

March 24, 2006

## Interview with Roberto Scano (Part 2)

### Summary: Interview with Roberto Scano (Part 2)

On March 17th, I talked with Roberto Scano, an Italian accessibility expert, about several accessibility-related issues. Due to the length of the conversation, the interview is in two parts. The first part is [Interview with Roberto Scano \(Part 1\)](#).

### Heading List

- [Accessibility Validators](#)
- [If your web page automatically validates is it really accessible?](#)
- [Roberto Scano: Bio](#)

### Accessibility Validators

#### Roberto Scano:

Another problem is poor use of accessibility validators. All of the tools are available in English. In Italy, web people use [WebXACT or Bobby](#) or [Cynthia](#). They check their page and they see they have reached the maximum level of Triple A but they do not read further and do not realize they must check certain things by hand. Also in the culture of accessibility, there are a lot of developers that use the [W3C markup validator](#). They see the automatic check and assume that their web site is accessible. Some years ago, I spoke to some representatives of [Watchfire](#) (Bobby and now, WebXACT) and they clearly said they can only guarantee a check of less than 20% of checkpoints with the tool. There are things the developer must check. The code must be checked using assistive technology.

#### Pam Berman:

And they don't.

#### Roberto:

Yes, they do not check but they still put the Triple A logo, "AAA," on their web site because for the developer, achieving the accessibility level is a goal but they do not follow through and test accessibility with the people that need it. They want to say to the world, "I am the best." because this is the nature of the web developer. "I am the best developer." I can be the best developer." And this is a problem.

#### Pam:

They don't go through and think about all the things that can't be automatically checked because we don't have the Artificial Intelligence yet to check those certain things.

[[Back to heading list](#)]

### If your web page automatically validates is it really accessible?

#### Roberto:

Yes, speaking of Artificial Intelligence, some things really are impossible ... it's interesting to test how disabled people browse the Web. For example, if you take 5 people with the same disability or the same experience, it is like having 5 people with different disabilities because all people use the web in a subjective mode. This is why it is important to do usability testing. Because it's the only way to catch some problems

[those expectations people have that are not being met] and it's why the "universal" web site does not exist. This is a big problem for the Web. The Web is a form of communication that affects all people so you cannot know if everyone has effective access to your web site. This is because there are people that are blind or have limited vision, people with hearing impairment but I think an even bigger problem is access for the community of cognitive and learning disabilities because these kinds of people have ... how can I explain it? ... you cannot know the optimal instructional level for these people. For example, you can convey a message in simple text but it can still be hard for them to read.

**Pam:**

And we may adapt things one way and end up hindering someone else with a different disability. That is what we are talking about in my eLearning Concepts and Techniques class right now. There doesn't seem to be a lot of research or as much research as there has been on the physical disabilities.

**Roberto:**

This is why sometimes the developer's side of me says "universal design" is impossible. You cannot have a web site for all. The Web for all is not possible. You can make a web site that can be accessible to a large group of people but you cannot make a web site that is accessible for all.

Take, for example, a learning application. If you make a learning system that is accessible and is tested by people using screen readers and by people with limited vision but what happens if you include some content that is difficult for some people to understand; for people with some type of learning disability?

**Pam:**

Yes, one of the reasons why I first got into accessibility was because I wanted to create a Triple A web site. I have since changed my vision and goal.

**Roberto:**

Yes, the problem is that "Triple A" was the first objective of all the people that start to develop with accessibility in mind. The important thing is some people go beyond that and actually test their solution with people who have disabilities. Then there are people who use "accessibility" as a "business" and they sell solutions that really are not accessible.

There are some public web sites that display the Triple A logo but they also include the Section 508 logo because the developers have tested using Bobby and Bobby also gives them this logo and they say, "Okay, we conform to [Section 508](#). Okay, we are in America."

**Pam:**

That is why I stopped worrying so much about meeting the guidelines. I would much rather use the best practices and processes that work for the target audience and I try to adhere to the standards so the tools they use can access it.

**Roberto:**

Are you familiar with ["Diving into Accessibility"](#)?

**Pam:**

Yes, I think so. I have it somewhere.

**Roberto:**

That was an experience of some group of people to explain all the WCAG checkpoints and they say, "Okay the problem is this; I cannot retrieve the headers, I've got a problem with alternative text." This is the real accessibility; the accessibility tested with the users.

For example, in Italian law, we have 22 requirements that are based on the WCAG but those are technical requirements. The problem is, for example, when something is wrong from the WCAG we also have problems in Italian law accessibility. The example I always use for why we do not directly accept the WCAG is the example of the color contrast. With the [WCAG 1.0](#) there is a strange thing; the color contrast got put at level Triple A and the color contrast for the image is at level Double A so I can create an accessible web site at level Double A that has wonderful markup and everything for the level Double A and put the content on a black background with the text in black and this web site is accessible to level 2. But the trouble is for people NOT using assistive technology because black on black is not readable.

**Pam:**

Ah, yes, I've used a similar example.

**Roberto:**

That is why, in Italy, we do not link directly to the WCAG" as is". Another problem is the definition of "clear language". What is the clear language? This is another problem.

**Pam:**

Exactly.

**Roberto:**

For example, for you, the clear language can be the text. For other people with a disability it is not the text.

**Pam:**

Right. It's a graphic or it's an animation.

**Roberto:**

Yes, this is because the web accessibility is a big world that cannot be explained in some checkpoints.

**Pam:**

Right. And I think the clear language part is moving into the instructional design realm because that's what we do. We look at the learners and try to choose the language and the strategies to convey the message specifically to the learner. And that is a very big field.

**Roberto:**

Yes, I think in the future this is a topic that must be studied by the web writer. The web writer should be the content accessibility expert of the future because if you don't have people who can write accessible content for a CMS, then we go back to the problem of people that have never created content in anything other than a visual editor and all those problems that go with that.

**Pam:**

I totally agree and I see those problems all the time. And one of the things that I'm trying to do as an instructor in my classes is to give them some of these things like the examples you are providing to the students so they can see what it is like for people that are using assistive technology.

**Roberto:**

Yes. I always suggest, begin to create good content by using a text editor to organize the content of the document; a text editor like Microsoft Word or Open Office, etc. because if you have the base structure of a document, you can apply it easily to the Web. In other words, if you can't organize content using the title, subtitle, the citation, etc., you cannot generate a good web page.

**Pam:**

Correct. In my class, we are creating an eBook project. We are talking about using HTML as the structure with cascading style sheets so that all people have to do is to mark up the information correctly and the look and the feel will be similar but people can adapt it and change it as needed. So this is very interesting. And it's hard for some people to see it that way because they are so used to seeing it visually. The graphic artists want it to look a certain way and they don't want anybody to change it. And I say, "why?" Some people need to change it.

**Roberto:**

This also reminds me that 3 to 5 months ago, we had a discussion about the [CSS Zen Garden](#). They have changed, if you go to their web page, their web accessibility declaration.

**Pam:**

Yes, I've gone through a number of their designs and I've picked them apart. I've magnified them and I've looked to see which ones work and which ones don't.

**Roberto:**

Yes, if you have gone to the web site, you would have seen there is always the declarations at the bottom; "xhtml", "css", "aaa", "508". Now the links go to a different place. This is work I've done with them. And I also did an article some months ago about how Italians have critiqued the web site. I said to them only, they cannot put Triple A and also CSS because it implies conformance on the web site.

Here is another simple example I use in training: links – if you remove the underline from the links and you only change the color of the text, if you remove the color, who can find the link? You cannot so you do not respect the guidelines of the [WCAG 1.0](#). If you use the CSS pixel designation, you cannot resize. If you don't use a set of colors that have an adequate contrast, you don't follow the guidelines. etc., etc. So they changed this link and put some information about the conformance of the [CSS Zen Garden] web site.

And going back to the black text; I can create a perfect page with markup and also the CSS must be done well. When different people develop a web page, people that are all working together, they must all develop with accessibility in mind. So if one is creating multimedia content, they must remember there are people that cannot hear and so must think about the captioning of the video.

I think the world does not consider accessibility to be a big issue. But think about the number of people who are aging and losing their vision. There are people who have poor

Web connection. Accessibility should be the possibility for the world to communicate otherwise, we go back to the big banner and the big Flash animation. This is good, this is nice but if I can't have access to this, what can I do?

### **Roberto:**

In Italy, there is another movement that is very interesting because it is inspired of a European directive of the year 2000 that said that every kind of discrimination, not only for the Web, but every kind of discrimination, direct discrimination and indirect discrimination, the people that think they have had discrimination can now act, go to the judge, and ask to have the discrimination removed. This is very interesting because for the first time here in our country, there is no difference between public service and private service. So, for example, I have a web site for my shop and you are disabled and cannot access my site. You cannot enter into my shop so you can go to the association and the association can go to the judge and the judge can obligate me to make the web site accessible. This is a very strong law. I think this is one of the strongest from around the world. And it is strange that only those of us in Italy have applied this law. Also in the UK there is a similar law but not so strong.

### **Pam:**

That's what [Gez](#) keeps saying, that things aren't strong enough. On [my web site](#), I have some specific examples where I have used CSS styling and I have black background with white text. If someone turns off the images, it's white text on a white background.

### **Roberto:**

Yes, yes, yes.

### **Pam:**

And I have that documented in my accessibility statement so I can say to our students, "Go look at this. This is what this means."

### **Roberto:**

Yes, like the black text on the black background. The Swiss government at Lugano has made a regulation to meet accessibility at WCAG 1.0 at level 2. We have prepared for them a document where we explain that is not good to only advocate to the WCAG. The document is in HTML with black text and a black background. And we say, "Okay, this document conforms to level 2 WCAG."

### **Pam:**

Exactly. So some things actually pass that shouldn't pass. So that is why I recommend that people go read what the guidelines are but you really have to look at the reasoning behind everything. I don't think it was the intent of the WCAG document but that's how things ended up. Part of the process of working in a group is, hopefully, to find all those things; for someone to say, "Wait a minute. This doesn't work." and then have that feedback integrated into the document so the best possible outcome or decision comes from the group. Sometimes that doesn't always happen. It's a very complicated process. If it was easy; if it was all black and white; one thing or the other, we would not be doing what we are doing because everyone would already know how to do it.

Thank you so much, Roberto!

[[Back to heading list](#)]

**Roberto Scano: Bio**

Roberto Scano is the AC Rep of IWA/HWG inside W3C and is an expert of user interfaces accessibility.

In 1999 he starts the first chapter in Italy of IWA (International Webmasters Association): the Venice Chapter. In 2000 he found IWA ITALY, the Italian chapter of IWA IWA, and become president of it.

On 2001, when IWA merged with HWG (The HTML Writers Guild), he starts to follow also web accessibility: 11th Sept. 2001 he become IWA/HWG AC Representative inside the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) and since this date he coordinate activities of IWA/HWG Member inside W3C Working Groups. In the same year he joined in the W3C WCAG Working Group (first Italian inside the working group).

On 2002 he developed a law project ("Campa-Palmieri Act") that was the first law project in Italy about web accessibility.

On 2003 he participated to the development of the accessibility guidelines for ABI (Italian Bank Association) for the home banking accessibility. He joined in the W3C ATAG Working Group (first Italian inside the working group), and inside OSI (Internet Web Site Observatory) of UIC (Italian Blind Union) as web accessibility expert. Always in 2003 he join also in The European Design for All e-Accessibility Network (EDeAN) and he has organized the first Face to Face Meeting of WCAG Working Group in Italy.

He was nominated EMEA (Europe, Middle-East, Africa) coordinator for IWA/HWG and joined inside CNIPA (Informatics National Center for the Public Administration) working groups that has developed the technical documents for the Italian Law about accessibility: he worked inside working groups that develops web site accessibility guidelines, software and hardware accessibility guidelines.

On 2004 he joined inside UNI (Italian National Standards Organization) and inside Working Group 2 (Video terminals) of the Ergonomic commission. He is a member of the technical secretary of the Interministerial Commission for the ICT for people of disabilities of the Italian government. He participate also to ISO (International Standards Organization) activities as Expert of ISO/TC 159/SC 4/WG 5 'Software ergonomics and human-computer dialogues' Working Group that develops standards for the accessibility of computer, software and web interfaces. Always in 2004 he develop the first book in the world in a new format: the "Tetralibro" (4-in-1: paper version that contains also CD-ROM with three accessible version: XHTML, Accessible PDF and version for PDA with Microsoft Reader). This book is a bible about web accessibility: "Accessibilità: dalla teoria alla realtà (Accessibility: from theory to reality) - ISBN: 88-7633-000-3. He develops also a CMS, <fruibile /> - L'elemento che mancava(tm) ("the missed element"), the first CMS developed in ASP (Active Server Pages) that conforms to Italian accessibility law and also to the requirements of EU (accessibility of public pages, content generated and also of back office).

On 2005 he joined in the board of EuroAccessibility Consortium and wrote a book about the Italian law (Law 4/2004).

[\[Back to heading list\]](#)