COVID-19, day 61, or maybe 95, who knows...?

My Wake Up Call ...

Recently, I posted something on a social media site - not business related, just a fun personal update for my “facebook friends” that included some pictures of my latest project...

A peer called me out for not captioning my pictures. And she was absolutely right!

To be clear, one of my job responsibilities is to educate business owners on the importance of making their digital messages accessible, **including** social media. While I talk the talk, I realized don’t always walk the walk. You see my co-worker, my friend, is visually impaired. I know she uses Facebook, I failed to consider her accessibility needs. She called me out, and I was guilty as charged!

I immediately set out to learn how to revise the text descriptions of images I post on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Going forward, I will make it a habit to review and revise the Alt-text so that it is accessible. Accessibility has a learning curve, but how can I promote its necessity if I don’t practice it myself?

In each Social Media Provider, there is an accessibility area in the “Help Section.” I’ve gathered some quick hints and tips – I encourage you to give it a try.

Making Social Media Accessible – Must do, How to...

The primary issue with accessibility on social media is a description of what is in the picture, commonly referred to as Alt-Text. Most social media providers now feature “automatic” alternative (alt) text, that uses object recognition technology to create a description of a photo for the blind and vision-loss community. More and more, resources use automated image descriptions. They automatically generate a description of photos and images for screen readers, that may or may not be accurate. The technology is simplistic and could be affected by the bias of its programmers. It's much better to write out the alt-text description yourself to ensure that the description matches what you intended to represent..

1. **Add image descriptions, also called Alt-Text.**

Alt-Text allows [screen-readers](http://www.afb.org/prodBrowseCatResults.aspx?CatID=49) to describe an image for an individual who is visually impaired. Once you have the method for each social media resource, it’s an easy habit to develop.

* [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/help/214124458607871) has the option to edit and add alternative text to its automatically-generated image descriptions. It is, however, better to include your image description in your main post due to issues with the alt text not working on different screen readers.

To see and edit alt text for a photo before you post it:

* + Click Photo/Video at the top of your News Feed.
  + Select the photo you want to add.
  + Click Edit Photo, then click Alt Text.
  + The automatically generated text will be shown on the left side of your photo. Click Override generated alt text to edit it.
  + Write your alt text in the box. To change back to the automatically generated text, click Clear.
  + To save your alt text, click Save in the bottom right.

To change the alt text of a photo after you've posted it:

* + Click the photo to open it.
  + Click Options in the bottom right and select Change Alt Text.
  + Click Override generated alt text or change the alt text in the text box. You can also click Clear to change your edited alt text back to the automatically generated text.
  + Click Save.
* [**Twitter**](https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions) makes it easy to write and add image descriptions. Don’t forget to write image descriptions for your tweets featuring screengrabs! Even though a tweet might be written out, a screen reader won't pick it up unless you add in the text yourself.

To enable the composition of image descriptions from twitter.com

* + Click on the more icon and select Settings and privacy from the dropdown.
  + Click Accessibility from the list of settings.
  + Find the Compose image descriptions checkbox.
  + Check the box to turn the setting on or off.
  + How to add image descriptions in Tweets from twitter.com
  + Click on the Tweet compose button
  + Attach your photo(s).

To insert descriptive text, click Add description beneath the image

* + Jim Halpert from The Office (US version) holding a pie chart: 60% Procrastination; 39% Distracting Others; 1% Critical Thinking
  + Jim Halpert from The Office (US Version) (c) 2007 NBC Universal Television.
  + Type your description of the image and click the Done button (The limit is 420 characters).
  + For tweets with multiple images, you must add each description separately.

Note: Image descriptions cannot be added to GIFs or videos. When using GIFs or videos, manually add a description in square brackets of the image at the end of your tweet.

Example:

* + Jim Halpert from The Office (US version) holding a pie chart: 60% Procrastination; 39% Distracting Others; 1% Critical Thinking
  + Jim Halpert from The Office (US Version) (c) 2007 NBC Universal Television.

You can find instructions for adding Alt-Text on an iPhone or Android mobile device in the Twitter Help Center.

* **Instagram** allows users the option to manually type in an "alt text" image description (found by clicking "advanced settings" when you go to write a post).

To see and edit alt text for a photo before you post it on Instagram:

* + Start by taking a photo or uploading an existing photo to Instagram.
  + Choose a filter and edit the image, then tap Next.
  + Tap Advanced Settings at the bottom of the screen.
  + Tap Write Alt Text.
  + Write your alt text in the box and tap Done (iOS) or Save (Android).

To change the alt text of a photo after you've already posted it on Instagram:

* + Go to the photo and tap (iOS) or (Android).
  + Tap Edit.
  + Tap Edit Alt Text in the bottom right.
  + Write the alt text in the box and tap Done (iOS) or (Android).

**LinkedIn** - You can add alternative text (alt-text) to the images you share on your feed or embed in articles. This allows members using voice-over screen readers to understand what’s in the image (alt-text won’t be visible to members not using screen readers).

You can add or edit alt-text for images you upload from a desktop computer, by clicking “Add description” at the top right of your image. Adding or editing alt-text isn’t available on mobile devices.

LinkedIn may automatically add alt-text to images that don’t have it. When uploading an image from a desktop computer, you’ll be alerted if alt-text is automatically assigned. You won’t be alerted if you’re uploading an image from a mobile device.

1. **Write your hashtags in Medial Caps (CamelCase)**

Sometimes an all-caps hashtag might look nice, but in reality, it's very difficult to read.

#WriteYourHashtagsLikeThis

instead of

#WRITINGYOURHASHTAGSLIKETHIS.

Not only does this make it easier for all users to differentiate words, it also assists automated screen readers in reading the hashtag for those with visual or reading disabilities.

## ****Use emojis sparingly****

"Scream. Scream. Scream. Scream. Scream." A screen reader is set up to automatically read emojis out loud. One red heart isn't terrible but having to hear "red heart" repeated 10 times in a row takes a long time and might get tiresome!

## ****Avoid language like "I stand with" and “insane/crazy.”****

Respect people and communities with disabilities — both visible and invisible — words have meaning and history behind them.

It might seem harmless to say, "I stand with XYZ," but try "support" instead. Don't alienate the millions of people who aren't able to stand.

Using words such as "crazy" and "insane" to indicate something negative can further stigmatize individuals with psychiatric disabilities.

Use more precise language for the feelings and issues you are addressing. Try, "That behavior is wild" instead of "crazy."

Instead of using "able-bodied" to describe an individual or ally who isn't disabled, use "non-disabled." "Able-bodied" implies that a disabled person is not able or somehow broken.

## ****Make sure your video content is captioned****

Open captioning of videos on social media allows all users to play videos on silent mode without bothering those around them. However, including open or closed captioning is essential for people who are hearing impaired. It gives them access to the information provided in the video. There are apps you can use to add captions... I haven’t conquered captions yet, but it’s on my list. Maybe my next quarantine lesson...!