Case Study: Global technology maturity at Atos

The business case for mature technological accessibility

As a global business with offices in numerous countries, Atos identified a need a way to champion good practice and improvement in accessible technology beyond the UK.

Atos saw a way to establish a technology 'gold standard' internationally using Business Disability Forum's Accessibility Maturity Model (AMM) in 2016.

They achieved this by

- Introducing the AMM to offices beyond the UK
- Securing senior champions and advocates to push usage of the AMM in these offices
- Supporting development of accessible technology through meetings and discussions
- Driving high standards through use of metrics and objective evidence

What is the Accessibility Maturity Model?

The AMM was developed as tool for measuring and guiding high standards of accessibility in IT systems. It was authored by members of Business Disability Forum's Technology Taskforce, drawn from organisations including Barclays, GlaxoSmithKline, Department for Work and Pensions, and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

The AMM is designed to establish a performance baseline for IT accessibility within an organisation. It sets out a series of accessibility requirements based on existing formal standards, and enables users to go beyond minimum compliance to bring greater benefits to their business.

The Model is used as a self-assessment, with a series of measures that indicate how well an organisation has embedded its understanding of accessibility issues in areas such as IT governance and procurement, and where and how it can improve.

Neil Milliken, Head of Accessibility and Digital Inclusion at Atos, also helped to author the AMM and saw how it could help to set an international standard for the organisation.

Maturity in the UK

Atos operates in 72 countries, and needed a transferable IT accessibility standard for use beyond the UK, where standards are already high.

Through membership of the Business Disability Forum's Technology Taskforce, Atos support the development of the Accessibility Maturity Model. This is a tool businesses can use to assess current levels of accessibility in their technology systems and practices, and map out ways towards improvement and best practice.

Neil Milliken took the lead in introducing the AMM to colleagues in the company's IT team in the UK. Neil was able to drive this by taking a presentation of a distilled version of the model to senior managers, securing c-level buy-in.

With this endorsement he could then drive the use of the AMM as a 'truth-telling' tool for the IT team, which look at what the team had done so far and look forward to how it could develop the way it worked.

"The AMM provides what you could call a 'passionate metric'", Neil said. "The tool is based on evidence, using data from current work, but in presenting that evidence against set goals for improvement, it shows a way forward."

This objective evidence was also key in identifying priorities and securing organisational support in pursuing these.

Using a process of continuous review and revisiting the AMM every 6-12 months, Atos was able to make sure that digital accessibility was seen as a given by IT teams in the UK.

Taking the model to the USA, Northern Europe and beyond

The next step for Atos was to take the model it had used in the UK and extended to the countries it operated in overseas.

"The fact that the AMM is a best practice standard was a great help in taking it to other countries with other legislative environments," Neil said. "It takes the focus of conversations away from compliance towards good practice."

Neil cited key factors in the success of the AMM in other countries as:

- Having senior champions to drive take-up of the model
- Buy-in among regional managers
- Supporting use of the model through meetings and discussions
- Being prepared to approach offices at very different stages of the accessibility journey

The end result was that the AMM was taken up in offices across Northern Europe and the USA, with reviews every 6-12 months.

"Aside from the formal framework," Neil said, "using the AMM is another way to 'bang the drum' for digital accessibility. It provides objective evidence and universal standards for teams to use."

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