

Speaker 1: Hi Jennifer, welcome to the show. Thank you so much for being with us today. I am so excited to kick off season four with your episode. I did not tell you in advance that yours is the first one of season four, but I'm excited to let everybody in on some of your wisdom and experiences. And to get us started, will you tell us about yourself and what makes you so passionate about this topic?

Jennifer: Okay. So I was born premature. Unfortunately things like numbers are really hard for me to remember, so I don't remember how premature. But I was diagnosed with a kidney disease at three years old. And then I was diagnosed with hearing loss or bound to be hard of hearing at age nine. I spent most of my life fighting for some sort of a combination between my physical illness, developmental issues from being born premature, and disability in school and afterwards. And I've got to say, most disabled people come to activism through necessity rather than desire. So I'm passionate about this, but honestly I would never have gotten into it if I hadn't been born a disabled person.

Speaker 1: I think that is both understandable and incredibly sad to me that you have to be living the experience in order to want to be an activist around it. As an activist, what do you wish that people better understood about the work that you're doing?

Jennifer: Well, honestly, like I already said, most disabled people become radicalized and involved in activism from a young age because they have to because they have no other options because they are fighting for access in schools, in the medical system and elsewhere. But honestly, I wish the world would be accessible already and that access was such a matter of fact issue that I could spend my time and many other disabled people like me could spend their time sharing things that we might enjoy rather than activism.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I feel like in some of the conversations that we have had and some of the conversations that we've been involved in with other groups, there's so little awareness by so many people. And this does seem like these different access points that need to be available just should be a part of the way life is. I don't understand some days.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And I think in business ... Most of our listeners here are business owners. Micro businesses, five, 10 employees maybe. And I don't think a lot of business owners have experience with confronting ableism in their work, especially online businesses. So is there something that you would say to someone who is thinking about this issue for the first time in a serious way?

Jennifer: So the first place honestly I start is we're talking to them and the person they know. So I think it's hard for people to get, really understand ableism and access issues if they're not in a relationship with a disabled person. But aside from that, I would-

Speaker 1: Can I ask-

Jennifer: Sorry, I blanked.

Speaker 1: No, you're fine. Can I lead you a little bit? Can I ask you a follow up question?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay. So when you say people need to be in relationship with a disabled person, in my mind, I feel like most people are in relationship with a disabled person in some way, they just maybe don't know it or aren't looking at it.

Jennifer: Right. So I think part of the issue is that disability is such a stigmatized issue in our society. And as disability becomes more openly spoken about, openly talked about, people are expecting disabilities and are willing to adjust them with their community members, with their family members. I think that especially will change the situation because everyone will be able to start realizing that the access is not just for a small population. It's not just for people who need wheelchairs. There's a huge range of disabilities that require access. And when I talked to you about online businesses, there's a lot of things you can do that are not as hugely expensive, like you can pay a one time fee to start incorporating these things into your business practices. And I think that's an important thing to think about and start doing.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that makes complete sense. And the stigma around so many disabilities ... I have experience with people who have some type of hearing loss or hearing impairment, that they want nothing more than to hide it from people. And so there is such a stigma. And when we are addressing things, it seems like that might make it important to allow particularly online access points where people don't have to ask for them, where they are available on demand the way we do everything else online.

Jennifer: Right? Yeah. And I think it would change a lot of your interaction with customers in these businesses. Because it's not just people who can't hear. It's people who don't put the volume on on their computers or their phones. So when we're talking about captioning access, we're talking about captioning your videos or captioning your stories if your business is on Instagram, or adding an image description at the bottom of your photo on Instagram for people who have low vision or are visually impaired. And these things aren't that difficult to do. Yes, they take time. But that time and that extra money is something you need to build into your business because you actually provide so much more access. You're going to get a lot more catch points with people. And you'll get more sales from that because people won't be skipping your stories because they can't access them.

Speaker 1: That's 100% true. And I can just speak for myself, since I started making sure all of my videos were captioned, the engagement is higher on all my videos across the board.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Speaker 1: So from a selfish marketing perspective, it's good for your business.

Jennifer: And those are things you wouldn't think about until someone brings it up.

Speaker 1: Right. In general, I have a belief that the right thing to do is usually good for your business. But-

Jennifer: Usually, yeah.

Speaker 1: It doesn't have to be so ... I actually learned a lot from you about making my content more accessible. And it originally started with captioning and things like that, but it made me start to look at all kinds of other ways that my content wasn't accessible for people of different abilities and who consume content in different ways. There are a couple of things you mentioned that I don't know about. so I'd love to know, what are some of the simple first steps you recommend content creators take to begin finding ways to create accessibility and inclusion for their content?

Jennifer: Right. So it's actually possible and simple to start making your content more accessible [inaudible]. But a few things to keep in mind are things like I mentioned already. Captions. There are a bunch of apps and there's at least one computer program that I know of, and I guess Otter is another one, that help you caption stories and videos. Also. I mentioned image description. So image description are when you describe the picture that you posted in your Instagram or on your website. If you have a photo on your website, often an image description is going to be right below the photo describing what the photo is of for people who have low vision or who are visually impaired. And if you're on Instagram that is alt text, which you can do, I believe ... I'd have to do a more long description of how to get that, but there are ways to do alt text. And it's already built into the Instagram app. and you can go into the alt text and describe your image as well.

Speaker 1: So I can fill in a couple of blanks here for people, I want to make a distinction. because alt text and captioning are not the same thing, people.

Jennifer: No.

Speaker 1: In my SEO world, when we talk about alt text, we're talking about something that's written largely for a search engine to understand what an image is. That was actually created for image readers, but Google destroyed it, essentially. Because SEOs ruined it.

Jennifer: That's annoying.

Speaker 1: Yeah, it is. But SEO'S stuff alt textS on images full of keywords to come up in Google image searches that may or may not have any relevance to what the image is.

Jennifer: That is horrible for people who are using screen readers though, because then they basically get a jumble of words that mean nothing.

Speaker 1: Exactly. It is one of my hot points about how marketers ruin everything. So if you are a person doing that, and I am calling you out ... I was going to say I'm not, but I am calling you out, because I know a lot of the people listening to this have been trained to do that. those alt texts serve a purpose for accessibility for people using image readers.

Please consider that. And you can use your keyword while also describing what the image is. Captions are separate. So captions show up in stream, like Jennifer was saying, underneath the image, so that you don't have to have an image reader. Right, Jennifer?

Jennifer: Yes. So some people who don't use image readers, they'll have low vision or struggle with [inaudible] what they're seeing on an image. Even I do, as someone who wears glasses and has a little bit of a depth perception problem. So sometimes I use those things. But you would never know that I have depth perception and image reading problems myself. So then a lot of people who are visually impaired who may not use screen readers all the time are for various reasons.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I think of that myself because if I do not have glasses or contacts, I cannot see anything almost. I'm not completely blind, but more than an inch in front of my face just see colors without the glasses and the contacts.

Jennifer: [inaudible] right here.

Speaker 1: Yes. So I think, "What would life be like without these things?" a lot. So the one other filler I wanted to give here, on Instagram, to put alt text in for an image reader, the three little dots that show up after you make a post, if you click that, you can then choose the dropdown that is edit or add alt text to your image. Both of those, it's really important that they be short and succinct because usually search engines will cut them off at 65 characters. So captioning, I had not thought about having both the alt text and the captioning on every image, so I'm really glad that you brought that up. And I just want to say it explicitly so people know, what I see you do in your Instagram is that you have your caption at the bottom of a post, right?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And you specifically label it how?

Jennifer: I label it as an image description.

Speaker 1: Okay. And that's a fairly standard way that people set that up?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 1: You mentioned something called CamelCase, which I was not aware of at all, I have to admit. Can you explain what this is and the importance of it to us?

Jennifer: Okay, so we're talking about hashtags now. So when you use hashtags in Instagram or Twitter or wherever you use hashtags ... I don't use them on Facebook, but I think some people do. Most people will type out the hashtag as one long word. The problem with that is that a screen reader basically reads it as one long word. So it doesn't make any sense reading out of a screen reader. It's not read out, separated out to make sense like a word. So when you use CamelCase, what it needs is you capitalize each beginning letter of the word in the hashtag. Gosh, I'm trying to think of a hashtag.

Speaker 1: Ours for this season is #dobetterdigital.

Jennifer: Okay.

Speaker 1: So let's use that one.

Jennifer: For #dobetterdigital, I would capitalize the "D" for do, the "o" is small, the "B" is capitalized and the rest of the word is small. Digital, the "D" is capitalized as well. So you want to make sure that you have each so it's distinctly set up to be separate words when the screen reader reads it out.

Speaker 1: That is fantastic. And I cannot believe that I never knew that. I feel like I do it instinctively because it bothers me the way it looks when they're all lowercase. But I did not know that at all.

Jennifer: Well sometimes it's very difficult to read anyway, especially if you have a really, really long hashtag. So it's common sense in some ways. But yes, It's very necessary for someone who uses a screen reader.

Speaker 1: That's amazing. I feel like I learn something new about how the internet works every day. So one of the things that we do a lot of in our work here is we do a lot of user testing and website development and things like that. And I've found that it's still very rare for small companies to prioritize web accessibility testing. Not just for alt text and things like that, but also the accessibility of their design and things like that. And I think many people have this belief that they want to do the right thing but they can't afford it. They're struggling with the cost. So I'd really love for you to tell us what that feels like to you and what you would say to those companies to help them commit to doing better at this.

Jennifer: Well, so first thing I would mention is that when they do this, they're leaving out a good portion of the population, as 20% of people have some form of disability. And honestly, the number needs to be higher than that. But those are the people who [inaudible], they've been counted in some way on this website count. So ultimately the world needs to be made more accessible in all areas. And the costs of accessibility are honestly part of the cost of doing business. If you can't find a way to finance accessibility in your business, then really, should you be in business? Because that's just something that seems to me is important [inaudible]. You need to plan for it.

Also, there are things you could do that are the "bare minimum." There are things I brought up earlier, like image descriptions or CamelCase and captioning your videos. And if you're putting videos anywhere on the internet, you really need to be captioning them for all sorts of reasons. In fact, just for the deaf community. There are people with autism, or there are autistic people who use captions because they either struggle with following what's going on or they want to watch your video with the sound off. Also, there are moms with babies or young kids taking naps who watch your videos with the sound off, as well as ... Gosh. There are so many reasons captioning is important. Also,

English second language learners are going to use captions to learn English, and it makes it more accessible to them because that's not their first language.

Speaker 1: Rabbit hole moment. Have you watched on Netflix "Away" yet, with Hilary Swank, where they're going to Mars? They have this ... When you say that about the captioning, the Chinese astronauts are learning how to speak English at a country western karaoke bar where they're singing Garth Brooks to the captions-

Jennifer: That's awesome.

Speaker 1: Learning to speak English. You should go ... It's a great-

Jennifer: So they speak with accent, yeah. No, that's one way that a lot of people ... I've had anecdotes talking to other people who came to this country when they were very little and after captioning became a thing on TV and they were like, "We turned on captions because we knew the captions would help with our reading, and to help with our English learning skills."

Speaker 1: That's amazing. And I feel like ... I used to do commercial mortgages. And one of the things we had to do ... I know. Okay, if you guys could see this, Jennifer is making a face like, "Ew, commercial mortgages." That's why I used to, not anymore. But one of the things you have to do when you build a building is be ADA compliant, where you can't open funding.

Jennifer: For sure. Facts.

Speaker 1: So to Jennifer's point, this is just a part of doing business. Nobody goes on their commercial mortgage and is like, "Well, I can't afford to have an ADA accessible bathroom." Well, then you don't get to open a building. That's how that works.

Jennifer: Right. Exactly. And it's not safe to have a building that doesn't have a strobe fire alarm, because if you don't have your strobe fire alarms, there are going to be deaf tone people in your building at some point in time if the fire alarm goes off and they won't know about it. And that's a requirement.

Speaker 1: Yeah. And I also want to point out, because we are listening to this in a podcast medium, if you want people to be able to consume your podcasts, transcripts are awesome and they are also great for your business. There's no good reason not to do transcripts.

Jennifer: And most deaf people don't access by reading. So I will say, transcripts are the bottom requirement.

Speaker 1: Okay. So school me on this, Jennifer. How do we do ... Because I would think of transcripts as the go-to for podcasts.

Jennifer: Yeah, it is now. But we want to be able to access podcasts the way you access podcasts, but we can't. We can't sit there and listen to a podcast. Some of us have some hearing, so some of us do still listen to podcasts to the best of our ability. But what is absolutely the best awesome use of links, there are some true crime podcasts that do their podcasts on YouTube in ASL with captions. And so they're going to interpret the whole podcast. And honestly, deaf people can't access it the way you do. We want to access it in our language, especially people who were raised deaf or who are primarily ASL speakers. Even I personally access everything better in ASL than I do in English. Like when I did my yoga teacher trainings, the ones I did without interpreters, I didn't understand or remember much of anything. And the ones that I did work interpreters, I did so much better. I retained that information, I was able to apply it, I was able to go and teach with it afterwards.

Speaker 1: I think that's a point that I feel like has been made to me 15, 20 years ago, but I still think a lot of people get wrong, particularly with deaf culture, that ASL is not a nice-to-have aside. It is another language that is the primary language for millions of people. To me it's the equivalent of bilingual captions. So you release your episode in Spanish and in English.

Jennifer: Yes, right, exactly.

Speaker 1: So you can tell me that this question is too advanced, but you think of the ideal way to do podcasts. You're telling me the ideal way would be to be on YouTube with ASL captioning, correct?

Jennifer: It would be with ASL interpreting.

Speaker 1: So it's done like a ... I know it's an option that can be turned on on YouTube, right?

Jennifer: No, no. So what I'm saying is you take the transcript, you send it to an interpreter or two interpreters, which you probably need because you have two voices, and you're going to have the interpreters signing the podcast for you on a video.

Speaker 1: So I thought that on YouTube, on the same video you could have a different version of the video that they could choose. You're saying it would be two videos? So you would have your regular, whatever the podcast was, and then you would have a second one with the interpreters?

Jennifer: I'm trying to understand what you're saying. We need to sit down and hash this out a little bit more. So I'll send you some links, because I have examples that will make this a lot clearer for you. It's just very, very hard to describe.

Speaker 1: Beautiful. We will include those links in the show notes, y'all, so you can take a look as well. Because I think I'm going to explore ... I have the benefit of having a family member who is an ASL interpreter, so I think I maybe can get this done [inaudible] getting this done. Okay, awesome. So that's ideal for podcasting. I know you can also, if you use YouTube Live, YouTube Live will auto caption, correct?

- Jennifer: I guess. I've never used it. I'm assuming, yeah. So auto captions unfortunately are not great. Auto captions are not great. We call them craptions for a reason.
- Speaker 1: Fair enough.
- Jennifer: So you can do the auto caption, but I would recommend that you save that video and then go correct the captions after the fact because you're going to get corrected if you use craptions [inaudible].
- Speaker 1: Okay. I've done that with Facebook Live. I have usually sent one of my people to do YouTube Lives. But Facebook Lives, I used to go back and fix them after the fact. They do some interesting things.
- Jennifer: They do, yeah. You're like, "That is not what I said." And sometimes you're just like, "That is really not what I said."
- Speaker 1: Yes. Y'all, if you're not aware, you can also hire people and/or use people within your organization to live caption. So for example, we're on Zoom right now. Zoom has a live caption capability that you can give someone the ability to type those live captions automatically. It's not the best thing in the world, but it may be better than the auto captioning.
- Jennifer: They're pretty good, yeah.
- Speaker 1: Awesome. Okay. So is there a difference that ... We talked about podcasting, we talked about YouTube. I know you are really active on Instagram. And you had said something about Twitter that I'd love for you to talk about. What are some of the differences and similarities that we need to be aware of on different platforms?
- Jennifer: A lot of it is similar to what I've said. So there's CamelCase, there's caption, there's image description. I will say that the disability community on Twitter is very large and very well connected, because it's one of those ... It's an older platform, I think. I believe it's older than Instagram.
- Speaker 1: It is, yeah.
- Jennifer: I've been on there since 2010. Yeah. I was on Facebook, and I'm sure you were too, on Facebook, since it was a college platform.
- Speaker 1: Yep. I'm trying to quit Facebook.
- Jennifer: Yeah. Well, most everything. So Facebook is one of those places where the deaf community have a lot of connections and we have events and things. Obviously not right now. But yeah, events and things like that. A lot of our connections for that were on Facebook. So what I was going to say about Twitter is that Twitter is one of those places you will get called out and piled on if you do these things and you mess them up. So if you put up a video without captions and the deaf community wants to see it,

especially if it's about the deaf community, you're going to get jumped on and it's not going to take very long. There's that.

And then, like I've said before on Instagram, if you don't caption your videos, you lose engagement. And it's not just deaf people who are following you. It's certain people who have babies. It's certain people who look at their Instagram while they're supposed to be working or while they're on the bus or whatever else, where they don't want someone to hear it. So you're only really hurting yourself in those situations. And it's interesting, I feel like ... I personally don't use websites as much. I feel I mostly navigate from social to websites now.

Speaker 1: So that's an interesting point about different types of users. A lot of heavy Instagram users in particular end up on websites from Instagram. Which was not true even a few years ago, because Instagram does not make that logistically easy.

Jennifer: Right. So now if you have a certain number of followers, you get that swipe up for a link or something, and that helps you with the navigation aspect.

Speaker 1: Yeah. If you have 10,000 or more followers and/or if you pay for it, you can have the pleasure of having the swipe up in your stories. Yep. I'm on a hot soap box about why that's BS, but anyway.

Jennifer: Instagram.

Speaker 1: So for every episode we have a little show plan, and I've been going back and forth little bit with Jennifer. And Jennifer, there was something that you put at the bottom of your show plan about music. And it really brought up this thing about intersectional accessibility that I think is really important. Plus it mentioned WAP. I don't even know how to say it.

Jennifer: I don't either. I am a deaf white girl. Definitely not trying.

Speaker 1: And I am just an awkward white person, I don't know. But tell us a little bit about music and about how it brings up this issue of intersections in thinking about accessibility.

Jennifer: Okay. So I think as we progress as a society, more and more issues are being brought to the forefront of our thought process. This year has been big as far as Black Lives Matter issues, as far as so many police shooting issues, honestly. And then recently, like this weekend, there was a white woman of hearing who is [inaudible] in an interpreting program I guess, and she put up a signed song for ... I'm just going to say the title of the song. For Wet Ass Pussy in "ASL." And I say "ASL" in quotes for a reason because her signing was just not accurate. That's why white deaf people view that, especially that because it's a rap song and is sung by two black women, there's a real cultural issue here where specifically black signers should be the ones getting the attention, the virality of their music videos, for signed songs.

And signed song actually is a black deaf community thing. It's not a white thing. It is not a hearing thing. It's not something you should be using for clout. It's not something we should be doing as a ASL level one student, anything like that. So I shared in the comment section, the end of this, I shared you a link, "Hooray black deaf women," who originally signed Wet Ass Pussy when it first came out. And she did it so much justice because she included all the context of the song itself in her signing. Hearing people were upset with her because she signed "wet ass pussy" doesn't mean they [inaudible] the song. But in the context of sign language, it was more appropriate. And so she has explained in her Twitter why she did it that way. But she didn't get a quarter of the attention that this hearing white girl got for doing this fake ASL signed version. And that's the frustrating thing is that hearing people use sign language for their ... What's the word I want?

Speaker 1: Amusement?

Jennifer: Amusement is one of them. I'm thinking for praising their profile on social media. So they get followers. If they get enough followers, they get endorsements and money and they get to be supported by each of their Instagram companies. And so mostly all these accolades go to especially white people that ... Even more than that, hearing people, sometimes interpreters, and it's a really big controversy in the deaf community. But when we're talking about black music, it should be black deaf people getting acknowledgement, getting that attention, getting their versions out into the community and being recognized for these amazing song signs they can do.

Speaker 1: That makes perfect sense, and I wanted to bring it up here because we are two white ladies talking about this topic. And I want y'all who are listening to this to think about not one silo every time we talk about accessibility. Not the checkbox for race or the checkbox for sexual orientation or the checkbox for gender or non gender or disability or whatever. But think about this as a big, sometimes messy but also beautiful, mash-up of different experiences that it's not enough to try to check boxes and pillars. There's a lot of intersections that happen here. So when you're looking at accessibility, you have to look at it through a lens of multiple types of experience, not just one thing. And particularly in digital marketing, I think we have a tendency to try to silo it.

Jennifer: Yes, for sure. And eventually ... Siloeing is not the way our world works, we want to keep in mind.

Speaker 1: Exactly. What is that quote? We all contain multitudes.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Jennifer, I want to thank you so much for being with us today and for everything you have taught me over the past year and for sharing that wisdom with other people. And Jennifer is about to teach a class in our Dear Grown Ass Women group. We'll link to that in the show notes as well if you have not heard about that amazing group. So I'm sure I'm about to learn some more from you, too.

Jennifer: Probably not.

Speaker 1: But is there anything I haven't asked you that you would really like to share?

Jennifer: Not right now.

Speaker 1: Awesome.

Jennifer: Nope. [inaudible].

Speaker 1: So where can people find you online if they want to connect with you?

Jennifer: So I am mostly under @hearherhands. I am on Instagram under that. I am also on Twitter under that. And I have a website, I don't really use it. I'll especially leave the link to that as well. There are ways to contact me through that, but I don't use it the way I intended to.

Speaker 1: I feel you. So Instagram and Twitter under @hearherhands are the best, and we'll also link those up in the show notes. Thank you so much for being with us today, Jennifer.

Jennifer: Thank you for having me.