have to have a very ergonomic office. However, we do have, we do employ people with disabilities, and you know, they can't use a mouse, they have to use a keyboard. And if that's not set up correctly, they're not going to be able to navigate a website. We've had other instances where people go to a website and try to navigate it just through voice recognition or a screen reader. They can't do it because they can't navigate, it gets stuck and they cannot do anything beyond that. Does that — I hope that helps give a little bit more definition around that.

Amanda 04:55

Yeah, for sure. And you know your story is interesting because you were someone who was an athlete in high school and then you had a near fatal car collision. And then you suffered a lot of different, a long road to recovery from my understanding since then.

Mark 05:11

Yes. And you know, that's where my passion comes from, from being a quadriplegic on the football field in high school. Luckily, I recovered. I never told anybody about it, because I didn't want to be perceived as weak. And I said that I didn't want society to push me aside. Years later, after that, I got into a car accident, were the witnesses thought we were dead. And really what ended up happening to me was it exacerbated those nerve issues, I ended up with cervical fusion, I ended up with an impinged disc in my thoracic and two bulging disc and the torn disc in my lumbar. And I lived in chronic pain, severe chronic pain for 10 years, and I made a decision: I'm going to own it instead of it owning me. And it was a long, huge journey. And I had to fight every day to get back to where I am today. But what that taught me was, you know, just because if we're not born with a disability, the likelihood we're going to end up with one, even low vision later in life, is fairly high. And just because you don't fit within a box of society, you shouldn't be disadvantaged. We only get one chance at this life, there's no reset button. So everybody should have the ability to enjoy this journey.

Amanda 06:27

We're talking to Mark Pound, CEO of CurbCutOS, an organization making the digital world more accessible for people with disabilities. You know, Mark, when we're talking about this issue and how technology has not really kept up with being accessible for people who are disabled, there's a big range of things. We're talking about talking to people with potentially physical movement problems, people with vision issues, or hearing issues, and on and on. And I think it's really interesting that we do have all of these wonderful advances in technology, yet, we are living in a world that's really — a lot of people are kept out of it, whether that's due to something like a disability or something like economic issues, like unable to have an accessible smartphone or be able to have internet at home or those kinds of things. And there's a lot of issues that that creates.

Mark 07:26

Boy, did you hit the nail on the head. I mean, what amazes me is, just like you said, there's so many advancements in technology. However, for the billion plus people who have spending power, over a trillion dollars are viewed as insignificant in the world today. And that just blows my mind all the time. And in fact, there's even an additional statistic: 82% of those people, including people who know them, with or without a disability, would conduct more business with a company via its websites and apps if they took a journey to where they became more compliant over time, because compliance is not 100%. It never will be. So it's a new line item that has to go into the budgets. But at the same time, it's not a cost. It's not a legal part, you know, even though there is compliance. It is, we like to say, compliance creates opportunity. And the opportunity is those billion people. I'd also like to add to that too, is the other thing that I've come across is when you say somebody with a disability, the first thing that society likes to think of is, for lack of a better term, the poster child person that's disabled, but they don't realize it's the aging population, even when all of us end up getting older and our vision starts to deteriorate. That's a disability. And we're in generations now and younger generations are growing up to where they expect the digital media to respond and be able to use it. So we're gonna expect a tidal wave if it doesn't start getting embraced, because these younger generations

will come up and they will walk away from business if they're not going to give them the accessibility they require.

Amanda 09:27

Yeah, that's an interesting point to raise because we're pretty mean to older generations that how they, you know, aren't adapting to technology the way millennials and under have been, but as we do get older and we're aging out of that target demographic for a lot of these tech companies, I think it's going to be a huge issue. We're seeing that, you know, you're just not able to interact with it in the same way you were when you're 30.

Mark 09:56

Absolutely. And you know, we are an aging population. And they do need to pay attention to it because everybody wants more market share. But instead of robbing it from the competition, there's an untapped market here with a tremendous amount of spending power. And really, all you have to do is minimal investments on an annual basis. There's no price limit there. There's no minimum cost/ maximum cost to become more compliant. You know, companies such as ours works with companies to where, "What is your budget? What are your objectives?" But as long as we're addressing it, it's better than doing nothing. And you will also reduce your costs over time.

Amanda 10:41

All right, Mark, what are three main things that you and your organization are working forward to or you'd like to see people be thinking about, when to make technology and the digital world more accessible for those with this huge variety of disabilities?

Mark 10:56

There's three things but I think the one thing that's paramount, and the reason why we call ourselves CurbCutOS, is there's such a thing as the curb cut phenomenon. And in the physical world, when those curb cuts were done, so people with disabilities could use those sidewalks and stuff, today, more people without disabilities use those curb cuts than people with disabilities. So with that said, our objective is to achieve the same thing in the digital world. Because what people don't realize is all the improvements that are made on the back end because you won't be able to see them, a website still looks the same, has benefits to people without disabilities. And so I think you know, other than three main areas, that is the key point that we want to be able to achieve.

Amanda 11:50

We've been talking to Mark Pound, he is the CEO of CurbCutOS, an organization making the digital world more accessible for people with disabilities. Mark, thanks so much for joining CultureShift today. It's been great talking with you.