



In its drive for inclusive, accessible learning, DDI gets expert support

DDI is a global leadership company that helps organizations hire, promote and develop exceptional leaders, from first-time managers to C-suite executives.

Industry

Professional services

Established

1970

Headquarters

Pittsburgh, US

Operating in

20+ countries

Solution elements

RWS eLearning Services

RWS Accessibility Services

Determined to accelerate its accessibility roadmap for its digital training platform, DDI discovered that it could learn a lot – and get ahead quickly – by turning to a trusted partner.

Great leadership is inclusive leadership – that’s one of DDI’s core values. The company strives to ensure that every leader, regardless of location, cultural background, neurotype or abilities, can access and benefit from development experiences.

A widening recognition of diversity

DDI has been attuned to diversity since its founding in Pittsburgh, in 1970. Within a year, the company was offering services in Japan, and its international growth accelerated in the 1980s. This made translation an early priority in its operations, followed by a growing appreciation that localization – which accounts for different cultural realities – enhances translation to ensure effective learning.

DDI’s approach to inclusivity has continued to expand over time. Today, course design acknowledges and considers diversity in gender, race, personality, individual preferences and more. The company’s most recent focus is accessibility in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

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Vice President,
Product Management,
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Accessibility in the spotlight

Worldwide, awareness of the need for better online accessibility has grown markedly in recent years, perhaps accelerated by the digital shift during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. Legislation in different parts of the world is certainly also a driver of awareness and action.

DDI has had an accessibility roadmap for its online training platform since 2018. The company’s early initiatives included basic subtitling of videos, in-house accessibility testing, and efforts to make course templates compatible with screen readers. But increasing interest and expectations from customers encouraged DDI to accelerate its roadmap significantly.

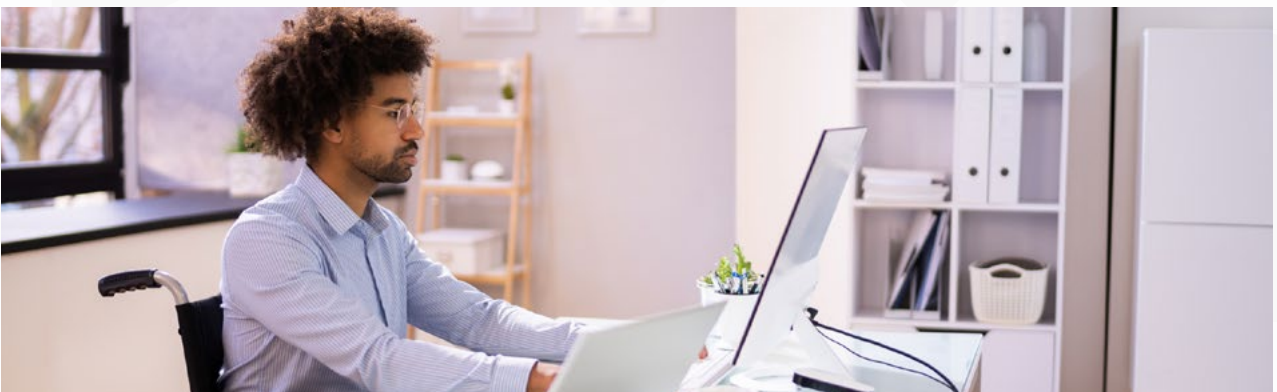
“We realized that if we wanted to move ahead with accessibility more quickly, we would need expert help,” says Verity Creedy, DDI Vice President of Product Management. “We wanted a partner that could be rigorous and impartial in assessing where we stood, and help us close the gaps discovered.”

Eyes opened

DDI approached three of its vendors that were providing content-related services or solutions. One was RWS, DDI’s localization partner for learning materials, including printed (for classroom training) and digital (for online classrooms and self-service eLearning). The two companies had built a trusted relationship over 10 years, with RWS taking on a variety of training localization responsibilities for DDI beyond core translation.

“When discussing accessibility, RWS really stood out,” says Verity. “Our other vendors offered some basic guidance, but RWS got stuck into details that mattered, and opened our eyes to what we *could* be doing and the impact on affected learners.”

“For example, RWS brought to life the difference between basic video subtitles and SDH,” she continues. “They showed us the difference between a basic screen reader experience and a *great* screen reader experience. They helped us feel confident enough to say: let’s do *more*, rather than just doing enough.”



Assessing platform accessibility

DDI partnered with RWS and quickly started taking big strides forward with accessibility.

The biggest project requirement was an audit of DDI's digital learning platform to assess its compliance with WCAG AA standards. For several years, DDI had used a content management system (CMS) to manage its learning content across multiple formats and languages, and had done some early work with its content templates in this system to meet basic accessibility standards. So the company wanted to focus initially on its learning *platform* rather than the course content that it holds. RWS helped by testing a typical user journey and compiled a detailed report with recommendations for remediation.

"RWS brought an exceptional level of rigour and technical competence to the accessibility audit," says Verity. "This wasn't a surprise, because we're used to the highest standards in their localization work, but it was still gratifying to see the same quality and efficiency here as well."

Why DDI chose RWS as its accessibility partner

- Trusted localization partner: a one-stop-shop for inclusive learning services
- Impartial advice and rigorous approach
- Expert in both content and software
- Remediation services available



Addressing platform accessibility

The resulting report identified around 45 systemic accessibility gaps, with five high priorities to make the biggest impact on accessibility. These included a challenge with DDI's brand colours used in functional (i.e., non-decorative) contexts. While it's possible to solve this without changing the brand, DDI is considering adjusting its colours so that its brand will offer a better experience in all contexts.

Audit in hand, DDI has a plan for next steps, starting with the highest-priority issues and moving systematically through the whole list. RWS will partner with DDI's software engineering team on best practices for improvements, and test their work.

"Our plan is to finish within six months," says Verity. "But that's not the end of our journey at all. We'll still have a lot to do on the content side with our course materials, and we have no intention of resting on our laurels. We'll continue doing regular platform audits – maybe once a year – to keep improving."

DDI is updating its software standards, guidelines and checklists, and educating its software engineering team to put accessibility front and centre in future development work. The company also plans to look beyond training to its website and other content. Verity notes that one DDI software engineer has been so inspired that he has made accessibility his personal crusade.

She adds: "In my own team, two content designers have also stepped up to become our in-house champions of accessible learning, without even being asked."

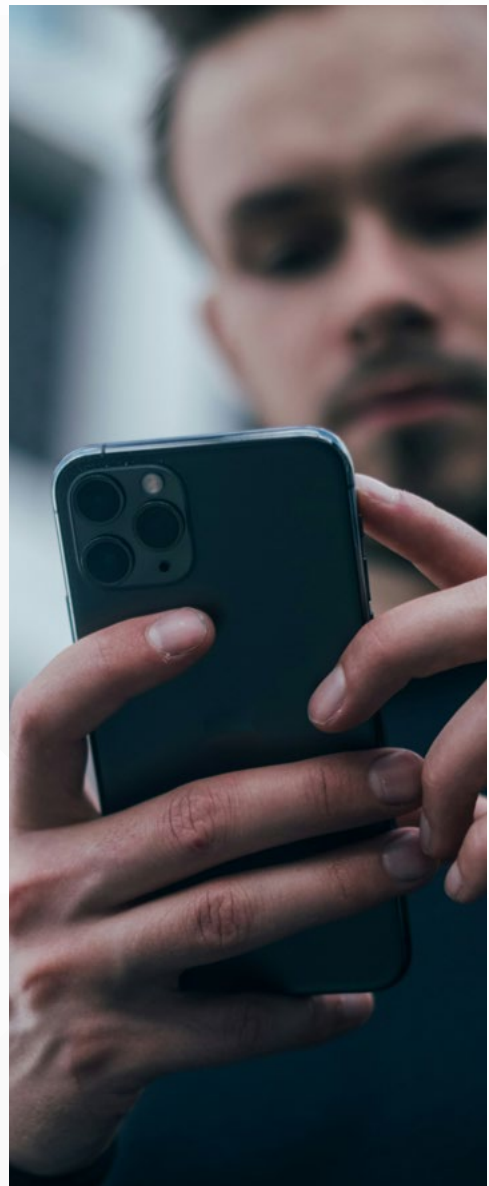
Assessing and addressing content accessibility

While the focus of the RWS audit was on the platform, it's impossible to separate platform from content completely – so the report did include some course content action points that DDI is tackling.

At the same time, several other initiatives are underway with a content focus. DDI has been reviewing and enhancing its course templates as groundwork for a proper accessibility audit by RWS. Fortunately, DDI's use of a CMS with applied templates will simplify any actions arising from that audit. Updating and reapplying the templates for better accessibility will go a long way to enhancing accessibility across DDI's courses, with a future content audit already in plan to identify any older course materials that may need attention.

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Special focus on video

One content type that falls outside the CMS templates is video, which was the first thing DDI wanted to focus on, even before undertaking the platform audit.

RWS has helped DDI move from basic subtitles on training videos to subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), which add descriptions of non-verbal sounds such as background music or the wail of an alarm. RWS now routinely produces SDH for DDI's English source videos and all localized versions.

DDI was already making transcripts available with every video on its platform, but the transcripts now also include the SDH text for additional context. For learners with a visual disability, the transcripts will soon also include descriptions of the key visual elements and action happening on screen that will be accessible to screen readers – effectively a text version of audio description.

Not satisfied with applying SDH and descriptive transcripts only to new videos, DDI has kicked off a project to apply the same treatment to older videos that are still in use.

A growing passion

DDI has ambitious goals for improving accessibility, recognizing that the pursuit of inclusivity is an ongoing process. Verity is proud of how far the company has come in such a short time, and appreciative of the part played by RWS.

“We've discovered that RWS is so much more than a localization partner. They've helped us develop an ambitious plan for accessibility and will continue to play a key role helping us to realize it. Achieving world-class accessibility for our world-class content will allow us to help more leaders be better leaders.”

Discover more about RWS accessibility services rws.com/accessibility

About RWS

RWS Holdings plc is a unique, world-leading provider of technology-enabled language, content and intellectual property services. Through content transformation and multilingual data analysis, our combination of AI-enabled technology and human expertise helps our clients to grow by ensuring they are understood anywhere, in any language.

Our purpose is unlocking global understanding. By combining cultural understanding, client understanding and technical understanding, our services and technology assist our clients to acquire and retain customers, deliver engaging user experiences, maintain compliance and gain actionable insights into their data and content.

Over the past 20 years we've been evolving our own AI solutions as well as helping clients to explore, build and use multilingual AI applications. With 45+ AI-related patents and more than 100 peer-reviewed papers, we have the experience and expertise to support clients on their AI journey.

We work with over 80% of the world's top 100 brands, more than three-quarters of Fortune's 20 'Most Admired Companies' and almost all of the top pharmaceutical companies, investment banks, law firms and patent filers. Our client base spans Europe, Asia Pacific, Africa and North and South America. Our 65+ global locations across five continents service clients in the automotive, chemical, financial, legal, medical, pharmaceutical, technology and telecommunications sectors.

Founded in 1958, RWS is headquartered in the UK and publicly listed on AIM, the London Stock Exchange regulated market (RWS.L).

For further information, please visit: www.rws.com

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