



# Michelle Parfitt talks to Kirtika Bhuvu, UX and UI Lead at John Lewis Partnership Ventures, about digital accessibility.

Video transcript: <https://youtu.be/5FGmMFwA95o>

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**Hi everyone, I'm Michelle, I'm a UX and Accessibility Consultant here at System Concepts. So we always find the GAAD event provides a really helpful focus on accessibility so we've created this sort webinar to show you how you can start incorporating digital accessibility into your practices. We thought the best way to do this would be to invite one of our clients along to talk to them about digital accessibility. So, I'm really thankful and thrilled to have Kirtika Bhuvu with me here today. She's the UX and UI lead at John Lewis Partnership Ventures.**

**So, you've worked at John Lewis for over 5 years and you've played a key role in making the website and app more accessible and usable and last year you also did a talk at the UXPA's GAAD which we're also sharing a link to. So, to start off with can you tell me a bit more about what motivated you to become an accessibility champion at John Lewis.**

So, to be honest, it kind of fell into my lap. I wasn't aware of it fully. I knew some parts of it, like accessibility colour blindness. Yeah, it was basically a colleague of mine who was speaking about it and both he and I went and started doing a bit more research and we wanted to implement it into a new project and we did, we implemented it on that new project. And we kind of worked without too much skill set in it. And then we got a company to do the audit for us; they did the audit and it came back and we had a lot of issues which was fine because then we set aside learning from it. And I really liked it because the audit was there and it highlighted the areas we had to work on which gave me that educational piece which then resulted in me creating little workshops for the company. I wanted to share all this knowledge with people and just show them it's not as scary as you initially think it is, which is what I thought. There's quite a lot to learn and it's quite overwhelming so to make it easier I tried to make it a bit more fun, a bit more relatable and something I would enjoy doing as well. So I just incorporated a lot of fun aspects to it, for example putting blindfolds on people and showing that connection which was quite nice because with every user, when you're designing something, whether its accessibility or non-accessibility you have to think about the customer and try and put people into the customers' places. It is a bit more difficult so you have to try and create these personas so that you have more relatable design solutions so yeah this is why I went into that avenue. It was an accident. But it was a good accident!

**Yeah, of course! So, is it through those workshops and stuff that you incorporated digital accessibility more into the design and development process? Can you tell me a bit more about how you incorporate it in?**



So, there's various ways of doing it. There's not just one way we do this now. So now, the culture's changed where people, especially in the online product team, people are thinking customer first and this way when you're thinking about an idea, you think about various ways of doing something. And also we've got a nice new platform now as well so the structure of the HTML content, for example, is nice and clean and more legible, so there's no room for mistakes, which is quite nice. So, this whole sort of new culture has got people thinking from development stages through to initial concepts through design stages and through every stage we go through, if at some point, someone says, "Oh this is not working" or, "Can we change this?" or, "What about this idea?", people are talking about it and that's really nice to kind of see that; everyone's learning from it. We just want to get customers in and testing it and learning from it, which is quite nice.

**That sounds great! And it's nice to hear as well that you're doing it at all stages, kind of throughout the process because we found that early discovery research is quite important, especially with people with accessibility needs because their needs are so much more unpredictable.**

What's quite nice as well is that people, colleagues, have actually said that they have accessibility requirements as well, which I never knew. Someone I was working with, who was a designer is colour blind and I was like "I never knew that about you" and he was like, "well we don't shout about it" and I was like, "this is true". And it was only last year or the year before that I found out that I was dyslexic; I had worked through the industry without knowing that I had this but it's quite nice to know it. When you know about something, it's easier to do something else for it.

**Yeah, and I guess having more empathy almost as well for the different types of requirements. And having people with different accessibility needs work on something also kind of, they bring new perspectives as well; that's really nice.**

**So, what are the key challenges you faced with incorporating digital accessibility into your practice?**

As with anything, it's always going to be time, it's always going to be budget and to get customers in to test what we want them to test. Especially in terms of environment set up as well; we might not always have the right set up for them to come in, although we can ask companies to do the testing for us but again that involves time and money and often we're so busy with quite a lot of projects that we need to work on which in return is helping to improve the site.

**So, I'm sure there are lots of inclusive features that you've seen and worked on in your time. Can you tell me about your favourite feature and a bit more about that and what you think is so cool about it?**

So, this is a bit of a funny one because it's not that cool. It's something I learnt very early on from the first audit we had about alt descriptions on images and back in the years when you were taught to add alt descriptions to images for SEO purposes and the familiarities to keep copy and pasting, copy and pasting. And what I learnt was having the alt description with the title grouped together is not great. For a screen reader user for example you hear the information twice. So, I shared this information with the merchandising managers and teams and thought, this is great, it saves us time and it saves us thinking time as well; that was quite nice because it releases the pressure off



them to get on with what they need to do but without harming the user experience for our customers.

**Yeah, so streamlined it.**

Yeah, so it's a little one but it's a nice one.

**Nice little nugget. And if you could give just one tip to someone who's looking to improve digital accessibility at their company, what would that be?**

Very easy, it just depends on what they think needs improving because very often you have something, it could be a product, and you might think it needs improving but how do you know if you don't test it with customers? So, I always say, if you've got that physical product, just test it with customers first to clear up the assumptions and then work from there because they're actually the best advisors for you.

**So get it in front of someone who's actually going to use it.**

Yeah!

**Great, well thank you very much for your time and sharing those insights with us.**

**So, I hope that's given you some ideas you can takeaway about how you can start to incorporating digital accessibility more into your work perhaps. One in six people have a recognised impairment and many more have temporary impairments so it really makes sense to start considering accessibility early on and throughout the process. If you'd like to find out more about what we do or if you have any questions then please get in touch because we're always really happy to hear from you and help out.**



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