INTERNATIONAL WEB CONFERENCING COMPANY INTEGRATES INCLUSIVITY INTO ITS PLATFORM

– APPLAUSE CASE STUDY –

" DESIGNING FOR INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE EXPERIENCES BY INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES EARLY IN THE SDLC MEANS INNOVATION. IT'S NOT AN EASY SHIFT, BUT IT'S A NECESSARY SHIFT. THE TECHNOLOGY WE USE MUST MATCH THE VERY DIVERSE WORLD WE LIVE IN, AND THE PEOPLE IN IT."

ENGINEERING PRODUCT MANAGER, INTERNATIONAL WEB CONFERENCING COMPANY

CUSTOMER

For companies to ensure seamless communications between teams distributed across different offices, remote workers and employees on the road, they need a web conferencing system that meets the needs of a diverse workforce. The global web conferencing company is committed to making collaboration accessible and inclusive for people of all abilities and backgrounds, and as such, did a major relaunch of its world class platform with an emphasis on inclusive design and accessibility.

The company knew that accessibility had been a hot topic for years, as enterprises around the world strive to meet WCAG standards. However, they recognized that, too often, accessibility becomes a legal checklist where most companies focus on compliance instead of value creation when it comes to persons with disabilities (PWD). Doing this, organizations miss the biggest value driver: serving people with limitations as customers. The web conferencing company wanted to ensure it was doing all it could to improve its platform and bring the best possible collaboration and video conferencing apps to market for all customer users. To achieve this, at the core, it focused on building empathy in its culture as a driver for their improvement and innovation.

COMPANY
Anonymous

INDUSTRY
Web Conferencing

TESTING TYPES
Accessibility, Inclusive Design, Inclusive User Experience

APP TYPES
Mobile | Desktop | Web

OBJECTIVES

- Develop delightful user experiences, with empathy for all customers, including people with disabilities

- Align knowledge for building inclusive and accessibility compliant products across teams

- Create a successful digital accessibility program that can scale and standardize across all the company's digital products

RESULTS

- Identified UX and accessibility compliance baselines by app to prioritize product improvements

- Streamlined engineering velocity and applied bug fixes and product user improvements

- Engaged real-world PWD in the design, engineering and UX process

- Implemented team educational sessions, a shared knowledge base site and 1:1 consulting sessions

APPLAUSE°

CHALLENGE

The web conferencing development teams were operating in silos at the time of the replatforming efforts. This created friction and disparate team efforts. Senior management wanted to create a more collaborative environment for its collaboration platform, but lacked the needed communication and coordination in processes, particularly as it moved toward a focus on inclusivity and accessibility. The result of these gaps was not only creating issues for people with limitations, but for all users.

The company knew it needed to change how it worked as a broad organization. It didn't want to be simply compliant with WCAG standards, but rather to go beyond these guidelines for accessibility to create innovative products that incorporated input and opinions from people with limitations early in the software development lifecycle (SDLC). To do this, engineering teams needed to more fully integrate the feedback they'd received. The organization would need to change the development processes and build an organizational culture shift, moving away from fixing accessibility bugs/issues to addressing the core issues in design. It wanted to shift from designing products *for* PWD to designing *with* PWD through partnering with the communities they want to serve.

Specifically, the web conferencing company was challenged to:

- drive high-velocity results;
- achieve and maintain accessibility compliance standards;
- establish accessibility and inclusive UX baselines for its apps;
- increase inclusive design knowledge to improve user experience for all customer users;
- improve collaboration between designers and engineers;
- streamline product, design and engineering accessibility and inclusivity into cross-functional processes to increase quality, increase velocity and lower costs;
- build empathy for customer users with limitations

These changes would not only address the innovation and improved product, but also reduce fatigue among engineering teams that were constantly dealing with accessibility pain points.

SOLUTION

To start, the development organization reached out to leadership to ensure there was buy-in at the top. Next, they began to identify individuals in various groups who were passionate about accessibility and inclusivity to serve as ambassadors, working to fill gaps in understanding across teams. As leadership saw that there was momentum and input from customers as well as internally among teams, the organization began to work with Applause, which started by focusing on the organization's vision for inclusivity, building a program to identify all pain points and then systematically addressing them.
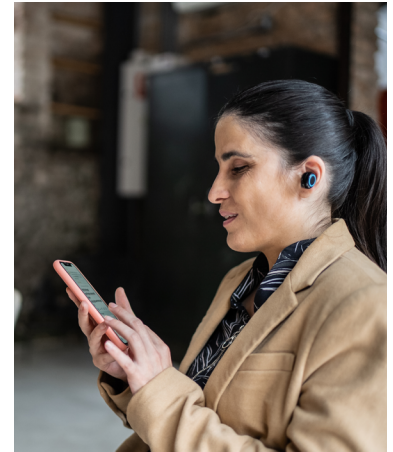
> " *We started off in a very siloed approach. All the teams were working very independently and very autonomously and not together. We were realizing that it was creating a lot of friction points within our product."*
>
> **ENGINEERING PRODUCT MANAGER**

Applause executed a multidimensional program to address the challenges and goals of the web conferencing firm. They started by recruiting PWD auditors to join the test team, delivering three full accessibility audits with remediation actions, and integrating in-sprint accessibility testing with the web conferencing company's app teams. Applause also established a process for successful Jira report-driven integration and provided immediate support for the release schedule required for live events. In addition, the Applause team conducted two inclusive UX design studies with the web conferencing company's customers, then facilitated an interactive UX workshop, followed by the creation of an accessibility knowledge base and accessibility training for all internal roles.

The workshops and direct interaction with PWD created a core foundation of empathy for designers and engineers. What better way to fully understand the struggles people face when using your software than to witness it close up. This empathy helped change organizational thinking to better understand customers as individuals. As this empathy spread throughout the organization, teams started thinking about accessibility and inclusivity during planning and design. This, in addition to having Applause testers work in sprints with the web conferencing company's team, meant that there were fewer bugs, and those that did occur were much easier to fix than finding them later in the SDLC.

RESULTS

The web conferencing company understands that accessibility and inclusivity is not a "one-and-done" effort. It is now set up to think about inclusivity early in the SDLC and has created a work culture of empathy across teams.

The organization has seen many results from its accessibility and inclusivity efforts: hundreds of logged issues and bug fixes from the accessibility audits as well as the in-sprint testing, a new flexibility to scale and respond to urgent requests, over 100 participants in weekly office-hour sessions where the company's designers have access to Applause accessibility experts, improved cross functional team collaboration and communications, and hundreds of employees participating in training sessions.

With the help of Applause, the web conferencing company has set up checkpoints at all stages in the SDLC. The freed-up time, previously used to fix more expensive bugs later in the SDLC, now enables development to focus more on innovation and has reduced engineer fatigue. The new process and the work leading up to it has set an improved tone in conversations with customers and has invigorated partnerships in their user community. Knowledge gained in the organization — such as profiles for various type of disabilities, or clarification of WCAG guidelines — is stored in a repository for all accessibility and inclusivity efforts.

Today, the organization is more proactive and less reactive. For example, it has a group of PWD that do testing early and point out issues even before the software

" *Now, before the designers begin to put a firm design into place, we have them get input from users with disabilities - early on - so it influences their design.*"

ENGINEERING PRODUCT MANAGER

reaches beta users. The new "expanded team" and processes enable them to do things such as several days of heavy testing on a particularly complex feature of the platform for accessibility and inclusivity issues. They get faster feedback from PWD, and through working with Applause, can pivot much more quickly and fine tune elements easier, making the development organization much more dynamic.

The web conferencing company has successfully built a shift to an ongoing commitment of understanding the real hurdles that impact PWD and how improving the user experience for specific disabilities makes a better experience for everyone. Instead of fixing compliance issues each quarter, it does this in every sprint cycle. As the new culture of empathy has spread throughout the organization, teams now think beyond just fixing bugs to a more personal perspective of how improving the software process makes life better for its users. Accessibility and inclusive design is more integrated into the minds of team members.

The web conferencing organization doesn't make assumptions about what users want, it partners with them to hear what they want and need. It creates collaboration that works for everyone.
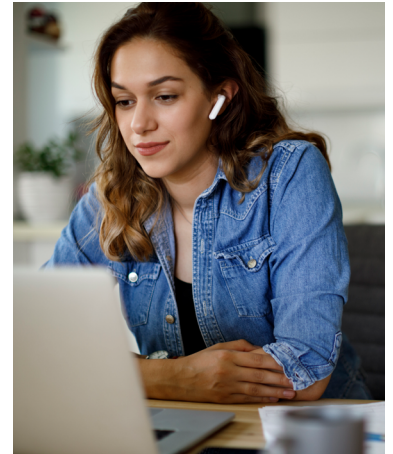
ABOUT APPLAUSE

Applause is the world leader in testing and digital quality. Brands today win or lose customers through digital interactions, and Applause alone can deliver authentic feedback on the quality of digital assets and experiences, provided by real users in real-world settings. Our disruptive approach harnesses the power of the Applause platform and leverages a vetted community of more than one million digital experts worldwide. Unlike traditional testing methods (including lab-based and offshoring), we respond with the speed, scale and flexibility that digital-focused brands require and expect. Applause provides insightful, actionable testing results that can directly inform go/no go release decisions, helping development teams build better and faster, and release with confidence. Thousands of digital-first brands — including Ford, Google, Western Union and Dow Jones — rely on Applause as a best practice to deliver the digital experiences their customers love.

Learn more at: www.applause.com