SAP's Accessibility Product Status Documents

March 9, 2012
Providing accessible products or applications is no longer seen as something optional in the recent years. In order to promote the awareness in the area of accessibility, a lot of activities have been introduced in many parts of the world and the turning point of this awareness is seen in the adoption of **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** by the United Nations as well as many other countries in the world. This enlightens the way the world regards disability and accessibility. The *new* challenge is that the adoption of the convention can be interpreted differently from country to country.

New Challenges
In the area of information technology we have seen that even before the convention was introduced, fragmented accessibility standards were and are still widely distributed. Such fragmentation along with differences in interpretation has made it a challenge for global information technology companies to meet the accessibility laws of each country. Thanks to the publication of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) as well as the recommendation from the European Commission to the European member states, such fragmentation is greatly reduced but not yet completely gone. Understanding such complexity, companies like SAP have decided to focus on globally acknowledged standards, guidelines, and requirements. Integrating standards and guidelines into the requirements of SAP's Accessibility Standard is not an easy process. SAP has to fine tune some internal processes in order to be able to deliver the documentation that describes the degree of accessibility within each product. What kind of documentation is provided by SAP in this case then?

Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT®)
The Voluntary Product Accessibility Template® (VPAT®) is a widely known instrument which is used to describe the accessibility status of a product according to the U.S. Section 508 standards. The template was developed by Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) in partnership with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to help procurement officers assess the accessibility of products being considered for purchase. SAP uses this template to document the accessibility status of its products; however, since SAP is a global company, it is anticipated that only providing VPATs® is not sufficient. Many member states in Europe as well as other parts of the world are orienting more towards WCAG than U.S. Section 508. For this reason, SAP goes great lengths to document the accessibility status of products according to WCAG's guidelines as well as BITV's requirements. So in addition to the already mentioned VPATs® upon request status documents reflecting the base principles of WCAG and BITV are available. Collectively these documents are known as Accessibility Product Status Documents (ASDs). As a side note, the creation of the BITV document is the most challenging task since all information contained in this document has to be translated to German. As a result, an extra step is introduced to the processes in order to facilitate that when a request comes, an accessibility product status document can be provided.

SAP's Accessibility Product Status Documents (ASDs)
In SAP's ASDs one will find detailed information starting with which parts of the product are covered in the document, details of the environment in which the product was tested, and a thorough status according to the listed standards/guidelines/requirements. Such detail can only be provided through an extensive testing procedure conducted by developers via check tools combined with internal testing experts – and not the product of brainstorming from the product experts. The SAP accessibility testing experts know the requirements of SAP's Accessibility Standard and test against these requirements. Their knowledge is not limited only to testing simple products but also complex products which involve combinations of technologies and/or third-party products. The SAP testing experts also know:

which settings they have to turn on during testing, which screen reader modes to test with, the expected speech outputs, the interaction paradigm from certain control or user interface elements, and the list goes on. On the top of these, they also follow a clear process for reporting and are working closely with the developers as well as SAP accessibility experts during the testing cycle. At the end of a testing cycle, an internal test report of a product will be produced and delivered to the owner of that product. This information then becomes part of SAP ASDs. Such knowledge and experience must be developed internally and channeled through internal processes. Therefore it should come as no surprise that SAP can only convey the accessibility status of a product via its own SAP ASDs based on requirements that are part of the aforementioned internal standards and guidelines.

Conclusions

SAP pays a great deal of attention to the creation of SAP ASDs. These documents are only provided to the SAP customers; if you would like to receive them please contact your account executive or write to accessibility@sap.com.