

Let's talk about accessibility | Martina Gollner and Christina Riedler

Christina

Hello, my name is Christina Riedler. I'm the founder and CEO at FullAccess. My pronouns are she, her, and for those of you who can't see me properly, I'd like to give a visual description of myself. My hair is a bright turquoise. I'm wearing glasses, baby pink jumper, and black trousers.

Martina

Hi, my name is Martina. Um, I'm the co-founder of our accessibility consulting agency. And my pronouns are she, her. And if I describe myself as well, my hair is orange, shoulder length, I'm wearing glasses and a dark red hoodie. And what's important to know about me is that I'm visually impaired myself. So I'm the reason why we're doing these visual descriptions because I would benefit from it if I would be in the audience or if I would watch this video. Thank you. Yeah.

Christina

So, Martina and I founded Full Access back in 2016 in Vienna. And as Martina already mentioned, Full Access is an accessibility consulting agency. We're focusing on the previously neglected leisure sector. And our clients include huge festivals such as Donauinselfest, which is the biggest open air festival in Europe with free admission. Bands like Coldplay but also sports facilities, trade fairs, conferences, escape room game developers and university related facilities.

And since Vienna is hosting the European Eurovision song contest in May this year, we are proud to have the opportunity to support the organizers in all issues really um relating to accessibility.

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Can you tell me more about your work on event accessibility?

Christina

So, um full access support event organizers in making their events accessible for their guests with all types of disabilities such as long-term physical, sensory, psychosocial and intellectual impairments, chronic illnesses or neurodivergence. And our aim is to establish accessible and socially sustainable events in Austria and beyond. And uh basically we're service providers operating at the intersection between social work, event, and communication management, and PR. And think of us as the interface between uh the event organisation and their guests with disabilities. And apart from consulting, we offer mystery guessing, on-site services, communication services, as well as workshops and staff training, for example.

And while disability organizations usually focus on one type of disability or chronic illnesses, it's essential for for our work and in event planning to think about overlaps to meet the diverse needs of all visitors. And yeah, well, regarding uh the Eurovision Song Contest, we're currently right in the middle of the planning face. But what we can say already is that we will be on site. And people will also have the opportunity to contact us with questions beforehand and we will have volunteers available to provide assistance when entering the venue Stadthalle and within the Stadthalle the venue itself.

Martina

What we have learned in our work is that it's mostly the small changes that people benefit most from. And it's important for event organizers to start early planning the services for guests with disabilities. It's mainly about the information you provide about the venue. Wheelchair users have to be able to access the venue itself and there have to be toilets for wheelchair users. No, that's no question, but it's what's really important is to be able to contact someone if you have a question beforehand.

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And people are people with disabilities start very early planning their event before attending an event and then the insecurities start. Can if I'm a blind person, can I bring my white cane to the venue or will it be taken away from me at the security check. Are assistance stocks allowed at the venue? These are things that we can this that we can talk about beforehand.

Christina

And event organizers also benefit from from us or especially when it comes to problems and Martina is a peer herself. So when she says no, we can't put you in the first row. It is too dangerous or something like that where the event organization says, for security reason is it a clear no. When they communicated, they're the bad guys. When we're communicating it and Martina says, no I'm a peer. Uh it is safer this way. It is okay for them. Yeah. Yeah, it's totally different. Yeah.

What are small steps that the organizations can do, also by themselves?

Christina

Well, first of all, is important to understand that the majority of disabilities are invisible. So, if you think of chronic illnesses, psychosocial impairments or intellectual disabilities, and the potential of the customer group of visitors with disabilities is underestimated if only the comparatively small group of people with visible disabilities is assumed. So, as Martina already mentioned, organizations uh have to be aware of the fact that the customer experience for people with disabilities start that it starts way before the actual event the event itself.

So, providing information is essential and as early given as early as possible, like which entrance to use, which entrance is accessible or Yeah.

Martina

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Even communicate what you don't have Yeah. and what you're not able to offer at or what you are to offer but people have to ask for it. Maybe I'm thinking about sign language here.

What is the biggest challenge that you face today as a accessibility consultancy agency?

Christina

Well, I think the biggest challenge is still dealing with organizers who are belittling the topic this accessibility and not taking people with disability seriously and not paying attention to the fact that their guests with disabilities are customers like any other customer they're hosting.

So our aim is to make disability mainstream. And yeah, so long to the myth of people with disabilities are sponges and scrounges and just need help. Um, yeah, it's just outdated because people with disabilities want to spend their money like every other event guest. Yeah. Yes, I think that's biggest challenge.

The right to party for everyone!

Yeah, because participating in cultural life is a human right and it's so essential for for yeah a positive living yeah feeling good about um yeah it's essential. Yeah.

Martina

It I think slowly but steadily the awareness of accessibility needs is getting more and more in the event business because Accessibility is part of an a new awareness law that's starting this year in Vienna now. It's on the one hand, it's not enough, but on the other hand it's a good start. It's a great start.

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What will be the challenge in 10 years of in terms of accessibility?

Christina

Let me start. Because I'm well known to be the pessimistic part of our team. So, I think biometrics and biometric data are becoming more of an issue within the next 10 years. So, we can all agree on the fact that secondary ticketing and fake ticketing is already a huge problem because organizers are losing money, the fans are losing their money, and so the industry is searching for more efficient ways to create unique tickets that are almost impossible to fake. And therefore, I believe that biometrics like facial recognition or hand scanner or even full body scans will be on the rise. And and this is problematic for people with disabilities because most scanning systems are designed for people who can stand upright, who can raise their arms, who can uh spread their fingers, stay still in a specific pose, yeah, and some scanners work with shape recognition or thermal imaging. So this systems may not accurately analyse prosthetic limbs, for example. So, long story short, and scanning systems often assume one type of body and one way of moving. And so for me, accessibility challenges arise because people real people are diverse.

Martina

Let me quickly add on this. I think you're right because I have a really hard time going through the face scanner at Heathrow Airport, London. Because you have to be in a certain distance of the machine and I have to be I have to look much closer to to see what I have to do. So this this doesn't work for me. Yeah. Yeah.

On an optimistic perspective, to to add an optimistic note. But at the moment we're talking about the dangers and risks of artificial intelligence. But I think in the field of disability, Artificial intelligence in the few next few years coming will be a great benefit for people with disabilities because when it's when it when it's used in in apps and assistive technology because in the future a completely blind person will be able to call a taxi a cab on his or her own and I don't mean not not calling it on his or her phone but

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the the camera on the smartphone will tell them when to raise their hands to to wink to to hail the the cab.

This and I think that this is this is really exciting and I'm really excited for this or if you think about self driving vehicles. This yeah, this exciting times.

Why are you so passionate about this topic?

Christina

Well, I can only speak for me in this case, but I just love music and attending concerts has always been the most exciting thing for me. And as a young teen, all I wanted for my birthday and for Christmas was a concert ticket. No question asked. And I attended my first ever concert when I was 12. And up to this day, I keep this very concert ticket in my purse for lucky charm or something. So it was a very magical and ethereal experience for me the this first uh yeah big concert.

And so it's important to me that anyone who feels as strong to life music as I am has the opportunity to experience it first hand. And yeah, besides as I already mentioned the participating in cultural life is not only a human right but also greatly enhances individual quality of life and it's super important.

Martina

Me me on the other hand, I was really scared about going to concerts because I thought that I would be scared of big masses of people and and I thought that it would be dangerous somehow to be in a crowd that's moving. So I I didn't go to concerts and I didn't go on my own until we had a really lovely experience in Nepworth near London at a festival in 2014 because the organisation of the festival, the information on the website, everything was really inviting to me as a woman with a disability and it was really easy to book a free a a free "care ticket" as they called it. And they care to take people to the next train station and everything worked really smooth.

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Christina

Yeah. And we wanted to have that in Austria as well.

I'll ask you now free names of people or organization or association that inspire you.

Christina

Let's start again. Yeah. First I'm going to mention my grand dad because yeah when it comes to integrity and trustworthiness I have to mention my grand dad.

The second name I want to drop is the lead singer of the famous British heavy metal band Bruce Dickinson from Iron Maiden because of his drive and his passion and his mindset as well. So never let the fear of failing hold you back and as well as for him is for us the same thing. It doesn't matter if you perform or work with five people or with a huge event organization. We take every show and every client seriously and we just deliver.

And the third name I want to mention is yeah, I guess it's the model Heidi Klum because also because of her work work ethic. Always be polite, always be positive, be in good spirits, never be late, and just deliver.

Martina

Easy to work with.

Christina

Yeah, easy to work with.

Martina

Let me tell you something personal about myself. I grew up in a when my my dad had his own company. He was a blacksmith And my bedroom was directly over the

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workshop with really heavy hammering and big machines. So I'm really used to and I love noise. Somehow I love rhythmic noises. Yeah, okay. No, that's not what I wanted to tell you. I what I what I was thinking about is I always said that I never I said that I never wanted to fund my own company. I never wanted to be self-employed because it's a really really so much effort you have to put in it. You have to you have no real holidays. You have to be there on weekends. That what I experienced growing up. But yeah, as we know now this changed. And and actually I'm really enjoying it.

Christina

So that and yeah the company that inspired you.

Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't asked you about?

Christina

Just one more thing to add maybe to everyone in Italy and beyond who is watching or listening and may want to attend the Eurovision Song Contest in May or its side events. Please keep an eye on the FAQs and if you have any questions regarding accessibility we'll feel free to reach out. We're happy to help We're looking forward to seeing you in May.

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