Event: 7968 ‑ AccessGA‑VPATs: What They Are and How to Use Them
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>> Johan Rempel: Good afternoon, everyone. This is Johan Rempel from center for inclusive design and innovation at Georgia Tech.

And today's presentation is going to be on VPATs: What they are and how to use them. Our presenter today is John Toles. Thank you so much for joining us today. This is going to be ‑‑ this is recorded now and will be archived and sent to all people registered via e‑mail.

Next slide.

So we have live captions being offered today and there's two ways that you can access them. One is through the StreamText link that our captionist has dropped into the chat. That opens a third party application that you can open and access and it gives you a lot of options as far as font size and color.

And the second option is through the closed captioning option on the Zoom toolbar. Right now there's a bright red arrow pointing to the CC option on the Zoom tool bar. Next slide.

So sign language interpretation. We have an ASL interpreter with us today to make sure we are fully accessible. For today she has been spotlighted. Next to the PowerPoint slide. If you want to reposition that window you can do so by hovering over the line between the live video and the PowerPoint. And you can readjust the size of both the video and the PowerPoint.

There is also another option within Zoom called the interpretation view which some people use as well. In today's training we're just having her spotlighted for ease of use. Next slide.

So, this webinar is being provided to you on behalf of AccessGA. AccessGA is a joint project of the State ADA Coordinator's Office, GSFIC and GTA, along with the center for inclusive design and innovation here at Georgia Tech. AccessGA's purpose is to support state of Georgia agencies with Information and Communications Technology accessibility, promoting equity and timely access for employees and customers with a wide range of disabilities. Next slide.

So, center for inclusive design and innovation we are located here in Atlanta under the college of design at Georgia Tech. Some of the services we provide include braille, document accessibility through our e‑text department and captioning and audio description services. Next slide. And we also house the Tools for Life program which is part of the Georgia's Assistive Technology Act Program. We also do a lot of work in the area of accessibility compliance, best practice, and user experience. We carry out comprehensive web evaluations. We carry out VPATs which you'll be learning about today. We provide training and technical assistance in the area of accessibility. And as an institute ‑‑ a research institute, we do a lot of research in the area of disabilities and underserved populations. Next slide.

I get the opportunity to introduce John Toles. He's one of our accessibility specialist here at CIDI. He provides web evaluations, technical assistance, and training. He joined CIDI back in 2016 providing customer support. He's worked with customer support teams as an AT support specialist and served as a lead developer for CIDI's Student Accommodation Manager, among many other things. I will pass it on to John.

>> John Toles: Thank you, Johan.

Today we'll talk about VPATs. On the agenda is to learn about the structure of a VPAT, to understand how to interpret the findings in a VPAT, to talk about the different types of VPATs, and I will do a live demo where I walk through a VPAT, explain the different parts and what to look for and the very structures in a VPAT. And we will answer the questions: When do you need one, who should complete it, once you have it, how do you use it and where can you find a VPAT.

We'll start out with a quick poll. The poll question is this: Have you ever used a VPAT before. Do you want to start that, Johan? I will give everybody a few minutes.

Okay. It looks like pretty much about 84% have answered. It looks like an overwhelming majority don't know about a VPAT. That's not surprising. We're here to learn.

I'm going to post the results.

So what is a VPAT?

A VPAT stands for Volunteer Product Accessibility Template. It is a registered trademark of the [indistinct] with relevant guidelines to access the [indistinct]. The included guidelines and ultimately a VPAT is used to create an accessibility conformance report. On this slide there's a link to information technology industry council. Their logo is on the slide.

So ACR verses VPAT. The production of an accessibility conformance report is the goal of a VPAT. ACR will include the findings by a VPAT. You will see a lot of times sections get left out because ‑‑ I'm seeing in the chat my audio is cutting out. Is it any better?

>> Johan Rempel: It was cutting out for a few seconds. The last minute or so has been fine.

>> John Toles: Okay. Let me adjust my mic.

So [indistinct]. A VPAT is the more common term. Like I said you will see them used interchangeably. You're really looking for an accessibility conformance report, not necessarily a VPAT.

A VPAT is ‑‑ even though a VPAT is used to create an ACR, [indistinct]. It will be for internal use or might be at the customer's request. [Indistinct].

>> Johan Rempel: The last 30‑45 seconds you're cutting out a bit.

>> Johan Rempel: We haven't been able to hear anything at all for the last 5‑8 seconds.

>> Johan Rempel: You're still cutting out.

>> John Toles: There's a link to how to create an accessibility conformance report.

>> Johan Rempel: It looks like John dropped off. He must be having some connection issues. So we'll give him a moment to log back in. Our apologies. I will splice the pieces out that have audio issues to make sure you get what you need from this.

>> John Toles: Can you hear me?

>> Johan Rempel: Yup.

>> John Toles: I picked up the screen share again?

>> Johan Rempel: Yup. Poll number two, I will run that now.

>> John Toles: Sorry about that.

>> Johan Rempel: We'll give people another 5 seconds or so to respond to the poll. Number 2: Does your organization rely on VPATs?

All right. We'll end it and share the results here.

>> John Toles: It looks like either no or not sure. Not sure is a little bit ahead. 42%. And no being 33%. That's not surprising. It's usually sorts of ‑‑ there's a lot of confusion around it what you need to look for or even how to find those. So hopefully we will clear some of that up.

I will stop sharing the poll.

Okay, so there are four different types of VPATs. So different versions of the template. The accessibility conformance report based on the ITI VPAT is the leading global reporting format for assisting buyers and sellers in identifying information and communications technology. That's a quote from their website. It explains what they're used for. There are four different types or versions of the template. There's the 508 version. That's targeted entities operating in the U.S. It includes WCAG conformance criteria and Section 508 criteria. It's a harmonization of the two.

There's the WCAG version. It's targeting mainly towards corporations that use accessibility or require some sort of accessibility consideration when they're procuring ICT products. It's the least detailed because it only covers WCAG.

There's the EU version. That's targeting entities operating in the European union. It includes EN301 549 functional performance criteria. It also includes WCAG criteria and criteria for some of the expanded functions. That's the main difference between the EU and the U.S. It includes software, hardware, video, two‑way voice communications, support documentation and emergency services access.

And then there's the INT that targeted to entities that operate globally. It includes all three of the other standards. So the INT includes everything. And then there's versions for the specific procurement practices you're following. The U.S. federal, basic corps or EU.

So there's sections ‑‑ the VPATs are divided up into sections. There's an image on the slide that has car parts. There's the front matter. If you're used to only seeing a VPAT in the form of an ACR, you might not be familiar with the front matter because it usually gets removed. It includes instructions for reading and completing the VPAT. The company information is usually what you see first in an ACR. It specifies the product version and other information pertinent to the report. If it's only covering a version up to a specific date, it will include that. It will also detail the evaluation methods and applicable standards for the report. If it's only covering WCAG, it will mention that. If you're using a particular evaluation method you'll see product knowledge or testing with assistive technology, things like that in that section to explain it.

There's the WCAG 2.X report. It's meant to keep pace with WCAG. We just had a new version of WCAG released. WCAG 2.2. The base templates have not been updated yet. Eventually it will be. It just covered the current version. It's separated into the performance level. There's A, AA and AAA conformance levels. Level AAA is usually left out and there will be a reason stated why.

There's also the 508 report. It includes the functional performance criteria for Section 508. Hardware, software and support documentation. The base level 508 conformance you'll find details there. It's important for any following U.S. federal and state practices.

There's the EN301 549 report. It includes the functional performance for that legal guideline and there's sections for closed systems like kiosks, things that can't connect to the internet easily. There's two‑WAI communication, hardware, software, support documentation and emergency services access.

And the last one is for legal disclaimer. This is where they add legal information that's important. It usually covers a current version of the product. It includes legal speech.

In a VPAT you'll find conformance levels that's broken down into supports, partially supports, does not support, not applicable or not evaluated.

Support means it has at least one method that meets the criteria without known defects or meets the equivalent facilitation. Meaning at least one functionality in the product supports this particular criteria.

Partially supports means some functionality of the product doesn't meet the criteria. You will want to include partially supports.

Does not supports means the majority of the product will not meet the criteria. We'll talk ‑‑ it will make more sense once we view the VPAT and go through what I'm referring to.

Not applicable means it's not referred to. There's certain aspects that don't include a product. You'll also see not evaluated. Usually that's in section ‑‑ in the WCAG section for the level AAA conformance criteria.

You'll also find remarks and explanations. They should include a justification for the chosen level. It should support about how it supports it. If it only partially supports or fails, it should explain how. It should give details in that area explaining exactly where it fails or how it only partially supports.

You should not rely on these findings alone. Do your own testing to confirm that what they are saying in the ACR or VPAT is correct. If an explanation is confusing, reach out to the company and ask for clarification. A lot of times you'll hear from someone reading a VPAT and they don't understand it but they will go with it. It's okay to reach out and ask for clarification. Don't see afraid to ask if work is being done to fix the accessibility of the product. If it has a lot of accessibility issues but it's still a product you're interested in, reach out to the company and find out where they are at in fixing the accessibility issues. You might want to hold off from procuring the product for a little while but if they give you assurances that a future version will include accessibility, that might help you make a decision about procuring the product.

I'm going to do a quick walkthrough of a VPAT.

Actually a couple of VPATs I think.

Johan, can you see my screen?

>> Johan Rempel: Yup, I sure can.

>> John Toles: So I needed to look through ‑‑ or look for a VPAT for some Google products recently and I found the Google calendar accessibility conformance report. This is a good example.

So, this is the front matter section ‑‑ the front matter section has been removed from this one but it's the ‑‑ so it starts with the company information. Explains what the product is. It's a web app which lets users create, edit and utilize events and appointment calendars. It gives the date and who to contact and the evaluation method. You want to be careful when you see product knowledge in the evaluation methods.

If you are an expert at a product you can go through and figure out ways that your product would or wouldn't meet the performance criteria. If the person who is filling it out isn't an accessibility expert, it's not possible to meet that in every standard. So you want to find something that's tested ‑‑ you want to find like applicable or not animated tools. Find out that at least some testing with assistive technology has been done.

So the applicable standards it gives the WCAG 2.0 guideline.

And then the revised Section 508 standards. It's also including corrections to ICT rules. It's all stuff from the U.S. access board. It's usually the same for all of them. If it's INT it will have a bigger list here.

And it has a quick blurb about the terms. Then it goes into the WCAG report. It doesn't say X. This is only covering WCAG 2.0. If it was covering WCAG 2.1 it will indicate 2.1.

It gets into a table of all the success criteria from WCAG. If you're familiar, it's broken down into different sections. You'll need to be familiar with WCAG to get the most out of this. There are links included if you're not sure about something you can follow the link and read about it.

It shows conformance level and also pretty much all of them include a remark and explanation. Where it false short it gives an explanation of how. Keyboard access it says only partially supports. All functionality is operable using the keyboard with some exceptions and then it gives a list of the exceptions.

So that gives you a good idea of what a keyboard user would run into.

Again for focus order it lists ‑‑ gives exact points of how it doesn't meet the criteria.

I will scroll down to the AAA. They didn't cover AAA but it notes that all AAA criteria were not tested. Usually you'll see it ends there. This one they included the table and listed not applicable for all of those.

And then this is where I don't necessarily agree with their ACR. They chose not to include the revised Section 508. They're saying it's not applicable for the scoping requirements. It's technically true but I complete VPATs myself. I always ‑‑ even for a web application I will include this section. It is a good way to explain to someone reading through the VPAT what somebody with no vision will go through trying to use the software.

And it also includes the hardware section. It's saying not applicable because it's content relevant only to web so users can use their own hardware.

These sections are pretty long. Software is ‑‑ a lot of times you'll see this get ignored when it's for a web application. It doesn't include any specific software. They have chosen to fill it out and note it does not provide any features that will be defined as accessibility controls.

That would be all the accessibility controls would come from your browser or operating system. They haven't included anything special for it.

And the supporting documentation is where you talk about the support documentation services details like they're saying that the accessibility and compatibility features are not applicable because the documentation for Google calendar lists and explains how to use the accessibility compatibility features of the product.

And it ends with the legal disclaimer.

So this is a pretty good example of a VPAT. I also have an example of what I consider acceptable but could be better. This is for Apple iOS 16 and iPad iOS 16. It's just running WCAG on this version but you'll see it supports with exceptions. It does detail how the ‑‑ it gives details about the exceptions which is good to see. Then when you get to the supports section it just lists supports. It doesn't give information about what features supports this criteria. It doesn't give any additional information to guide your own testing. It just says it supports it and leaves it up to you to trust it or not.

It also only includes the level A and AA and it stills covered the 508 functional performance criteria.

I'm trying to scroll through this quicker. Then it also still includes the other chapters and ends with the legal disclaimer.

I'm going to jump from there into how to find a VPAT. I'm generally using pretty major companies who have made their VPATs available publicly and I want to give you a walk through how to find those so you can replicate this for any company hopefully.

This is Apple's website. Usually a major company like Apple will have an accessibility statement on their website. Usually it will be in the footer for their home page. That is always a good place to start when you're looking for information about accessibility for their products. So I'm going to click on that.

They have a well-defined accessibility site. It gives you a lot of information about how to ‑‑ the accessibility features in their products and how to utilize those. What you want to look for is any mission of accessibility conformance report or VPAT as you scroll through the site. You might try these links. I know on these website they have a link at the bottom. It takes you to a list of all their VPATs. If you're looking for a particular product ‑‑ the list is not exactly easy to read through because it includes Mac book multiple times. You have to know exactly what you're looking for. Once you get here you might use your browser find function to locate the exact one. They are broken up into headers. So at least it has that going for it. It can be hard to find the product you're looking for.

Compare that to Google. This is Google's main website. So accessibility statement in the footer. So you might ‑‑ it's Google so the fastest way is to Google. A lot of times you can find a company's VPAT by Googling or using a search engine. VPAT will usually bring up accessibility conformance report as well.

I used to rag on Google hard about not having accessibility statements but they have made some changes. If you go to their about page they have an accessibility statement in their footer.

It's a little hard to find the ACRs on their statement. You have to explore around and look for it. If you click on the explore accessibility in our products and features link, the page header here has a link to their accessibility conformance report. Not quite as easy to find as Apple but it's easier now to find it.

They include icons to help you differentiate the different products.

I will go ahead and do Microsoft as well. Microsoft does have an accessibility statement in their footer. If you're not sure or the footer is not well organized you can go to the home page, use your browser search and look for accessibility. There should be a link in the footer. If the company doesn't have an accessibility statement, ask. Contact their customer service to start with. See if they have an accessibility statement and you're just not finding it. If not, let them know that you're interesting in procuring a product. Are they planning to have an accessibility statement? Ask about the accessibility of their products. You might actually be ‑‑ the idea that you're interested in procuring their products might push them towards doing the stuff they should be doing already.

In Microsoft's page it's hard to find their accessibility conformance reports. I started scrolling through, reading all the stuff on the page and couldn't find it. I didn't look in the menu to start with. There's a link to the conformance reports under resources.

They actually have a search feature included in it so you can search for ‑‑ Word. It will bring up all the different versions of Word. I haven't looked through any of their VPATs. I don't know how well they look or not. I should do that in the future.

Do we have any questions before we move on to the ‑‑ rapping up the last few sections here?

>> Johan Rempel: No questions yet but I will definitely let you know if they roll in.

>> John Toles: Okay. I will go back. Can you see the slides still?

>> Johan Rempel: Yup.

>> John Toles: So, I will wrap up by answering the questions that we listed in the agenda. So these slides will just cover various answers for those questions. When do I need a VPAT? Any government or corporate organizations require the accessibility of a product to be considered during procurement. A VPAT can be used as a justification for acquiring a product over one that is not. If you have a positive accessibility conformance report on one and the other one doesn't have one or if they do have one but it doesn't meet your requirements for accessibility, that's a good justification for picking the other product. A VPAT or ACR can be a method of demonstrating the accessibility of a product for a user who uses assistive technology. So if one of your employees is an assistive technology user and you want to give them an idea of a new product or one of your existing products that you use works and how it will work with their assistive technology, then giving them a copy of the VPAT and go through it with them and explaining all the places where it doesn't support a particular criteria will give them a better understanding of how they can actually use this product with their assistive technology.

And it can also guide an accessibility tester who is evaluating a product but it does not ‑‑ it should not replace testing of the product with assistive technology. So if you're a tester and you're trying to evaluate the accessibility of a product, you can look at a VPAT, get some idea but you still want to do your own testing to verify the claims and maybe find places with the VPAT is not correct or ‑‑ especially if the VPAT is for an old version. The new version may change something and they haven't updated it yet they will give you an idea of what is broken or what's changed.

Who should complete a VPAT? They are completed by the company who created the product or by a third-party organization that specialize in accessibility testing. The company that created the product is responsible for turning a VPAT into an ACR and justifying the claims in the report. The quality of the VPAT will depend on the expertise of the organization. A large organization with a robust accessibility program will be capable of completing their own report. A small company might outsource to an organization that's focused on accessibility. If you see one or the other, ultimately you want to look at the expertise level of the company. I demonstrated Apple, Google and Microsoft. They all have their own very robust accessibility programs but if it is a smaller company and they're outsourcing it, you might find out who the outsource is to and then look up that company to see how capable would they be of performing it.

And how do you use a VPAT? You want to read through the report sections that are relevant to your organization. So if you find an INT but you're only procuring based on federal government procurement practices you wouldn't necessarily want to read through all the EU sections. You want to look at the evaluation methods used. You want to be wary of when it just mentioned product knowledge. Testing with automated tools are good but you want to look for something like testing with assistive technology. That means someone who actually uses assistive technology went through the product and evaluated it based off all the conformance criteria.

And you want to look for areas where the conformance level does not or only partially supports a criteria. If it only list does not support and does not give remarks ‑‑ especially in parts where it says partially supports ‑‑ they should list how and why.

If the report only includes conformance level with no explanation it will be difficult to justify the claims. Don't let the VPAT or ACR be the end of the process. Do your own testing to check the claims. Have it evaluated on your end and listen to ‑‑ especially if you have an employee or someone in your organization who's an AT user, listen to their feedback. If they have complaints about it, listen to what they have to say, and then let that be a guide more than just we have a VPAT and it VPAT says it supports a claim.

So where can I find a products VPAT. We went through that in the demo. A company's website have include an accessibility statement. It's usually found in the footer of the website. For products that are not web‑based, it will sometimes be included in the product documentation or the product support website.

If you're buying a piece of equipment, includes a user interface or something like, often the manual might also include a VPAT and you might be ‑‑ if you're looking for that ahead of time, you might go to the product website and look in the support documentation and see if they have a VPAT anywhere.

And ultimately you can try Googling the product name and VPAT or the company name and accessibility. It will usually give you something. If it's not easy to find on their website, that can help you to find it. If all else fails, ask the company. Try the contact information on their website or the accessibility statement if they have one. Often the regular customer support won't be the contact information listed. Sometimes the regular customer support is able to handle it. If the company doesn't have an ACR, you asking for it might spur them to complete one. If there's a federal or state agency that's interested in procuring a product and you make it a requirement they might complete one.

>> Johan Rempel: We have about 11 minutes before 2 p.m.

>> John Toles: Thank you. I went ahead and covered that. I was worried we wouldn't be able to do both. We will leave about 10 minutes at the end for questions.

Key take aways for this demo ‑‑ for this presentation will be that VPAT is more common term, but ACR is the more appropriate term.

There are four types of VPATs, each targeted to different standards and audiences.

Points made in the ACR are only claims and should be investigated through assistive technology. And if you're having trouble located an ACR, ask the company for it.

We'll finish up with a quick poll. After my whole presentation, do you plan on including VPATs or ACRs in the future.

>> Johan Rempel: All right. We'll give people 5 more seconds to respond.

>> John Toles: Okay. It looks like an even split. Mostly not sure and a lot of yeses. If you're not sure, I know this can be confusing and you have to figure out how to incorporate this into your accessibility program. Hopefully, this has given you a lot of information that you can use for that. I will stop the poll.

And our last slide is all of our resources. All the links from the presentation just collected here at the end. There's a link to the ITI's website, a link to their accessibility section. A page where it lists all the VPATs and gives you links to documents for all of their templates. There's a link to how to create an accessibility conformance report using a VPAT from Section 508.gov. And there's a link to the U.S. access board information and communication technology guidelines. And there's a link to the EN 301 549 guidelines. That's a PDF and it take a few seconds to load. If it doesn't immediately come up, give it a little bit and it should work.

I think we'll spend the last 8 minutes or so for questions. If anyone has one, feel free to post in the chat. Or if there's any listed.

>> Johan Rempel: Yeah. There was a lot of thank yous. This was informative. And thank you for an informative section on VPAT. Just a reminder this is being recorded and will be archived and sent out to everyone who registered. So you'll get the MP4 video and the PowerPoint with all the slides and the great resources near the end that John referenced as an accessible PDF as well. That should be going out within a week of today. You should be receiving that.

Any questions at all for John at this point? He's actually done several VPATs and he's familiar with it. I realize this can be very overwhelming if this is your first learning of VPATs. So the old adage of "there's no stupid questions." We're all on a learning curve. So feel free to drop them in the chat there.

I'll give people a moment.

>> John Toles: When I'm completing a VPAT for a customer, I always try to include as much information as possible. Even when the product supports a particular criteria. That can be a little daunting when you're first starting to read these. Understanding what the criteria are, what the intent and the actual text means. For that you really have to ‑‑ having a good fundamental knowledge of WCAG, the W3C's web guidelines is a great place to start with that. We've done a lot of webinars on that in the past.

Ultimately if you're reading through something and it doesn't make sense, don't feel like because of your lack of knowledge. If you need clarification on something, reach out to the company and ask. Don't just find the VPATs, read them and let that be the only source of information you're getting. If something doesn't make sense to you, it probably doesn't make sense to other people as well. We try to create these documents as useful as possible but if they're not, we need to correct them.

If the company needs to clarify. These aren't supposed to be static documents that are never changed. You can always update them later.

>> Johan Rempel: All right. I'm not seeing any additional questions in the chat. So we'll go ahead and wrap this up. We're actually less than 5 minutes left. Thank you John for your wealth of expertise. This was an informative presentation. We will have the recording to refer to and the PowerPoint as well. So 3 months from now, a year from now if you need to refer to this, you'll have that available. With that we'll go ahead and close it out. Some additional thank yous in the chat there.

>> John Toles: Thank you, everyone.

>> Johan Rempel: Thank you for our ASL interpreter and our captioner. And thank you for the attendees for making time to sit in on this. I will close it out. Enjoy the rest of your day.