

Outlook Business Solutions Eyes Accessibility With Sarpy County Chamber

By Jason Huff
The Daily Record

The region's largest employer of the blind has teamed up with the Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce to improve digital accessibility.

A new video resource page launched by the chamber in collaboration with Outlook Business Solutions offers member organizations an opportunity to learn how to make company websites and applications more accessible to customers with disabilities.

"The chamber is excited that Outlook Business Solutions can help us add information about the importance of accessible digital content to our video resources for members," said Brian White, groups and engagement manager for the Sarpy County Chamber. "We want to help our businesses thrive by making their digital assets – like their website or app – available to any customer."

Outlook Business Solutions has a growing network of professionals — more than 60 — who are blind or visually impaired. The company offers marketing strategy, customer service, sales, digital accessibility testing, graphic design/art, copywriting, videography and data entry.

Outlook says its data shows that about 15,000 people in the Omaha area have severe vision loss or blindness.

While handrails, sidewalk ramps, automatic doors and designated parking spaces might come to mind when people think about accessibility for disabled persons, the digital realm can have numerous obstacles for people with partial or total blindness.

A person with macular degeneration may try to magnify the computer screen to make the text appear bigger.

A blind person might use software called a "screen reader" that helps interpret, navigate and read text alone from a website. But if that website has a slideshow that has multiple images or content, it can trap the screen reader program in a loop — interrupting the reading of the website again and again as each new item loads.

Greg Rogers, accessibility testing manager at Outlook, is blind and works and navigates the internet without the need for a monitor or mouse. Since he joined Outlook in June 2020, he's worked to find and solve accessibility roadblocks online for his clients. Rogers said he aspires to oversee a holistic testing process that will help people with a wide variety of disabilities, not just vision but also motor, auditory and cognitive impairments.

"The overall misperception with people with disabilities is, 'Oh, they were born that way or because of an accident they are now disabled,'" Rogers said. "But yet, we don't think of folks like our parents, the baby boomer generation. They are a huge market, and their abilities will change overtime, as we all will."

Some people face disabilities such as dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome, he said. Epilepsy also requires specific considerations.

"There are international standards that pertain to seizure disorders like flashing content that developers need to consider," Rogers said.



Small businesses looking to make their websites and other digital assets more accessible to people with disabilities, such as making their websites function better with screen readers used by the blind and visually impaired, can benefit from videos from the Sarpy County Chamber of Commerce and Outlook Business Solutions. (Dan Farrell/Unsplash)

In addition, sometimes disabilities aren't obvious to other people. "There are also situations where people don't view a person of having a motor challenge, like someone holding a child in one arm while trying to use their phone or laptop," Rogers said. "Or maybe March Madness is coming up and you're out playing a pickup game of basketball with your buddies and break a finger."

Across the country, more than 25% of adults have some type of disability, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A report from the American Institutes for Research cites the discretionary income for people with disabilities is about \$21 billion.

The Sarpy County Chamber's new resource page currently features three videos on accessibility. They focus on what the term "accessibility" means, why businesses should care about this topic and how people with disabilities use the web.

"We look forward to partnering with the Sarpy County Chamber to help them deliver important and inclusive resources to businesses," Outlook Business Solutions Vice President Natalie Hadley said. "Some basic knowledge of best accessibility practices will help businesses improve customer experiences and expand the reach of their products and services. Digital Accessibility is not only for the vision impaired."

Rogers is current preparing a more in-depth presentation for people who are content creators and website developers. He expects that will launch this summer.

For more information about Outlook Business Solutions, visit outlook-businesssolutions.com or call 531-365-5055. Find the video resources from the Sarpy County Chamber at sarpychamber.org/video.



Greg Rogers