Challenges in making
Free and Open Source Accessibility work

Peter Korn

Accessibility Architect

Sun Microsystems, Inc.

Agenda

- Some History

- Funding model in US, Europe, elsewhere

- Incentives (508, other laws)

  - what happens when we reach "sufficient support"?

- What are our funding source options?

History

- AT started as small hacks from individuals for individuals

- AT of general use – become products, and companies formed around them

- Big problems (GUI access, Eye gaze, tactile access) got gov't research funding

- Much (most?) purchased by gov'ts, not end users (too expensive to do so!)

Existing funding models

- U.S.: Department of Rehab (maybe) pays for AT software, hardware. Companies pay for employees ("undue burden" clause in ADA)

- Netherlands, Denmark, others: government pays all AT costs for individuals, training costs

- Germany: companies who don't hire individuals w/disabilities taxed – taxes by AT needed by the hired individuals, training costs

- Other countries (help this poor American out here!)

Result of funding models

- U.S.: gov't pays for initial creation, then pays to purchase (pays twice!); private individuals unable to afford the high prices (most disabled unemployed anyway)

- Outside of U.S.: - help me out here gang!

Incentives (laws)

- ## Section 508:
  - U.S. Companies working hard to make their desktops (and other products) accesible:

    Sun with GNOME accessibility leadership

    Microsoft with UI Automation

    Apple with "Talking Interface", Magnifier
  - Explosion of commercial web accessibility checkers

- ## IDEA:
  - School funding for AT purchases

Mandates (laws)

- ADA:
  - Employers must pay for accommodation where it is "readily achievable"
  - No real incentive to corporations

- Section 255 of Telecom Act:
  - Telephones must be accessible in the U.S. (so far this has meant that wireless and cell phones be compatible with hearing aids)
  - Has had an effect on handset manufacturing, but not for programatic access to phone features beyond POTS

Sun & F/OSS Accessibility

- Sun is here because we believe in it

- Sun is here in a **big** way because of Section 508 and other laws

- Sun is doing this F/OSS for a few reasons:
  - We believe in F/OSS, and increasingly more of Sun's technology is going this way (cf. Solaris)
  - We aren't looking to compete based on unique access solutions
  - We want the company, and to build community & a viable alternative platform for/around accessibility

What happens after "enough"?

- At some point UNIX & GNU/Linux accessibility will be "good enough":
  - Users can be functional, effective on the desktop
  - U.S. Gov't agencies will be comfortable purchasing under Section 508
  - Other governments will be comfortable purchasing

- "Good enough" != "excellent", "satisfying"
  - Screen reader scripting needed for "good enough"?
  - Parity with $1,300 AT needed for "good enough"?
  - Wealth of AT tools (cf. Windows) needed?

Funding beyond "good enough"

- Where can we go to get funding for F/OSS accessibility (now, and also after "good enough"?)
  - Companies who otherwise would pay $1,300/screen reader – the Apache model
  - Gov't agencies who would otherwise pay $1,300/screen reader...
  - Gov't grants should prefer F/OSS – better benefit to the taxpayers! (how to convince them?)
  - Universities – technology transfer (cf. GOK, Dasher)
  - Other ideas? [discussion]

- How do we change these models? [discussion]

Peter Korn

peter.korn@sun.com