

Accessibility Work You Might Not be Thinking About

By [Bonnie Bartos](#) posted 08-28-2019 11:47

On Monday, August 26, 2019, I had the opportunity to interview Thomas Dinkle, an Accessibility Engineer who works for the Optum Division of United Health Group in User Experience Design Services (UXDS). The UXDS is part of Optum's Accessibility Center of Excellence. Thomas has worked for Optum for 19 years and has been in his current division for over five years. He telecommutes, and the ability to work from home is a great benefit to his family. Beyond the impressive and lengthy work-title, Thomas states that the focal point of the division's work is that, "Accessibility benefits everyone".

He cited how automatic doors and flat or ramped access areas in shopping areas were initially designed to improve access for people in wheelchairs. Though these changes also benefit parents with children in strollers, delivery services, and people using walkers. Thomas and his coworkers help make digital products and media on United Health Groups Website accessible to everyone. Evaluation of web content occurs to assess for the ease of access, captioning, screen-reader usability for those with visual impairment, readability, and navigation potential for individuals with limited movement of their hands.

If the web content does not meet universal accessibility standards, it is modified and subjected to the second phase of testing. This cycle repeats until navigation is possible for anyone. When asked about the toughest part of this job, Thomas replied, "It's the sheer volume of materials that need to be modified or adapted for accessibility. Everything, from basic news updates, disease process information, follow-up care messages, health education information to electronic appointment booking systems needs to be adjusted to allow equal access". Even though there are numerous people in his division, they will never run out of work.

The UXDS also provides Empathy Training for new employees of United Health Group and other companies. They bring sensory and mobility deprivation materials to the training sessions, such as low-vision goggles, earplugs, mittens, or gloves. Items that simulate limitations in touch sensation, wheelchairs, walkers, and canes are available during the training sessions for people to experience limitations in mobility. Those attending the training try to do simple mobility tasks. They also have the people in the training classes navigate the United Health Group Website while they deal with their temporary changes in mobility, vision, or sensation. The goal is to train staff to focus on Accessibility so that it is in their minds throughout United Health Group.

Thomas stated that accessibility of documents and electronic services should be second nature to us when we design an item to put on the website. He notes that United Health Group was amazed to see that more people clicked on the caption-link than viewed the corresponding video.

Permalink for the 08-30-19 ADCES DCOI Blog Post:

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