# LIVING SYSTEMS: DRIVING ACCESSIBILITY AT ACCENTURE

## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:00:00] You have to live it and breathe it. Think about accessibility in every action. Space in every meeting. You walk in a room, you have to think 'how will the wheelchair fit through the door?'

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:00:14]  i, everyone. It's Penelope Prett, Accenture's Chief Information Officer. And I'm glad to be here today with Margaret Smith, who leads Accenture's Geographic Services Organization, which includes our office services, our real estate, our procurement and our travel. We also have Melissa Summers, who heads up corporate technology in the global I.T. organization. Our global I.T. team continues to drive technology powered business transformation in support of all of Accenture's areas of business. And today, we're gonna take a look at how we're supporting accessible systems and spaces within Accenture, sharing some insights on what's coming in the future and some things that you might consider as you take your organizations through the same journey. Melissa, let me start with you. Can you talk a little bit about what we're doing around technology accessibility at Accenture and what the journey has been like for you so far?

**Melissa Summers - Corporate Technology Lead in Global I.T., Accenture** [00:01:07] Sure. Thanks, Penelope. First I'm thrilled to be here today, and I look forward to sharing some insights about the work that we've been doing around technology accessibility. You know, first,

it's important for us to keep in mind that we have really an important role to play in ensuring that our technology bridges the divide for people with disabilities. Some of the things that we've been focused on since we've taken on the technology accessibility program are making sure that our five hundred thirteen thousand employees can be as productive as possible across our technology landscape, regardless of their abilities. So what we are focusing on is removing barriers for those who use technology in all sorts of ways, whether they use technology with or without a keyboard, a mouse, other devices, perhaps with a screen reader. And most importantly, making sure that those use cases are incorporated in our ongoing development of features within that application landscape. Coupled with this application work, and making sure that code is accessible, we've created a number of processes and assets to ensure that our many content creators are educated and equipped to publish accessible content for their consumers. So, Penelope, that's just a little bit of the stuff we've been working on on this journey so far.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:02:24] Thanks, Melissa. Margaret, if I can turn to you for a minute, how are you handling accessibility from a space perspective? And how does are accessible technology profile fit into that overall space picture? What are the connection points?

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:02:38] That's a great question.

Based on the work we've done in the Philippines, which has been leading edge, we've implemented seven accessibility centers so far. So we're on a journey. We now are able to empower people with disabilities in Manila, China, India, Malaysia and apan. There's about three hundred thousand people who are covered across these centers. Our goal is to build similar centers in all of the new big office build outs. We've also ensured that we got at home accessibility equipment for everybody who needed it during the Covid pandemic, which has been an important part of our accessibility journey, Penelope.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:03:20] It's impressive, Margaret. And there's a lot going on right now. Maybe both of you can tell me when you talk about this story with the market and with our clients, what are the things you're both most proud of in terms of what we've been able to achieve with accessibility to date? Why don't we start with you, Melissa?

**Melissa Summers - Corporate Technology Lead in Global I.T., Accenture** [00:03:3 ] Sure. There are three things that I'm most excited about and proud of in our accessibility journey to date. The first is setting and hitting goals in making those employee interactions more accessible and really removing those barriers for all of our employees. The second is elevating our discussions with our ecosystem partners and our strategic vendors. So, for example, this is a topic - accessibility - that's being discussed on a regular basis in our business reviews with Microsoft. And then finally, really the lift in awareness and education that has resulted in more recognition that, in general, a more accessible world is a better world for all of us.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:04:18] And Margaret?

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:04:18] We're pretty proud of the Accenture request tool.

So we have a request tool that allows people who need special equipment to actually log a request to make sure we fill whatever they need to be productive. And in March through April - so that's just this year, a few months - there was one hundred percent increase in requests due to remote working. So we know how critical the response that we have is because we can see how much people are requesting. And that's been really, really fantastic. It's showed us we're having a real impact on the team, Penelope.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:04:54] And I know we have a great deal more in the works right now so if I can ask you both to turn your eyes to the future, what's on the horizon for you? And then we're going to talk a little bit later about what we would advise our clients in the market to be thinking about in this space. But let's start with what's on your future plan.

**Melissa Summers - Corporate Technology Lead in Global I.T., Accenture** [00:05:11] Sure. So really, what our focus for our future plan from a technology accessibility perspective is really making sure that accessibility use cases are part of the fabric of our work. So really at the forefront of our mind as we're designing enhancements to our landscape. And then also focusing on that awareness and education, bringing it to the next level. Making sure that all of our employees are taking accessibility into account as they create presentations and emails and also on their larger project deliverables. And making sure that we are creating our new process and technology solutions to be accessible.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:05:48] Margaret, what about on your end?

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:05:49] So borrowing a great expression from a colleague we're thinking about the now, the next and the future.

Right now, we're focused on the return to office plan, always guided by safety and the well-being of our people and the business essential needs of our clients. Our return to office playbook considers inclusion and diversity for safety protocols, including an approach to wear face coverings. And we continue to evaluate our work from home policies to understand where we see new opportunities and what policy adjustments we need. As we look at the next 18 to 24 months and then beyond that, we're going to constantly try to reimagine what's possible. All our new office build outs and design standards are going to incorporate accessibility now, but we're also going to look at what is the next newest, best practice thinking, because this is an area of rapid evolution. As another example, prior to Covid, we did a thorough review of animals in the workplace. We looked at emotional support animals. Currently service animals are allowed and we will allow emotional support animals if required by law and supported by landlords. But once again, that's an evolving set of policies as the market changes and we change Penelope.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:07:00] Thanks, Margaret. And one last question for both of you. We've learned some things along the way. What would you share with others as best practices or learnings in this space that are critical to success? Melissa, you want to start?

**Melissa Summers - Corporate Technology Lead in Global I.T., Accenture** [00:07:15] Thanks, Penelope. I think one of my main lessons learned over, in particular, the last year is really making the different standards that we use around technology accessibility real to the people that are developing solutions. So really demonstrating how our colleagues who may use technology differently in a real environment. I had an example where I had a colleague demonstrate how she used technology without using a keyboard to a group of vendors, and it was extremely impactful for them to really see where there may have been some deficiencies in the software. It was really, really enlightening. Back to you, Penelope.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:07:55] Thanks. And Margaret, how about you?

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:07:58] You have to live it and breathe it. Think about accessibility in every action. Space in every meeting. You walk in a room, you have to think 'how will the wheelchair fit through the door?' You have to also think, 'how is someone going to open the door?' It's important to ensure that all leaders share their I&D commitments with their teams. Teams also need tactical training: Microsoft Office features to check accessibility, closed captioning on broadcasts. It takes a really strong change management approach to get your people to stop and think. Check documents, emails, broadcast. Are they all accessible? It's crucial to have active allies who are vocal and leadership teams and role models who represent all of our communities. We have people with disabilities, allies, mental health allies, all of which have received specific training. Penelope, I think it's really critical we listen to those allies as well as listen to our community to keep progress going forward on this.

**Penelope Prett - Chief Information Officer, Accenture** [00:08:53] Melissa and Margaret, I really want to thank you for being here today and for the great discussion around accessibility. And as you pointed out, Margaret, so much is evolving so quickly in the space that I really look forward to having you back soon to talk about what's going on in the market.

**Melissa Summers - Corporate Technology Lead in Global I.T., Accenture** [00:09:08] Thanks, Penelope. Always happy to talk about what we're doing and what's next.

**Margaret Smith - Global Geographic Services Executive Director, Accenture** [00:09:12] This has been a really great discussion and so important to the future. Thank you.

**Narrator** [00:09:17] Thank you for joining today's podcast. Be sure to subscribe to the Accenture CIO podcast series on Apple podcasts or Spotify. Find the full CIO 24/7 podcast series and additional ways to subscribe at Accenture dot com slash CIO podcast.