

Podcast Name: Chax Chat on Article 19, Ready for Transcription

Narrator:

Expression is one of the most powerful tools we have. A voice, a pen, a keyboard. The real change which must give to people throughout the world their human rights must come about in the hearts of people. We must want our fellow human beings to have rights and freedoms which give them dignity. Article 19 is the voice in the room.

Marty:

Hello, and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Malloy, President at Tamman and I am the host for our conversation today. Today we're going to be talking about mergers and partnerships – Tamman and Chax – Chax Chat – digital documents – trainings and what's in store for 2024 and beyond. Joining us today are Chad Chelius cofounder of Chax Training and Consulting – an accessible document specialist – Adobe certified instructor and all-around digital accessibility and InDesign wizard and his cofounder Dax Castro cofounder of Chax Training and Consulting – accessible document specialist – Adobe community expert – trainer – advocate – all-around digital accessibility wizard. I cannot wait to get into talking with these guys and digging in a little bit further but first – I am joined by my friend – cohost Kristen Witucki content creator and digital accessibility specialist – ombudswoman at Tamman. Kristen, hey how are you?

Kristen:

I'm OK. We had real winter this time, Marty – after years of no snow.

Marty:

That's so great. I love it. Did you get out into it at all?

Kristen:

I did. It's beautiful. That silence – that feeling of silence is amazing and then it becomes fog and it's confusing but while it's falling – can't be more beautiful.

Marty:

Can't be more beautiful and I love coming inside so that's the other side of it is just getting to be warm and everything else. Well, before we bring in our guests formally I'd like to give a little context if you're a first time listener to Article 19 for our conversation today. Article 19 is a call for others to join us in a bigger conversation around the American's with Disabilities Act – the ADA – digital accessibility and access to information. At Tamman we are working to build the inclusive web every day but to do that we need all of us working together and learning together. We want to thank you for listening to Article 19. Let's go ahead and get this conversation started. Let me formally bring on our guests – Chad and Dax. Fellas – welcome to Article 19. Welcome to the show.

Dax:

Absolutely. Really great to be here. I am excited about the conversation that is about to ensue right? It's the calm before the storm as it were.

Marty:

And you're both podcast pros. I don't think we've ever had anyone who were podcast hosts in their own right on our show before, so really looking forward to doing this with both of you.

Dax:

We're glad to be here.

Marty:

Let's not bury the lead for our listeners. Chax Training and Consulting and Tamman have merged which is really, really exciting for all of us.

[00:03:04]

Dax:

And all of us. We couldn't be more excited. It's one of those things where when Chad and I started this way back when – as Chad says – we started – opened a bank account – planted a flag and said we're open for business and here we are a couple of years later and we have now joined the Tamman family and Chad and I really, really consider it a family. When we flew out to come to the retreat – the first sense that you got was wow this is a family. It's not a bunch of people who flew in from different locations and just meet once a year. These are people who really have a connection and I just felt – I think, Chad, you would agree right? We just felt such a welcoming and whole community.

Chad:

Absolutely. When we first started talking about this one of the things that Marty and some of the other guys had said was how awesome the culture is at Tamman and – yeah – when we came out for the event it was very apparent. You know what I mean? The culture is really, really cool. Everybody was amazing. Yeah, there's a lot of fantastic people working here. Yeah, we couldn't be more excited about this partnership.

Marty:

We've talking about that before right? We've been talking now for quite a while but to hear you say it again – it's something that we've worked really hard on and Tamman always had a pretty strong culture. It's something that isn't new to us but going remote – it's a whole other kettle of fish and when you do have people that aren't seeing each other day in the office it takes a lot of intention to make sure that we're – I don't know – doing the things that we say we are working towards and to be intentional for a lot of really good reasons. I wanna ask the two of you though – honestly I wanna pull back the curtain because even within Tamman and – you know, we are a family and everything else – I wanna know and I wanna – for our listeners – why was this coming together – this merger from both of your perspectives – why was it such a no-brainer for you and you can view it from an individual perspective or as – the quiet conversations the two of you had after we ended a call or a meeting or whatever the case was.

Chad:

You know, for us one of the cool things about our business was it's the two of us right? Our business was the two of us. Dax is out in Sacramento and me here in Philly, but we also had found that there were some situations where it hindered us because there were clients who were reluctant to do business with us because it was only the two of us and we weren't exactly scalable – although that brings me to one of the next reasons why the partnership really made a lot of sense for me was because we were approaching some growing pains. We were approaching that point in our business where we were gonna have to start hiring people and between you and me I just didn't wanna deal with that. It was hard enough—not hard but stressful enough making sure that Dax and I got fed and adding another person to that – for me it was just a level of stress – a level of complication that I really didn't wanna

deal with so being now part of a company of 60 employees – we have so many more resources at our disposal. We're now a much bigger organization. We have a lot more capabilities and to me that was a big one. Also, I did the finances for our company. Not one of the most fun parts of my job to say the least so having that off my plate is also a really fantastic thing in my opinion.

[00:06:28]

Marty:

Yeah. Yeah, well and you get to stay doing what you do best which is—

Chad:

Exactly.

Marty:

—being the expert and the trainer that you are and being able to engage people there instead of worrying about all of the other things that go into a larger business and when it isn't just the two of you. Dax, what about you? What were some of the things that you were like this makes sense because?

Dax:

You know, it was interesting. When we sat down with you at AccessU and had the conversation – I'm very much an empathetic person and I pick up on people instantly and the moment that you and I – when all three of us were sitting down – it was just genuine. There's not another descriptor but it just felt genuine and no secret – Chad and I have had our struggles with previous companies and we work together and it's been a little difficult with some trust and other things but none of that even came into the field of view as we were kind of coming together to figure out how Tamman and Chax were going to be together. When you said look – “we love what you're doing and we don't want you to stop.” I worked for an engineering company – Carter and Burgess and they were seven states – 14 offices – big company. Another company came in said we wanna buy this company and they said look – we don't wanna change you – we're not gonna rip the engine out of the sports car – you're already running fast – everybody started leaving and as a new hire to Carter and Burgess I had no idea why. I had not ever experienced a corporate merger and three months later they did a huge amount of layoffs and I ended up in that troupe so when you said we want you the way you are I was like PTSD but the reality was when we came out and went to the retreat and we talked about – we sat in a meeting. Chad was in a different meeting and I was in the meeting with you and the others about business development and really that's my forte. Chad talks about the financial backend that he doesn't like to do. I say I don't want to do all the marketing and all the other stuff that goes along with it but I really do love it secretly.

Marty:

You're really good at it too.

Chad:

Yeah, he's good at it. Yeah.

Dax:

Thank you. But when we sat down in the meeting and talked about strategy and things moving forward – I very much got the sense of we wanna take what you do and amplify it – not what you do and strip it

down or change it or whatever and that really for me was kind of the solidification of we're doing the right thing – this feels exactly the way it's supposed to feel.

Chad:

Dax eluded to this – and again – not to get into details but we had gone to work for another company that didn't work out for a multitude of reasons and so I think Dax and I were both a little gun shy about the concept of working for another company again because it was – talk about your stress levels – it was rough. It was really tough and when Dax and I quit there was a certain amount of freedom that came with him and I just saying OK let's do this. You know what I mean? It was scary. There were some – like I said – we opened up a bank account with a zero balance and we said OK guys we're open for business but it happened pretty quickly so him and I working together came with a certain amount of freedom. Again, we're 3,000 miles apart but fortunately we have technology today that kinda makes us feel like we're sitting in the office together which is kinda cool but we did have that in the back of our head like hey this didn't work out well for us the last time but he's right – when we were talking to you, Marty, we did get that sense of just very genuine – you're a very genuine person – we got the sense that Tamman was genuine and to that point everybody that we met – Jeff Tamburino – the owner of Tamman. We met him and it was like just talking to a friend. You know what I mean? It was just talking to somebody that we met on the street and that really kinda set our minds at ease.

[00:10:17]

Dax:

I will say for anyone listening right now – if you're at an organization or you're getting ready to go find a new job – trust your gut. I can't say this more clearly. Trust your gut. You are gonna make the right decision if you go with your initial perception because there are so many backend – under the surface level things that you pick up as a human with the people you talk to – with the experiences you have that you can't quantify but are there and they help influence your decision and if you're sitting back going well I don't know if I trust this company. That's a good sign that maybe that's not the right fit so for those of you listening to this story going what do I get out of this – the answer is trust your gut – do your due diligence and once you have a good picture – a good sense of what the situation is – if you're on the fence always choose the side that protects you. There's lots of companies out there. There's lots of opportunities and there's only one you. You have to find the thing that fits you and I think that we really found that here with Tamman.

Marty:

That's really well said and I think it also speaks to take some time and build relationships and I think when – I keep getting asked because we do care about our culture. I was on a podcast and a webinar not that long ago with an HR company and they were saying we've gotten a lot of feedback about your great culture – can you talk about it and a lot of it is just be yourself. One of the things that I have noticed at Tamman since we've gone remote and we have people across 13 states – now internationally and everything else is what has benefited us are those folks who understand that are not only need to do my job and do it well but I have to take some time and build some relationships and get to know them and this whole origin story comes from that and I think about the time, Dax, at AccessU – not even when we were sitting together but then we went to a restaurant. You got to meet people from

Tamman who weren't even at the conference and you sat there and you laughed with us and you shared with us and there's a lot of value in getting to see people not necessarily in their task and work environment but to look them in the eye and say ohh these people actually kinda like each other and they like me and there was just a fit there from right away.

Dax:
Yeah.

Marty:
When you all were at the previous company though – I am curious about this because you both have great reputations for yourselves in this world. Did you know each other before going into that company or did you meet – what was it like in the days before Chax?

Chad:
That's a really good question, Marty. Dax and I met each other – our paths overlapped because I have been speaking at conferences for 15 years now – something like that. Do you remember what year it was, Dax? Was it 2016?

Dax:
Seventeen. I think it was 17.

Chad:
In 2017 we ended up speaking at the same conference together. It was the Creative Pro Conference in Seattle and we didn't know each other prior to then but we kinda both were asked to speak at this conference and while we were at the conference we met. I think it mighta been at a mixer or whatever it was and we realized that we were both in the accessibility space and to be honest I think we were the only two people there in the accessibility space, right?

[00:13:30]

Dax:
Yes.

Chad:
But he and I really just became fast friends because within the accessibility space there's only a couple of people that you can have an accessibility conversation with. You know what I mean? You can't just talk about the tags-tree with any old person.

Dax:
But what's interesting over that, is that, when you are the smartest person in the room about that subject who do you ask questions to? And this goes to any software. When you're the power user of InDesign or Word and you get stuck on something that is just really technical – who do you go to? And it was nice because Chad and I could bounce things off each other and really have that deep dive

conversation that only 1% of the people can really have because most people are still trying to use styles – let alone talk about the merits of variable text inside a nested style of a paragraph.

Chad:

And so after the conference we were just calling each other on the regular because to Dax's point – now all of the sudden we had a sounding board and so when I'd run into an issue I'd give him a call. Be like hey man – what do you do in this situation and we'd talk it through and we'd go back and forth. I like this idea – I like this idea – I like this idea so we just really just enjoyed our company and kinda stemming off of what we're talking about here – one day him and I are – I always use this phrase but he and I are waxing philosophical about accessibility and Dax says – “you know Chad – I think other people would really like to hear this conversation” and I was like really – what kind of a person would wanna hear what we're talking about and basically he spent the weekend – he banged together a website and he learned as much as he could about creating a podcast and basically the next week we recorded the first episode of the Chax Chat Podcast and that's basically how Dax and I met. That's how the Chax Chat Podcast got started and at that point like I said then we were meeting on the regular and while we were doing this – and I know I'm stretching this out a little bit longer than you probably wanted me to but while we were doing this we both got approached by a company at the same time – which I don't know if it was coincidence or if they heard the podcast and they're like these are the two guys we're gonna go after – whatever but so Dax had just talked about when you're talking about taking a new job trust your gut and he and I went back and forth for a couple of weeks. We were kinda going back and forth and listen – if I'm being honest, Dax – you could disagree with me if you want – we chased the money. The money is really what the – they said to me what's your number. I gave them my number and they said OK and then that got transferred to Dax and Dax was like “let's do this.”

[00:16:26]

Dax:

And I will say in fairness his number – quite a bit bigger than my number so I was happy. I was happy to say yeah let's go with his number – yeah that's definitely a better thing but what Chad doesn't know – let's kinda circle back to the story because we're here to talk about us and here in the Tamman thing.

Marty:

Yeah, yeah, no this is great. I'm loving it. We're gonna break something here on Article 19. Something Chad doesn't know about the origins of his own space here with Chax.

Dax:

Chad doesn't know but I kinda fanboyed Chad very much at that conference and I was very nervous because I had actually borrowed one of his resources – one of his PDFs to have as an example file and my session because I had not put together a sample file and thought well his has all the stuff already. I found it and kinda used it. I was very nervous about stealing his content – air quotes – but I had known Chad as any of the students ever who have gone to his LinkedIn learning classes and I had seen him at Adobe Max and been in his sessions and here I am now rubbing elbows with Chad Chelius and it was very ethereal for me and it took me a bit to kinda not be – I would tell my wife secretly well I'm kind of B list – C list celebrity. I'm kind of slasher horror movie celebrity and Chad's really A list celebrity and of

course now we very much consider ourselves very much comrades in arms against inaccessibility but yeah it was a little fanboyish kind of at the beginning so it was—

Kristen:

Well, Tamman was very fanish about it too. We heard about it from Liza right?

Marty:

Yep – absolutely. And she turned us onto Chax Chat and Liza – as any listener at Article 19 would know and love is our in-house expert – is amazing at what she does and she would I think self-admit she fangirl'd Chad and Dax and I met Chad for the very first time – he was standing at M-Enabling– this is just gonna be a podcast about conferences people should go to – and he was in line. I was kinda “hi – hey – I'm a fan. I had heard the podcast” and you were very gracious. You were nice but my whole thing was to introduce you to Liza and she was like nope and she ducked out and I turned and said let me introduce you to my colleague and then she wasn't there and I was like oh no but you were still super gracious and kind and generous – as both of you have been throughout. I think there is so much to point towards this being successful – this coming together.

Chad:

And not to interrupt you – Marty.

Marty:

Yeah.

Chad:

One of the things that was a little challenging when we started our business was that I had been self-employed for 15 years so this was just like I just rolled right into it. It was very, very natural for me. Dax came from more of a corporate world and so the whole self-employment thing – I had to remind Dax – I'm like Dax – we're gonna have to pay taxes on this money, come end of the year, so just put some money aside, type of thing, because I'm used to it. I'm used to writing that stupid check every quarter and all that good stuff.

[00:19:36]

Dax:

Wait – we're supposed to write a check every quarter?

Marty:

Not anymore.

Chad:

I know man – I know. As much as I hate it but we learned from each other and I will say one of the things that I love about Dax is I learn from him every day. Every day. Even today's a great example. I called him up this morning and I'm like hey man I have this situation – this is what I'm planning on doing

but what are your thoughts and he kind of agreed with me. Sometimes he doesn't and that's great too. I love when he doesn't agree with me because that means I'm gonna learn.

Dax:

Well, and that goes both ways because we really do – as much as we disagree – I really try to think through all the avenues and OK what could be the reason this would fail or not work or be a bad user experience or not be the way we should approach things because when you can identify all of it then you can kind of – we tell clients sometimes it isn't "this is a solution." Sometimes it's good – better – best and you have to be OK with the decision you're making. If you say look – I can't spend six hours remediating this document. OK here's your solution to get good and it passes the checker but if you wanna go better – here's a couple of things you could change to make it even a better user experience or if you want to roll out the red carpet and make this a – I call it the Cadillac user experience – then here's some extra things that you can really tune this document and make it shine.

Chad:

Yeah, for sure. We lifted – although I don't even think it's unique to her but we embraced the great Meryl Evans' "Progress Over Perfection" when it comes to accessibility. I think those kinds of values alignments were right there also from the very beginning of the way that we approach these things. I think it's very, very well said.

Dax:

And Meryl's a great person. Shout out to Meryl. She is one of my – of I consider a good friend and really love her to death.

Marty:

And talk about learning from people – we have learned so much from her and she's constantly putting information out there and we're like oh it's great – I'm gonna take that and incorporate that into my practice.

Chad:

What I love when we can learn from the people that we teach. We had a podcast guest on. His name is Jeremy Seda. He's at the North Idaho College and they have a conference every year that he has – Dax and I come out to speak at but we had him on as a podcast guest and he had this great analogy. Jeremy is a – I think he's a black belt in jujitsu. He's a very accomplished jujitsu person.

Marty:

Jedi?

Dax:

Jedi?

Marty:

Let's make him a jedi. Yeah, that's fine.

[00:22:04]

Chad:

But he had this great analogy. He was like – when you're doing jujitsu and your I guess fighting somebody – sparring somebody – if you can improve your position by 1% it's an improvement. Just a 1% improvement you've now gotten better and he made that analogy with accessibility. If you can improve your document or your website or your mobile app by 1% you've improved and I've always remembered that because when I have a document in front of me and I'm making this document accessible – I always think about – we always have to kinda balance what the client's willing to pay versus level of effort. That's – we are always fighting that but there's moments where I will say you know what – I'm just gonna do this because I know it's the right thing to do. I know it's gonna improve the user experience and I'm gonna be able to sleep better tonight knowing that I did this versus just saying no – not my job – pass it on – it's passing the checker – we're good to go. I apply that with a lot of things that we do. Dax and I do a lot of pro bono work because when we started our business one of the things that really made me wanna go into business with Dax was we both agreed that fundamentally what we wanna do in this business is help people. That was our primary goal. Of course we're trying to make a living too but what we really just want to do is help people. That's always been at the top of my head and sometimes we're able to help people free of charge because we just wanna help them. We just wanna give them some guidance. That's always been kind of at the top of my mind with what we do.

Dax:

Our biggest pro bono is this shameless plug here – our PDF accessibility Facebook group which now has almost 4,300 members, and I started this group back in 2016 or 17 and I was happy when I got to 100 users. A hundred people talking about document accessibility and now we're at 4,200 and something and I just couldn't be happier because it used to be I would go on there and answer 90% of the questions. Now I go on there and answer 15 or 20% of the questions but I review the answers to every question to make sure people are getting the right information and maybe I'll chime in with the clarification or somebody will ask Chad something and I'll step on Chad's toes and I'll answer it before Chad gets the opportunity to and for those of you who can't see – he is laughing hysterically.

Chad:

That literally happened this weekend. Somebody posted a message on the group and said “hey is it OK if I ask a question about PowerPoint here” and I go sure – go ahead and she asked the question. I didn't even have a chance to respond and Dax jumps in that answers the question.

[00:24:58]

Dax:

What's funny is – full disclosure I have ADHD and so my brain just is going all the time. I was covered in mud out in the backyard doing stuff in the alpaca field and just thought I'll take a break and look at my phone for a second – pulled it out of my pocket – saw OK shoot which was Chad's message and then scrolled up – saw question – because I ignored it. I had no idea what the context was – scrolled up – solve the question and then answered the question and then I saw Chad reply with lol – I'm going oh crap. I just did it again. Dang it.

Chad:

I didn't even have a chance to even think about responding. It was great. It was great.

Marty:

I love everything about that story and especially because it reinforces – now Chad I've been on at least two calls with you where we're reviewing a document and we're looking at it and there's a group of us kinda talking through it and everything else and then 20 minutes later at the end of this conversation we're like OK – here's the plan and this is what we're gonna say to the client and you're like by the way – I went ahead and remediated the whole thing because I have a problem – I have a passion – I can't let something go untouched and I love that because from both of you it's just – sure blame it on your ADHD as much as you want, Dax – but at the end of the day it's you are passionate about this work and you're passionate about people and you want to give this gift of knowledge out as far and wide as she both can and I absolutely love that about both of you. If somebody wants to find the Facebook group – if they're not a Facebook power user but they're like man that sounds like a great community for me to be part of. If they go on to their Facebook what do they type in to become a member of that particular group?

Chad:

PDF accessibility. That's literally the name of the group. It can't be easier than that. It is just a matter of typing in PDF accessibility. We are the only Facebook group titled that so you should find us right away. There's a big H1 tag as the logo and as long as you didn't create your Facebook channel yesterday – you'll get automatically approved. We've got a few filters because we do get the people from overseas trying to beg for work in the group and matter of fact – we have a very zero tolerance policy in the group. There is no spamming – please send me your PDF's to remediate – I can do a good job kind of thing. It is all about learning and when you get stuck and you have nowhere else to turn – that group will definitely have the answer for you in minutes if not seconds.

Marty:

That's awesome.

Chad:

I know a lot of people have a love-hate relationship with Facebook but it's almost worth it just to be on that group because – like I said – 4,300 voices standing at the ready to answer your question – it's pretty cool. It's pretty cool and Dax and I have seen as he pointed out over time everybody's knowledge has grown to the point where these people are now answering these questions and it's really cool to see that monster thrive for lack of a better term.

Dax:

The growth.

Chad:

Yeah, the growth. Yeah.

[00:27:48]

Marty:

That's the best use I think of social media and social connection for sure and I just got a note from one of our producers – Harper – that he's going to put a link in the show notes to make it easier for folks. Before we turn to just get into digital documents – one or two little quick things because this has been a great conversation so far anyway. From both of your perspectives – and it's still early days but from both of your perspectives – if you're talking to a past client or a future client of Chax – what is one thing you want them to know about what's coming in 2024 and beyond? What's one thing that you're excited about in terms of the sort of hopefully mostly just not unchanged but growth of Chax with Tamman?

Dax:

Chad?

Chad:

I'll say for me I think having the backing of a much larger company and having enhanced capabilities is probably something that I'm most excited about. As I said before – before it was Dax and I so we would often run into situations where we're like hey listen we just don't have the resources to handle this and now having a multitude of people – specifically in accessibility but just in general because I feel a lot more reassured and I feel more confident in our capabilities now being part of Tamman.

Marty:

Yeah, and not the least of which – we've talked about Liza who just becomes part of your team and she's already learned so much from the two of you she's going to continue that growth in a meteoric way. We have other members in the digital document space but we are also a digital accessibility firm so we have people like Wally and Leah and Bill and all of these great developers and designers on our team who can bring a different web accessibility perspective which is also just very, very exciting.

[00:29:44]

Dax:

And I can't wait because I have talked with all of them and have probed their psyche to understand what do you do so that I can use you to come up with or check off boxes in my list. I have a tremendous list of projects that I want to get finished and I have started them and they're in the hopper. One of which is a series of personas for children to understand disabilities and so there's color blind Carlito and several other personas that identify with certain disabilities and I have come up with a script and an idea and an animation. I eventually wanna turn it into a book and a digital PDF that will help start that conversation at an early age for people to understand that disabilities do not lessen a person – they just changed the way you need to interact with that person and become a contributor to their success. I'm very much in the community model of disability inclusion. I've got it all in the hopper – I just need people to help me with the animation and the voiceover and all of that. That aside – we've got accessibility study cards – a 52 deck pack of cards that will help people that link to videos and all sorts of things which is even something recent and then the biggest thing is that we are developing – and this is kind of where we started this conversation you and I kind of way back when – we're developing an app that is task based single task videos that are 30 seconds – a minute – 2 minutes. When you're stuck and you're like how

do I make the title tag In Word say heading level 1 – great – there's a video you can watch just on that process. Not 30 minutes of video to try to find the one piece that tells you how to do it. It is a single task oriented – right now my list is 600 videos. Literally I have identified 600 of them that can be in this thing. When we launched this hopefully by the end of the year we should have at least 200 to 300 of those videos and I can't be more excited about the capabilities at Tamman to be able to put that all together and help us so that we can get the content done so that you can help build the extras around it and I'm just so excited to bring that to everybody.

Marty:

I've always started most of my digital accessibility conversations with people who don't really have a grounding in this world that we're seeped in and everything else around documents and it goes back to what Chad was just saying with the 1% that not everybody can understand web accessibility and they might not have a background in HTML or React or JavaScript or whatever the case might be but almost every professional works in some ways with documents. Everybody understands that from a concept and when you talk about heading levels and structures – you can do some things at 1% that are gonna make you better today than you were yesterday and then you add another one and those kind of micro videos that just say oh great – now I've learned that and I can repeat that in my practice every day – now let me get the next thing.

[00:32:45]

Dax:

You don't need to be an expert – a seasoned expert to do accessibility. You just need to know – use styles and add image descriptions. Do those two things to your document and you're 75% there. We would have far less of an outcry and a disparity between accessible and inaccessible content if everyone just did those two things and it doesn't take a vast amount of knowledge to know to click on the heading level or to add a description of an image but yeah – I couldn't be more excited about the opportunities to get these projects moving farther down the pipeline because I know what it is to struggle because I was that guy. How do I learn this? In 2017 – 16 – 17 I was a presentation designer for the California High Speed Rail and someone walked in and said we need to start making things accessible – anybody know what that is. Literally that's what they said and I kinda went “no but I'll find out” and of course my laser beam ADHD took over and it fed all the dopamine areas – it was a puzzle – it was an accomplishment – it was all of these things and learning something new. It just fired on every cylinder but I remember how hard of a struggle it was trying to find the information and figure out what was correct and in fact – I look at documents that I thought were accessible back then and to cringe at what it really was compared to what I know now. I wanna help people avoid that journey.

Marty:

I think I heard – I don't know if the listeners heard some silent amens coming from Kristen there with some of what you just said, Dax – both as a teacher and a learner but also someone who is consuming digital documents – talking about headings and the importance of styles and things like that.

Kristen:

I can't wait to check out these videos and just find out how much I can improve my own document accessibility knowledge because I'm trying to do that every day too. I think some of that cringeworthy journey is a little bit unavoidable.

Dax:

I agree and it's those times where we struggle the most that help us learn the hardest lessons. I tell people – I posted this on LinkedIn several times. If you struggle for more than 15 minutes – reach out to me – I know the answer but I get the idea that some people are like no, no – I need to struggle through this and figure it out. My only concern there is, I want you to struggle to get to the right answer – not struggle to get to a dead end or to the wrong answer and that's all.

Chad:

Because unfortunately there's a lot of misinformation out there on the interwebs. Googling will often take you down this rabbit hole of misinformation and before you know it you've spent hours trying to fix this problem by taking the totally wrong approach. I've seen this time and time again. I go into an InDesign class and they're tagging their InDesign document as XML. We haven't done that in 12 years but there's still an article out there online saying this is how you make a document accessible and unfortunately they stumbled upon that one and it's a huge rabbit hole.

[00:35:48]

Dax:

And unfortunately some of them are on Adobe's website themselves. Some of the old content is still out there and yeah we'd love to see them fix that and improve the products.

Dax:

I couldn't be more excited and I will tell you one of the things that we love and I'll try to make this segue very quickly – we love going to CSUN because it is one of the only conferences out there where you see a large majority of people with disabilities and you get to see your work in action. You get to see the lived environment and, Kristen, I can't tell you how happy I am to be at a company like Tamman where they have people with disabilities who are contributing and being an integral part of what's going on. I really can't wait to work with you on documents – to be able to run things by you – to get your opinions and not that you represent every blind person – and those people we come in contact with many times will say – oh I talked to this blind person – they said I should do it this way and it's such a faux pas to think that one blind person represents them all but I will tell you I am super excited to be able to bounce ideas off of you because your opinion and perspective as a screen reader user – as a person who has to wade through all of what we think are good ideas – is that opinion is invaluable to us because I can only approximate. I'm a pretty good screen reader user but I don't use it every day and I don't know the things that you know and I'm really excited to be able to work with you so I just wanted to tell you that.

Kristen:

I'm excited about that too from the opposite perspective – not just contributing anything that I think which represents me mostly but hopefully represents a little more sometimes but I someday want to learn how to make documents as accessible as possible – maybe get that ADS certification and I've

heard that it's not the most accessible all the time so I'm curious to find out if it is – if I can learn it and what needs to happen for someone like me to be able to learn it.

Dax:

We're excited too and we hope that the technology gets there to the point where a PDF can be remediated. A Word document – a person who is blind can absolutely make a Word document mostly accessible – the majority of it accessible but currently Acrobat, Adobe – the program itself – Adobe Acrobat, is not accessible enough for someone who does not have sight to be able to remediate a document and we are working with – talking with – having conversations with the people at Adobe to try to move that needle closer and closer but what is possible is to work in design pairs where you have a sighted person and a person with a disability to be able to use both of the strengths of each side to create an accessible document and that is awesome thing. I mean it really is the best of both worlds.

Kristen:

When you step back and think about the nuts and bolts and the finishing of your day-to-day – what is the difference between a compliant document and a terrific user experience?

[00:38:50]

Dax:

Chad?

Chad:

Well, it's one of the areas that Dax and I put at the forefront of what we do. We put the user experience as the priority because the reality is – and a literally just had a conversation with a client before we hopped on here – he had a table of contents but the table of contents was just tagged as a bunch of P-tags and there were no hyperlinks in there and the PAC checker as well as every other checker out there gave the full thumbs up – says hey man you're good – this document looks fantastic and I always tell people checkers are dumb – checkers are super dumb elements. They can only check for what it knows. The checker can't look at this page and be like oh this is the table of contents – this should be tagged as TOC tag with TOCIs within the TOC. It's dumb. It doesn't know. All it can check is to make sure that there are tags applied and if there are tags applied it gives the thumbs up. Same thing with headings. It doesn't know when something should be a heading and so if a heading's tagged as a P-tag it says hey you're good to go but we as humans know that that violates WCAG-informed relationships.

Dax:

You know what's interesting Chad is it is not impossible for a checker to actually be able to check for that.

Chad:

I a hundred percent agree with you yeah.

Dax:

You can identify that this font is 16 point or 32 point and the body copy directly before it and after it is 12 point or 10 point and you can formulaically decide OK when there is a two point or greater difference between a font in a paragraph and a font in the next set of texts – there might be a heading and then you could give a warning to the user and say hey – we've analyzed your document and we think there might be headings in here – go take a look and see. It can be smart enough but the answer is right now the people programming these checkers are not remediators. They are programmers and we run into this fight all the time where we suggest improvements to the checker programs and we get the wall. No – people don't really do that oh that's not and we're like look – we're remediating thousands of documents a month – a year. I would say probably 10s or hundreds of thousands of documents in our lifetime and we know what's going on here. It's not just us wanting some unique thing. They are pass fail checkers. They check for pass fail conditions only.

Chad:

It's software. It can be programmed to do that. We've seen that in Adobe Acrobat with the auto tag feature. Auto tag used to be dumber than dumb.

Dax:

Garbage.

[00:41:35]

Chad:

It would evaluate the size of the text and if it was 18 point it said oh you're an H3. No, no, no, no – that's not how this works. I want you to find the biggest font – that's my H1. They've definitely improved it in the latest release of Adobe Acrobat where it's smarter now but to your point, Dax – it's software so it can be programmed to evaluate the content. The font size is known in the PDF so just evaluate that and tell me where the biggest is – tell me where the second biggest is – the third biggest – and I'm sure it's not always gonna get it right but at least if you're throwing up a warning or a flag to say hey just double check your headings and make sure that they're tagged appropriately – that would certainly be helpful.

Marty:

But if we can train people to use the styles embedded into programs already – that's one thing in terms of why both of you have sort of put such an emphasis and focus on creating champions.

Dax:

Now you're talking sorcery. Now you're talking witchcraft. I don't know.

Chad:

One of the things Dax and I always say – the best place that you could start is in a source document. Now again – not all source documents are created equal but Microsoft Word – Adobe InDesign – PowerPoint has its issues but at least it gives me tags that I can fix. Excel is a hot mess but at least if you start in a source you at least have something to work with where Dax and I always say the kiss of death

is when you open up that PDF file and it says no tags available because now we've got our work cut out for us. Now we've got work to do.

Marty:

Let me swing you back to Kristen's question. Kristen – you had asked what the difference between a compliance versus—

Chad:

A document can totally be compliant but it could be a bit of a train wreck for the user because again – the checker is only so smart. One of the things Dax and I always say is that compliance is a combination of manual and automatic checks and it only works if you combine both of them because the checker is great because it lets you know within seconds about certain things that are a problem and that's super helpful because I don't wanna have to scour my entire PDF – drilling down into individual tags to make sure that things are correct so that's where the checker it's really beneficial but where it fails is when it comes to things that require a human. Do figures have sufficient alternate text. If you put a space and the alternate text it's gonna pass the checker.

Dax:

Or the word logo. If alt text for the logo just says logo – OK. If I – this is an IRS form I want to know that is the federal IRS logo. That's an important marker right?

[00:44:38]

Dax:

But I think the difference between a compliant document and a good user experience is testing and we say this all the time. People are so scared of using a screen reader. They don't understand. We teach you – and one of our classes is document testing with NVDA. We teach you – the first thing is how to silence NVDA when you first turned it on because it can be sensorily overwhelming. Number two – we teach you how to keep it from voicing everything your mouse touches which is turning off mouse tracking. Three – we teach you some basic keys for navigation. Literally the down arrow and the insert down arrow are all you need to know to be able to use a screen reader to test your document. Now you may not be able to do some complex things.

Chad:

I would add the H key.

Dax:

Yeah but even then any – I mean H, T – H for heading – T for table – L for list. The first letter is usually the hot key but if you can just hit insert down arrow and listen – you can tell if your area – that area of your document is gonna voice the way you want it to and if you have a list and set a table that is not an actual list but just a bunch of hard returns – you listen to it and everything is wrapping to each other and you can't tell the difference between one list item and the next – you immediately know that is a bad user experience cause you just heard it. You don't have to be a rocket scientist. You don't have to know a bunch about NVDA. You don't have to be a native screen reader user. You just have to be able to hit

the insert down arrow and that's it and so I think the difference between a good user experience and a technically compliant document is understanding what the user experience is and Chad and I say this all the time – the first question you wanna ask yourself when you come to a roadblock is what do I want the user experience to be because if you can't understand what that user experience is – you have no way to know if your solution meets the criteria.

Marty:

And to do a little log rolling for Tamman here – that's why we've put a couple of videos together with Kristen using a screen reader because I think a lot of people have no idea what NVDA is like or JAWS or any of these other screen readers – VoiceOver on their iPhone. For me it was so important just to give exposure to that because some of my first conversations with Kristen – we were talking about shopping – well we talked about a lot of things but shopping was one of them and you were telling me about just you only go to certain websites because you know they have at least some alternative text that you can understand what those things are versus others where it's like – yep – no – I mean it says shirt. Can you give me a little bit more.

[00:47:16]

Chad:

Thank you right? Thank you – that was super helpful. Yeah. That's one of the things I started doing and my classes, Marty is as I'm teaching them I will kinda pause and take a break and I'll read the document using NVDA and it just really opens people's eyes because prior to that they're doing what I'm telling them to do because I told them to do it but when you show them the impact of what they've done and how it equates to what's most important and that is the user experience – all of the sudden the light bulbs start going off and they're like oh I get it now – that's why a headings important – that's why it's important for me to describe this image – that's why it's important that my bulleted items are tagged as a list. It all starts making sense and I think I do that in almost every class now because it just has such an impact for people to understand why they're doing what I'm instructing them to do.

Marty:

This to me is a whole other podcast. We don't want to get into it but, Kristen, you and I have certainly talked about this before. Representation matters. People aren't exposed to someone who is blind using a screen reader as their coworker and so it's pretty easy for employers to discriminate against that thinking they're doing something almost nice when they're not. Not to toot your horn.

Kristen:

And I love that you have the top three keystrokes for somebody to just get started because now you're taking the screen reader past the – Oh my God someone uses this but this is too scary for me to learn stage into the stage of well “Ok I really don't know how to use this but at least I can get started really quickly.”

Chad:

I think the biggest eyeopener for people it's when you explain to them – and I know this sounds very logical to us – all of us in this meeting but when you explain to them that somebody whose non-sighted

can't use the mouse. The mouse is not helpful to them. They have to use their keyboard and it's a real eyeopener to a lot of people. They're like oh my gosh I never even thought about that and you're like why not but when you think about the mouse – it works for us because we can—

Marty:

Purely visual – yeah.

Chad:

Yeah, we can create that connection on the monitor but that doesn't work for everybody. Even the keyboard doesn't work for everybody. There are some people who use different input devices so I think that's a big eye opener for a lot of people.

Marty:

We've talked a lot – we've given a lot of information – we've talked a lot about education and both of you are expert trainings. You do a lot of them. If I'm someone listening to this and I wanna get signed up for an upcoming training – what are a couple of upcoming trainings that you both know you have on the horizon and how do I sign up for it?

[00:50:06]

Dax:

Well, it's easy. If you go to accessibilityunravelled.com – just scroll down a bit and you'll see the three classes coming up. We always do at least three classes a month and they're drop in classes that anybody can take. One of the biggest problems of training is how do I get my boss to pay for this. I don't have six people. It's just me. Chad and I developed our live online three hour drop in classes that anybody can just go to. We always have a discount code. There are about \$224. February 8th is Understanding the PDF Tags Tree so if you're new to tagging and what – how do I walk through this thing and what am I supposed to be looking for – that's a great class and of course tables are always the bane of everyone's existence because they don't understand what makes an accessible table and thanks for asking the question because now I need to go in and add a new class. One of the classes that we do a lot is the Secrets of Writing Effective Alt Text which is a three hour class on how to write Alt text and maybe you wanna talk about this. I know you have thoughts on this class.

Chad:

I do have thoughts on this and I always say kinda tongue in cheek that as a graphic designer I am the worst possible person to write Alt text for your graphics. I'm the worst choice. The job of writing alternate text really should fall under somebody in an editorial role – in a copy roll – photo editor – somebody's job is to really kind of wordsmith on that content but you know what Dax and I find – on paper when you say oh for every figure you need to describe it. On paper that sounds so simple. It's like oh that's easy right? Until you're asked to do it and then all of a sudden you've got a bar chart or a pie graph or a line chart or a – God forbid – a heat map. Photos tend to be fairly easy. They're pretty obvious but there are some graphics that are much, much more difficult. In this class Dax has a really good formula for helping people to understand “OK let's evaluate what we have – let's figure out what message we're trying to explain and then let's write the alternate text appropriately” and it's really a

great online class. Probably one of our more popular classes to be honest because like I said – so many people when they sit down to do it they're like oh my gosh this is hard and so it's a really great class that we love to do. And then also to bring up – the online classes are just kind of one sector of what we do. We really specialize in custom training and so if you work for a company and you've got a group of people that you need to have trained – we have group training both online and in person. Next month I'm heading up to Massachusetts to do some training for a company but yeah we do both online or in person training and in those training sessions we wanna use your files. We love to take your files and be like OK let's dive into these files and figure out “how do we make these accessible” and that applies to all the applications whether it be Word – InDesign – whatever it is will customize and tailor that training for you.

[00:53:29]

Marty:

Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. Thank you both so much. This has been just a start of a conversation and for those listeners who might be wondering now that you're part of Tamman – are you gonna be here – Chax Chat is definitely continuing so if you're a Chax Chat listener and you just need more or if you've never listened but now you're like OK I gotta go here what these guys have to say – you can go to [Chaxchat.com](https://chaxchat.com). You can download Chax Chat anywhere where you get your podcasts so I highly, highly, highly recommend folks do that. Kristen, I'm very curious for what these guys are gonna recommend but why don't you bring us home with our wind down question.

Kristen:

The wind down question we tend to ask people – we'd love to hear your thoughts is – could you each recommend a TV show – the movie – a game or an album or a book that people should check out right now or maybe even a hobby? Whatever you want.

Dax:

I'll go first cause I have one ready. Temple Grandin. That movie really opened my thoughts. As a person who is an advocate for people with disabilities of all kinds – people who are neurodiverse or as someone with ADHD I know about my own disability. I'm learning more every single day thanks to TikTok. Thank you to all the TikTok people out there who are making ADHD awareness content but people who are autistic – that's a little bit outside my realm and the Temple Grandin movie really helped me understand what it is to be a person with autism and how outside stressors can cause influence on someone in a variety of ways so if you have not watched it it's a 2010 movie about a real person and she has lots of videos online now that you can go watch of her speaking. It's not just a movie of some made-up person. It's a real person so definitely that's a good place to start.

Chad:

I think the movie that comes to mind for me that I really enjoyed was CODA. That's a movie a couple of years old now but CODA stands for children of deaf adults. I learned a lot. I really learned a lot in that movie. I know there was a little bit of controversy regarding the authenticity of the experience in that movie but I thought it was fantastic. I thought they did a really good job and it really opened my eyes to that whole situation for children of deaf adults.

Kristen:

Thank you. We love those recommendations and we will link to them in the show notes below. Do you have any other thoughts or questions, Marty:

Marty:

No, I don't. This was amazing – although I knew it would be. I love talking to both of you and I learn every time I talk with both of you so thank you for taking some time today and I just couldn't be more thrilled that I get to call you colleagues.

Kristen:

Yes, welcome.

Chad:

Likewise guys.

Kristen:

Thanks for joining us.

[00:56:17]

Dax:

Absolutely. I'm really excited about the journey ahead and kind of the new doors that are opening and honestly what it means for the people listening and the people who are learning accessibility and our success is your success because everything we are doing is to help you learn more about document accessibility and accessibility in general and I'm actually excited about learning about Tamman's web capabilities because we do meet clients all the time who need more than just document accessibility and being a part of a company who has that capability is exciting for me as well.

Marty:

Awesome.

Chad:

I know one of the things that I've experienced over the years – I tend to find that document accessibility is often a byproduct of the web accessibility initiative. When companies decide oh my gosh we gotta make our website accessible – as a byproduct of that they're like OK we're making our website accessible and then they're like oh by the way – you've got 300 PDFs on your website that are not accessible and that's when the document accessibility initiative comes into play but it also works in reverse. A lotta times we're working on document accessibility and people are like oh we've also gotta make our website accessible so I think they really both go hand in hand. Accessibility is something that needs to be done by everybody. It's just so important.

Marty:

Awesome. Well gentlemen, thank you so much. Kristen, it was so fun to be on the pod again with you.

Kristen:

Come back again.

Marty:

I will. I promise but I appreciate all the hard work you've been doing. I wanna thank our colleagues Chad and Dax for coming on. Myself, Marty Molloy and Kristen Witucki – we're your hosts – producers were Markus Goldman and Harper Yatvin. If you liked what you heard today and want to explore more about digital accessibility – digital document accessibility – technology – our company culture – any of the things we talked about please schedule some time to meet with us. You can find the whole Tamman team at tammaninc.com. That's T-A-M-M-A-N-I-N-C.com. You can sign up for our newsletter so you never miss an insight from us. Be sure to please rate this podcast wherever you're listening on Spotify – Apple Podcasts – whatever works for you. It really helps us grow and reach new audiences and make sure to follow us. Hit the little bell icon so you never miss an episode. If social media is more your style you can follow us at “Tammaninc” on LinkedIn – Twitter/X – whatever that is now – Instagram – Facebook – you can share the podcasts there on your favorite platform but until next time thank you so much for listening and being part of Article 19. Take care of everybody. See you soon. Bye.