I am James Pepper and I had progressively worsening tunnel vision in High School and College and received my sight back in 1987 so I developed a means of making PDF documents and forms accessible to the blind. Last year I made the National Voter Registration Form accessible to the blind to enable 10 million blind and visually impaired Americans the opportunity to register to Vote. We all know about accessible voting machines but they forgot about Voter Registration and if you are not registered, you do not vote!

My form was tested by AFB Tech, the testing division of the American Foundation for the Blind and they were so impressed with the form that they sent it to the Secretary of State of West Virginia, the state where they are located. Jim Dickson, the Vice President of the American Association of People with Disabilities presented my forms to the Elections Assistance Commission in October of 2008. Anne Taylor at the Jernigan Institute of the National Federation of the Blind can tell you about my work.

I am currently writing a book which is tentatively titled "I was Blind, but Now I can See," for APress, on how to make this form, documents, and websites accessible to the blind. I go into detail exactly how the blind fill out the current form published by the Elections Assistance Commission and why the blind have to pay a poll tax of $1095 to access the content. I show exactly how the blind fill out the form using screen readers, each step and what they must do to access most of the content. I delivered the book to the publisher APress last week. I just found out about this request from the Copyright Office yesterday!

In the book, I show how to fix the problem so that the blind can access the content using free software. So there is no poll tax, the blind can freely access the content. Right now the only way to access most of the information in the National Voter Registration form is to buy a full licensed copy of JAWS the screen reader for the blind which costs $1095 and even with that, they do not have full access to the content. This is a Poll Tax and it is a direct violation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

My format works and it is a new standard for accessibility. My book explains how to do this work, exactly, using standard software. I show you what the blind experience so you will know it and understand the problems from their perspective. I explain how to do this with documents, forms and websites. And this is not only accessibility, reading content but these processes can be used to enable the blind to interact with that content. For example, it is possible for the blind can be hired to do reliable data entry.

Currently there is no "meeting of the minds" in form design with the US government; the blind do not have access to all of the content. My forms have a "meeting of the minds;" ALL of the content is accessible to the blind. My hope is to educate the world on accessibility. The New International Standard must include the language "Meeting of the Minds."

The blind can use free software for the Windows Platform to access all of the content. Free Access is important for the blind. Also my format is backwards compatible; people using older screen readers can access this content.

This is important because the blind are poor, they are 71% unemployed in the United States (their best rate ever!) and the CDC says the economy spends 54 billion a year on the blind. The CDC says the US government spends $266,000 for each blind person over their lifetime. The US government was supposed to be accessible in 1973 with the Rehabilitation Act, 36 years ago. Multiply 54 billion dollars by 36 years and you get 1.944 Trillion dollars spent to keep the blind at 71% unemployment. This has to change!

I explain how to create failure standards for IT personnel so lay people can determine if their webmasters actually know what they are doing! I have found the main resistance to accessibility is IT personnel who just simply do not know how to do it, or think that they do not have to do it. I have found that they are offended when you point out that their websites or documents are not accessible, they consider this to be a minor thing, a nuisance to comply with the law.

I include the reactions by the states to my form including the State of Washington:

> *"Remember, too, that federal law requires that voters be able to vote independently; the capability to complete registration applications independently is a desirable goal, but not a legal requirement at this time."*

But it was required under the following laws:
1. Rehabilitation Act of 1973
2. Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984
3. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
4. National Voter Registration Act of 1993
5. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1996
6. The Help America Vote Act of 2002

Accessibility is required by law and yet there is a general lack of realization that IT personnel can be held responsible for inaction. The result of inaction is the separation and the denial of the civil rights of the blind. Since this is a hate crime, IT personnel should be fired for violating the civil rights of the blind and disabled. If this threat was implemented, then IT personnel would have the incentive to act and learn about accessibility and take this seriously! This should be done immediately with Colleges and Universities where they exhibit this type of behavior. The laws are on the books, it is time to enforce them!

I explain in the book the consequences of the recent decisions of the Unruh law in California and that private companies are now required to be accessible to the blind in the United States. Most are unaware of their liability.

I explain how to make standardized tests accessible to the blind. This was in response to the recent litigation between the National Federation of the Blind and the LSAC which makes the LSAT test. I looked at the situation, found I could fix that test, and so I lay out exactly how a person will fix the test in my book.

I explain how teachers can make tests accessible to all of their students and include samples so they can immediately start testing their students and I made these samples in all of the languages supported by JAWS. I am working on 30 different languages so we can enable teachers worldwide to make their content immediately accessible to all of their students, whether they are blind or not and thus emancipate the blind worldwide!

I point out that it is possible that the blind can be misled where the content of the accessible portion of documents and websites can be completely different than the experience of the sighted user and that this liability in form design should be looked at in order to prevent fraud. Banks and Insurance companies need to be made aware of this liability which comes with bad form design. Right now the different experience is based on a lack of ability of people to make accessibility work, but it can be used in a fraudulent manner and I explain how people must test their documents to make sure this is not happening. Insurance rates and bank loans need to be adjusted based on this liability.

I found that Colleges and Universities do not have accessible applications forms for admission and employment, a direct violation of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and all of their funding is dependent on compliance. I recommend that all colleges and universities be required to be accessible to receive any further funding and that the law be enforced on all of the moneys they have received since 1973, to encourage this work.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 specifically states that this money acts as a lien against the University so they must become accessible to the blind and disabled. This money includes Student Loans, Grants, NIH Grants, NEA grants, Presidential Libraries, every dime paid to the University since 1973 acts as a lien until they comply with the law! Because if colleges cannot integrate the blind, then what does that say about our society? What about the classes they graduate, how are they going to react to the blind in the workplace if they have no practical experience of the blind and disabled as colleagues?

I recommend that standardized tests be required to stop "outing" the blind and disabled with their practices of telling admissions departments what type of accessibility device is used to take their tests. The status of the health of an applicant cannot be known until after they are accepted into a University. So colleges do not ask these questions; and they do not need to ask, the standardized testing organizations tell the college what type of accessibility device is used to take their test. So the colleges know what type of disability the applicant has without asking. This needs to change because the blind and disabled are accepted into colleges in proportion to their numbers in the population but the do not graduate from college in any reasonable proportion.

I explain how to make Daisy Files and their limitations. For instance this reliance on Daisy does not make all of the content accessible to the blind, it is a great benefit but you could make the case that there is no meeting of the minds. You have to take what you can get with the most commonly used software. With my PDF format you can make ALL of the content accessible.

Also I go into detail how companies that make software for the blind appear to have never actually tested their processes in a real world situation. For instance for many years Adobe Reader had a kill switch for accessibility where their built in screen reader "Read Out Loud" was unable to read pop up screens that warned you of problems. So when you opened Adobe Reader with a form you will get a pop up screen warning saying you cannot save the document. That is what you see on the screen if you have eyesight but the blind get nothing, there is no feedback and you have to know the correct keyboard shortcuts to remove the pop up screen to continue. This was a kill switch. This applied to versions 6, 7, and 8 and clearly all Adobe had to do was actually test their product with the screen off and without a mouse.

Now with Adobe Reader 9 they have these pop up screens built into the menus and since Adobe "Read out Loud" still cannot read these menus the information is missing entirely from their experience. So if the warning is that you cannot save the document with the information intact, then the blind will fill out the form and at the end of that ordeal, then they find out they cannot save the information.

Or if you try to start Adobe "Read out Loud" without a document present you would get a warning from Adobe Reader that visually reads that "Read out Loud" would not be able to read the document but no audio feedback. This happens a lot because the blind need to know if a document is open or not. Adobe "Read out Loud" is the built in screen reader for Adobe Reader. Why would you build a warning that cannot be read using "Read out Loud", telling you that "Read out Loud" cannot be turned on to read the document? Why did they go through the trouble of actually making this pop up screen? Clearly the folks at Adobe never tested their product in a real live scenario, by turning off the monitor and not using a mouse.

And before you say, well "Read out Loud" is not a real screen reader, my format makes it work. It is a real screen reader if you use my layout.

I recommend that a set of patents be made available for use for the blind in Adobe Livecycle forms so that the blind can have the opportunity to save forms so that they can have an accessible copy that they can access copy and make corrections. This will create a "Meeting of the Minds" because they will be able to open a document that was saved and read the content.

Right now the blind must print out a document and then use OCR to scan it so they can save a copy on their computer. They have to correct that scan without knowing what is actually in the original document so there is no meeting of the minds. But the responsibility of making sure the content is correct is from the sender, not the receiver.

Anyone can change anything after it is sent. Even if the document is digitally signed and printed, it still goes through the process of OCR and the corrections by the end user, not the author. This is not a "Meeting of the Minds." This is not a valid contract.

I have a lot more to say in my book which goes over all of this technology from the perspective of the blind using many different programs.

Sincerely,

James G. Pepper
Dallas Texas USA