

## Part 1

Bob Gilbert (00:08):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tails, a podcast series that invites travel and tourism leaders and influencers to share their take on key industry issues. My name is Bob Gilbert and I'm the general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. My career spans over three decades in the travel and tourism industry where I've had the privilege of working with iconic brands and so many amazing colleagues who in their own ways are pushing the industry forward and using tourism to increase understanding, access, and quality of life. For those who work in travel, those that love to travel, and the communities that benefit from travel, I'll be bringing you into the conversation with top professionals who are shaping the industry, all with their unique tales and perspectives that they're ready to share with you. Welcome to another freshly brewed edition of your favorite podcast, tourism Heads and Their Tales. Today we sit down with a true travel industry legend and tourism personality. Dare I say, a serial entrepreneur. We welcome Jake Steinman, founder and CEO Travel Ability. Well, you and I go back many years, Jake, but for the benefit of our audience, please share your career journey so far and explain how and why you founded Travel Ability.

Jake Steinman (01:38):

So, I've been a serial entrepreneur, as you know, and I've had four companies, and I'll just go with the, with North American Journeys when I started that. And, that was in 1994. And then we built that over about 24 years into a B to B media and event company that had, we produced six events and had a website for tour operators, and we had a magazine and many different, kind of little events and conferences that we put on, the largest of which was, ecotourism Summit, which became the largest digital marketing conference in the world for destinations. And so a lot of the contacts in our industry had been with DMOs and, destination marketing organizations. So I sold that in all the assets in 2019. And, before I sold it, I got an award, an email with an award from the city of Sausalito, which is where my office is located, proclaiming North American Journey's Travel Agent of the Year in Sausalito.

Jake Steinman (02:52):

And I was really honored, but we weren't travel agents. Of all the things we did, travel agency was not one of them. And so I just didn't think any more of it. But during the course of the year, people started knocking on my door asking for help, planning travel. And so that got out somewhere and half of them had somebody with a disability that they were planning travel for, and they didn't know where to turn. There was no information. And so after about the fourth person, I realized this may be a pattern because it was all sort of people who were either the caregivers or the daughters or the sons or someone who was paying for this trip who had the disability, and they wanted, the first thing they wanted to know is where they could go and then where they could stay, and then what they could do.

Jake Steinman (03:45):

So after a while, I realized that these were baby boomers who were aging into a disability, and aging is really kind of a form of disability on the installment plan, you know, we're all going to age into a disability if we're lucky. And I started to realize that. So I decided to conduct a listening tour of my contacts because I was uniquely positioned in the industry because we had about 700 clients at that point buying something, subscribing to our newsletters. And, I mean, if you talked about inbound, we had 3000. They knew who we were, and we had sort of a reputation for seeing things a little early. So I

thought this would be a good thing to go into as a kind of a give back to the industry. So that's how I got into it. And then over the course of, and just to give you a brief history of probability, we started with a conference that began in 2019, and then we had to cancel it in 2020.

Jake Steinman (04:50):

And during that time, we sort of did research and we researched the accessible landing pages. We created a newsletter, we created our own podcast with a couple of our, our advisory board members. We created a playbook that took us seven months to compile that had everything, any company in the industry, any travel industry organization needed to educate their stakeholders about accessibility. And I started to realize that, this was, you know, it was a growing field. So during the listening tour, I spoke to 53 people in the industry and, you know, disabled travel bloggers who were a handful of them. And they were sort of the leaders going out in this, and hotels and attractions and museums. And what I ended up realizing was that there were three mindsets that were in the travel industry. One was the mindset of the idealist. And this is really somebody who feels that it's just patently unfair that people with disabilities are not treated like everyone else.

Jake Steinman (05:59):

And that mindset was really prevalent among museums. And the reason museums were so accessible is A, if they get any kind of federal grant funding, they have to have an ADA coordinator that ADA coordinator has other jobs, but they actually are looking to become as accessible as possible. So a lot of these museums, they're not just accessible for people in wheelchairs. They're accessible for people who are deaf, for people who are blind, for people with autism, for dementia, for Alzheimer's, they go deep into these different disabilities. And it's because they also see the local residents on a regular basis. They have school trips, they have senior center trips, they have, you know, to these museums. So they have to be accessible because they see people with disabilities all the time. And so the second mindset that I saw was a mindset of fear.

Jake Steinman (06:58):

And that was really, that's a mindset around compliance. They are worried about being compliant, they are worried about being sued, they're worried about getting complaints, they're worried about offending people by the way they speak. And that mindset was prevalent in hotels and, the hotel community, because everybody has their lived experience. And the lived experience for hotels, unfortunately, is serial litigators sending demand letters for \$15 or \$20,000, which is kind of the sweet spot between, oh, let's just pay this off so it goes away. Or we fight this in a lawsuit and it's given the disability industry a black mark because of that. So that has, that's something that has to be overcome. Then the third mindset is the mindset of growth. And that mindset is really the destination, because their purpose is to be the canary in the coal mine for their stakeholders, telling them what's coming next, how to plan for, you know, 10 years from now, we're going to need to expand our convention center. So they have to think the long game. So that's where I decided to concentrate travel ability, because they A think the long game, they can see the growth in baby boomers and they have the relationships with the stakeholders, with the hotels, with the museums, with the attractions, with the restaurants, anybody that interfaces with tourism, to be able to educate them, at a grassroots level, which is where it needs to happen. So that's what I've realized, and it's motivating all the things we're doing now.

Bob Gilbert (08:34):

Right. You know, it is, it's interesting from a visual perspective and awareness perspective, if one travels a lot, it is sometimes very difficult to understand and observe, you know, what the disability may be. I guess if you travel and you're flying, you see folks getting pushed, you know, in their chairs and wheeled onto the plane ahead of everybody else. And some, I hear some people grumble about that, it's like, oh my God. But that's just a piece of it. I think that, you know, there's a, I have a lot of different thoughts and questions for you, Jake, but you know, that is the end result. But the ability or the ease to be able to make, a simple booking on an airline, you know, it has to be a huge challenge. And again, just the tip of that iceberg, but the market itself, and we'll come back to that question about how easy or not it is to make a booking a reservation, given the nuances of the varying categories of disability. But you mentioned that we are all going to be there at some time, probably. What is the number? I know that the UN World Tourism Organization say that as about 15 percent of the global population has a disability. Do you know what that number is? Domestically in the USA?

Jake Steinman (10:04):

Yeah. It's, 15 percent of the US population that's about 45 million people self-identify as having a disability. And that disability is anything from hard of hearing to being on the autism spectrum.

Bob Gilbert (10:20):

Mobility,

Jake Steinman (10:21):

It's very, it's very broad. The issue is really for people with disabilities, they're set up at home for what they need, right? I mean, they've got, you know, they have whatever they need, one story home, if they're in a wheelchair or they have whatever their needs are, they can meet when they're home. They know what stores to go to, they know what restaurants to go to, they know what attractions to go to. They know what movie theaters to go to that work for them. But when they're traveling, it's basically a crap shoot. And the reason for that is there's no information. There's an ADA that provides a baseline, you know, and actually this, this week we celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the passage of the ADA. So this is, Disability Awareness Week.

Bob Gilbert (11:11):

Oh, this week?

Jake Steinman (11:12):

Yeah, this week. Yeah. So just the, it was the 26th of, July that it passed. So there is that baseline physical infrastructure that exists. So there are ramps and graph bars and rail signs, but there is no ADA for information. There's no law that says you have to publicize the accessible features that you have. It forces people with disabilities to be detectives before they to book a trip, because otherwise they end up, you know, they, I mean, the airline experience is stressful for me. I don't have a disability. I think it's stressful for a lot of people, period. Because there is a, there is a chance that, you know, a lot of things can go wrong. Delays, but for them, for people with disabilities, you know, they get to a hotel or they get to an attraction and they have planned and paid for, and it doesn't work for them.

Jake Steinman (12:08):

And so that's their lived experience. The skillset they need is forensic skills for people in wheelchairs, for example, which, you know, that's very visible. They have to not only book the room, but they have to

call the front desk at the hotel to ask somebody to go in, you know, see if there's a thick carpet there. Because if there is, there it is just like they are in quicksand with their wheelchair. Or if there is a shower, a roll in shower, or if the, how high the bed is or if there's space under the bed. This is all an education issue and information issue. And so what I saw, why I think I'm so gratified by the progress that's happened in the last five years is because the destinations, that's their businesses to provide information about all the attractions and all the features and all the things. This is what they're put on earth to do. They're there to promote tourism.

Bob Gilbert (13:07):

I was going to say, you mentioned earlier that from a hospitality industry perspective, it's almost like, check the box compliance, we have to do this as opposed to, we need to do this,

Jake Steinman (13:21):

As opposed to, we want to do this.

Bob Gilbert (13:23):

It's not a need to have, it's a must have. And it's the mindset. And I think as well, you know, we live in this environment of DEI and from a DEI perspective, it's almost as if the D and the E are the heavyweights and the, the I inclusivity has become a minor league. I say that just based upon conversations. I've had meetings, I've had conferences I've been to that there is a greater emphasis that I have witnessed in the diversity and equality versus the inclusivity. You know, again, this is just what I have witnessed, but you know, what we are talking about here definitely is the eye of DEI. Do you have a point of view on that or do you see that there's more improved integration with disabilities in DEI?

Jake Steinman (14:17):

Well, I think you hit the nail on the head, Bob with that, because really what is happening, the progress that we've made, I think is because accessibility is really something that fits into inclusion. And D E and I started with racial justice, you know, with George Floyd murders and just, you know, that, that whole issue and, the diversity started there with race, but they had been doing the equity side for a long time before that, which again, the lesbian market with female equity in the travel industry. But they had not with diversity. So I think what's happened is the last five years, so many destinations after that happened, published a statement on their website that they were appalled by all of this. And this is now one of their pillars. They want to become diverse. But diversity is, is a difficult thing because it, take alcoholism, how long did it take for alcoholism to be considered a disease rather than a character flaw.

Jake Steinman (15:22):

That was decades for that to happen. And diversity is something that the DMOs have taken so far. And then going any further requires bringing in a consultant, and then there is chipping away at it, you know, year after year. You know. And so what happens is change really takes place when there's an adjacency and accessibility as part of the inclusiveness portion of D E and I is that adjacency. And I think that's what's happened, is there's somebody now responsible who can take that on as a way that they can move the needle even faster in a way that's not political. Because in a lot of areas, a lot of red states, for example, they see the DMO moving into diversity, and they just wonder, and they ask them, is this really part of tourism? Is this part of your job? You know, we don't want you to go any further with this. So they check that box and they have to move on. So accessibility is like a safe space because it's not

political. It's one of these areas that's basically non-political and it benefits the residents as much as it does the tourists.

Bob Gilbert (16:33):

The visitor. Yes. Something that may be very, very difficult to be weaponized, if you will.

Jake Steinman (16:39):

Yeah. Well, it, it is politically incorrect to be weaponized. And then the statement that you made earlier, I'll tell you, is something that I face all the time. That is accessibility is a must, is a, is a nice to have, but not a must have. But in between nice to have and must have is cool to have. And that's what we are shooting for.

Bob Gilbert (17:01):

So which industry segment is the coolest, is the leader in accessibility, airlines, attractions, hotels?

Jake Steinman (17:09):

Well, I would say the attractions are the leaders, but that doesn't bring the coolness. No. What brings the coolness is pop culture. I mean, when you see movies like CODA winning Best Picture of the Year, last year in 2022, Crip Camp was nominated for best documentary, Sound of Metal, won the best picture for the year before that, for 2021. When you see all these fashion brands now coming out with accessible clothing, and suddenly it's gone kind of mainstream. And if you can believe this, Bob, we were, this year we were invited to the Cannes Film Festival.

Bob Gilbert (17:48):

I was going to ask you about that. I did see a note that, that you were down at the Cannes Film Festival. Was that educational? Tell us about that.

Jake Steinman (17:59):

Well, at the Cannes Film Festival, there's an American pavilion and there is really basically a, an international 10th city that's set up on a platform on the beach in Cannes with 20 feet from the Mediterranean Sea and the American Pavilion, because of what it is in the film industry being so prominent worldwide is huge there. And it has the Roger Liebert Theater, it has a conference center, it has a restaurant, and it has an enormous amount of lounge area for schmoozing. And they put on a reception every night. It's a big thing. So they asked us to come advise them about accessibility, and then while I was there, we met the people who actually produced the film festival, that group, and they introduced us to it. It turns out that they, I didn't realize this, but they had been blisteringly criticized the year before for not being accessible for some of the filmmakers and the producers and the actors who were in these disability films.

Jake Steinman (19:08):

These were really disabled people. So this group got together and published a press release called Inaccessible Cannes 2022. And all the, you know, Variety, Hollywood Reporter, Women's Wear Daily, Vanity Fair, they all printed it word for word, word for word about, you know, what they couldn't do. And it was because it prevented them from advancing in their careers because it's all about meeting people there. Obviously. And just, you know, and, and getting more business and all of that. So this year,

as a reaction to that, they had a hospitality desk that no symbol of any kind, that this was an accessibility desk exclusively, but that's what it was. Three women who had a connection to disability. They either had a family member that was disabled or they worked in disability, and they were there as concierges for anyone that wanted it with a disability. Well, the problem was Vanity Fair and Hollywood Reporter and Variety didn't cover that. So nobody knew that they existed and they were sitting there idle in this room. So I met with them and talked with them. This is one of the problems, if you become accessible for people with disabilities, you've got to tell the people with disabilities that you're welcoming them.

Bob Gilbert (20:26):

Now. Right. Communication.

Jake Steinman (20:27):

The whole communication side, you know, so we built a relationship with that group and, they, they, I think, we're going to, we partnered with a kind of a Expedia for Accessible Rooms, a startup called Will the World, and we're going to work with them to create a tour. We're going to get 10 15 tickets to Cannes next year just for, to create an accessible tour of Cannes for a week in France. And, you know, they'll spend three days at the Cannes Film Festival, and it's impossible to get into that. So the fact that the Cannes Film Festival is doing this makes it cool. That's what I'm saying, because that's arguably the most glamorous event in the world. I mean, when I was there, even those paparazzi had to wear tuxes,

Bob Gilbert (21:14):

And there's me thinking it was a governor's conference on tourism was the most glamorous event in the world.

Thanks for listening to part one of this episode. Tune in next time for part two. Please like, subscribe, and leave a review. You can also visit [EddyAlexander.com](http://EddyAlexander.com) to learn more about our tourism, marketing, and destination management services, and read some of our recent case studies.

## Part 2

Bob Gilbert (00:09):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tails, a podcast series that invites travel and tourism leaders and influencers to share their take on key industry issues. My name is Bob Gilbert and I'm the general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. My career spans over three decades in the travel and tourism industry where I've had the privilege of working with iconic brands and so many amazing colleagues who in their own ways are pushing the industry forward and using tourism to increase understanding, access and quality of life. For those who work in travel, those that love to travel, and the communities that benefit from travel. I'll be bringing you into the conversation with top professionals who are shaping the industry all with their unique tales and perspectives that they're ready to share with you. So let's rejoin Jake Steinman, founder and CEO of Travel Ability part two on Tourism Heads and Their Tales. Let's pull this back into the destinations. So I'm a destination and perhaps if I'm a state travel director, you know, I have a different perspective than if I am a regional DMO, but how do I start? I understand, I embrace it, I want to engage. What are the steps? Do I need to do an assessment? How do I do that? What tools are available? Can you walk us through those steps and maybe are there some best practices?

Jake Steinman (01:45):

Yes. So let me just go through the different tiers of DMOs that you're talking about. Okay. So from a state level, the state's position should be one of leadership and facilitation. By that, I mean they should be including accessibility at their annual governor's conference, tourism conference, that's where everybody comes to meet and they take leadership by bringing people into that conference with disabilities so they can meet them and interact with them. And then what I've seen states do is they bring in an influencer. There are three or four influencers that kind of make a circuit around that the states use and they bring them in and then they subsidize their basically offshoot trips to any destination, any of the cities that want to host them. And this usually results in a Facebook post or a blog post about that city and what they've done. And that is kind of where it gets left off.

Jake Steinman (02:47):

They just say the state does that, and then the city does that and they both check the box. And so they feel that we've handled accessibility. But what hasn't happened is, is that the city doesn't realize that that blogger has basically created an itinerary for them that they can use on their website. And rather than have the blogger control the narrative about accessibility, they could take the URLs of everything that that person, usually a wheelchair user that person has already been to vetted, commented on, reviewed, and turn that into an itinerary as part of their website. And have,

Bob Gilbert (03:29):

User generated content.

Jake Steinman (03:30):

And provide the information that's missing. And that way they can control the narrative and they can add the transportation, they can add medical device rentals, they can add, you know, whatever else they want. And that way they start with the information. So there's kind of a spectrum of DMOs. So we have started the Destination Ally Club to fund a foundation that we developed to basically provide

scholarships for people with disabilities who can't afford to travel. And they work together. They've all agreed to make accessibility one of their pillars.

Bob Gilbert (04:02):

What type of grant programs are available from a destination perspective?

Jake Steinman (04:07):

It turns out we're doing a grant funding workshop at our conference in three weeks.

Bob Gilbert (04:14):

Oh, ESTO.

Jake Steinman (04:15):

Yeah, before ESTO, we're co-located with ESTO in Savannah and there's money available within the city. So there are city grants, there are state grants, there's infrastructure money that's cascaded from the federal government to the state, to the counties that they can apply for. And the reason they're being awarded these grants is because the grant helps the local residents more than the tourists. They'll use these features more than the tourists will use them. We produce a Shark Tank type event called in Innovatable Showcase. And this is a pitch fest that we've done for five years. These are products and features that can help make a destination more accessible or a hotel more accessible for people with disabilities. And Bob, it is incredible what's out there, the technology that's available that, that people don't even know about. We have 50 products, technologies, innovations, contraptions that we vetted out of about 280 that we put on our website and we're recommending to the Destination Ally Club that they adopt to make it more accessible.

Jake Steinman (05:27):

And so they're applying for grants to pay for those and then award those to the hotels and to the cities. And it's those products. I mean, we had somebody, we just held this list on Wednesday and we had a company there called EnChroma, and they make glasses for people who are colorblind, these kind of sunglasses. And they make a version that fits over their glasses for people who actually are, have prescription glasses and they have people crying that they've never seen colors before. And these glasses cost \$129 to have at a museum or at an attraction. And they put them in these telescopes, the view location telescopes. Now they're all in every telescope, in every one of those view scopes in Tennessee. And these are things that can help a lot of people. And it has nothing to do with really building an infrastructure, building a ramp, or building something. So these are products that we found and unearth that, you know, we're exposing to the industry.

Bob Gilbert (06:25):

But I think you made a really good point. And that is, in general, when a destination builds or enhances the tourism infrastructure, whether it's service or a product, it's there to attract more increased visitation, which helps with the visitor economy. But when the tourists go home, it's there as a benefit to the local residents. And this is exactly the same for accessibility. When there are enhancements, improvements, whether it's service or product that are built for whatever the disability is, it is there also to benefit the local residents. It really does have a double impact

Jake Steinman (07:04):

Exactly.

Bob Gilbert (07:05):

To help with the visitor economy. And more and more today, the inclusion of local residents in the marketing plans that destinations are doing. We touched on assessments, accessibility assessments. Do they provide a toolkit for a destination to complete so they can, self-assess?

Jake Steinman (07:29):

Yeah. So just the. So, uh, you mean are, are you talking about Wheel of the World?

Bob Gilbert (07:31):

Wheel of world. Yes.

Jake Steinman (07:32):

So Wheel of the World is a combination of an Expedia booking engine for accessible rooms and Tinder, a dating site. And so what happens is the user who's disabled goes and fills out a profile of what their disability needs are. And that profile is on their site just like it would be on Tinder. So they've done this with 2000 hotels in 130 cities around the, in 50 countries around the world. They've sent TaskRabbit people into these hotels and they 200 data points, they measure the accessible rooms, you know, everything from and with four different disabilities. And what happens is when a user goes in and they have their profile entered and they search for room in Mesa, Arizona, the search results just turn up the rooms, the hotels that have rooms that fit their specific needs. Because every disability has a spectrum. Right. And the ADA was written for one size fits all, and this is why it doesn't work because there is no one size fits all.

Bob Gilbert (08:42):

Yeah I was going to say, if you look at disabilities, and you mentioned this earlier, it covers cognitive hearing, vision, mobility, and each of them have their own barriers. And so the one size fits all definitely doesn't work.

Jake Steinman (08:58):

Yeah. And this is why Wheel of the World is getting so much traction because they're verifying everything. So we're, at our conference, we're having five different examples of people who've done assessments. So you have different approaches to it. One is you turn it into a volunteer effort. Rapid City, South Dakota did this. They basically turn it into, okay, we're going to do assessments of hotels. They got promoted on social media, they had a, meetup every Saturday and a one month and everybody was given assignments. They went to the hotels attractions it is. And with a little flyer said, we're doing this to help make ourselves more accessible for people with disabilities. And then they had like a beer party afterwards and it became sort of a, a social thing. And that's an approach that that worked for them. Another approach is Wheel the World where they go in and do all the work. The destination doesn't have to do anything, the hotel doesn't have to do anything. They do it all and it's verified and measured and they've got an app and an AI engine that just basically matches people with what they need. Another way is you send some, one of the influencers in that are in a wheelchair, for example, and have them do the assessment that becomes more expensive because that's like usually one person. And it's very hard to scale that

Bob Gilbert (10:20):

Within a destination and the organization. So if I'm thinking of an organization chart, who owns this within the destination?

Jake Steinman (10:29):

So it varies. Sometimes it's the D E and I person. Sometimes it's the guest services training person because it involves training and sometimes it's just somebody randomly inside that has a family member that's afflicted with a disability that is becomes a passion.

Bob Gilbert (10:53):

They have skin in the game

Jake Steinman (10:55):

And they have skin in the game and they want, they want to pursue this.

Bob Gilbert (10:58):

You know, it's interesting, you know, we started to call out the different segments from a cognitive hearing, vision, mobility, you know, I guess it would also include allergies,

Jake Steinman (11:08):

Food allergies

Bob Gilbert (11:09):

Food allergies to break it down to simple terms, you have a peanut allergy, and you want to fly in on an airline. The rigmarole, you have to go about to ensure that there's no nuts. It's a nut free flight or

Jake Steinman (11:23):

Or in a restaurant. Just the,

Bob Gilbert (11:25):

gluten-free and celiac. I mean, I'm sure that you have collected some horror stories with bad traveler experiences and, and hopefully some good ones as well. Do you have any examples without being too shocking?

Jake Steinman (11:40):

Well, one thing that I realized is we had a, we had a speaker down on our advisory board was a triple amputee. He was injured in a, in an explosion when his fuel tank blew up. And he's been obsessed with travel with airlines. He's taken over a thousand trips and stayed in 500 hotels since 2014. And he's kept meticulous logs on everything and 80% of the hotel rooms that he's stayed at and 500 hotels had a problem with the shower set up. So imagine this. Okay, so he's in a hotel room with a roll-in shower, this is what I'm talking about, the easy fixes. So he is in a hotel books, the room rolls into the shower, he's naked for some reason, the housekeeper department who cleaned the room, move the shower wand from where he had it the day before, all the way up to the top, which is really part of the protocol that they do.

Jake Steinman (12:37):

He's alone, he couldn't reach the shower wand. He had to roll back out of the shower, basically get himself from the shower chair back to his wheelchair, go into the room, call the front desk to have them send somebody who could move that shower wand down to his level. That is an example of a service lapse that's doesn't cost anything, doesn't take any time and is easy to fix. You know, it's just making them aware. Don't move anything in an accessible room. That's a horror story. That's just, that's denigrating to someone to have to do that.

Bob Gilbert (13:13):

Yeah. But it's a simple fix.

Jake Steinman (13:15):

It's a simple fix.

Bob Gilbert (13:16):

You know, it's almost as a provider, you know, whether it's an attraction, a hotel, an airline, they have to put themselves into the wheelchair and try and do these things yourselves as opposed to we need to check the box from a compliance standpoint. You know, it's what makes sense.

Jake Steinman (13:32):

Yeah. So we had a video on our website that had hotel general manager in a wheelchair for a day with one of these bloggers that videoed him and this led him through the entrances, you know, the common space, the room, the restaurant, there's a certain Feng Shui that has to happen in a room for people with disabilities. So they saw all of this, but most general managers aren't going to do that as fact. I don't know of any will take the time to do. That's other ways to create the empathy. I think it's a matter of reducing the fear of the hotels that they're going to get sued. It's a lot of it is really language, you know, because how you speak indicates how you think and how you think indicates how you act. And so it's really kind of changing the language because you think differently when you think about some being inclusive, then you think about being compliant.

Bob Gilbert (14:24):

I mean you've made amazing strides in five years and there's been a few of those years that have been the pandemic phase and you know, everybody had their pent-up demand, including folks who are accessible, challenged, and you know, you've made great strides in that communication. What's your forecast for the next few years in growth? Are there any specific areas where you see some easy wins, some growth opportunities?

Jake Steinman (14:51):

I see. Are you talking about for our organization or for DMO in general?

Bob Gilbert (14:57):

Let's say both. Let's start with the DMO and then with your business. You know, with Travel Ability

Jake Steinman (15:03):

For DMOs, the best thing that they can do is really add a page to their website about accessibility. Because really what I'm finding is if they go in and just go to Google and you're in Wisconsin, you just Google accessible things to do for wheelchair users in Milwaukee. Up will come three or four articles that were done. So those other people are controlling the narrative about accessibility in their own destination when they should be controlling the narrative. And it's not that hard. It's, it's easy. So we've developed a playbook that we update every year that I mentioned earlier, that gives them templates to use for their accessible landing page and how to go about it. And they worry that they're not going to be complete because it won't have information for everyone. Well, accessibility is like a journey without a destination. You just iterate, you start somewhere and then you keep adding.

Jake Steinman (16:03):

And then one year you focus on blind accessibility. The next year you focus on hearing accessibility. The next year you focus on autism accessibility and you do everything kind of around a holiday for that, a disability holiday for that specific disability. And then suddenly it becomes, okay, this is kind of a rally that we're doing around a disability holiday and we're going to try to gather as much information as we can and we put it on our website. And after three or four years their website, that landing page becomes the hub for local residents who have friends and family who come to visit them that can't stay with them because their homes aren't accessible. They have to stay in a hotel and suddenly the hotels get bookings from local residents and local residents. They become the hub of that destination around accessibility. That's our job is to help them do that.

Bob Gilbert (16:59):

So your playbook, is that available on TravelAbility.net on your website?

Jake Steinman (17:06):

Uh, no. That has \$120,000 of other people's work in it. And okay. And it has seven months of effort. So we sell that for \$10,000 as a donation to our foundation and we make it free to any DMOs that are part of the Destination Ally Club and they can distribute it to all of their stakeholders.

Bob Gilbert (17:29):

Okay.

Jake Steinman (17:29):

I can't give it away free because of that.

Bob Gilbert (17:32):

Is the playbook or parts of it used in workshops at your conferences?

Jake Steinman (17:36):

Yeah, we will actually show the playbook to people in the conference and a lot of the sessions at the conference are using parts of the playbook.

Bob Gilbert (17:45):

Gotcha. Understood. So the future of Travel Ability your business, what do you see that headed?

Jake Steinman (17:52):

So I see us expanding into meetings and conferences and making those more accessible. And the reason that I think it's moving in that direction and just needs a little nudge from us is because a, that part of the industry is much more trackable and important for destinations. So there's a lot of focus and infrastructure on meetings and conferences and conventions and what's happened since covid, 35% of the workforce works remotely and the major corporations have offsites and the people with disabilities. I'm finding when I interview the people at Salesforce and you know, I talk, they have like these employee resource groups that have in-house travel agents that'll help them book the travel, even find somebody to travel with them. What they're finding is because of their lived experience, they don't want to travel to these offsite, even if they're in like resort areas because they're afraid of it.

Jake Steinman (18:48):

And the woman from Salesforce told me it's an impediment to advancement for them because if you don't travel to offsite meetings, you're not building relationships with your team members and your managers. And if you're not traveling to conferences and trade shows and meetings, you're not creating a network in the industry. So you're basically isolated. It's preventing people with disabilities from promotions, within their own companies. And I think people understand that. And, you know, I have a meeting on Monday with Conference Direct that is now getting involved in accessibility with their RFPs, neither thousands of conferences. So I think we're moving in that direction. And then we created a calendar of disability conferences of these different advocacy groups and para sports events. We have a calendar of 168 of these events around that are happening around the country now that we've built. And I think we're going to promote that calendar as a way for destinations to motivate their communities to apply for these areas, to get these meetings and events.

Jake Steinman (19:58):

And you know, and I'm seeing now that like Visit Lauderdale was able to land the deaf seniors annual convention in Fort Lauderdale rather than Miami because of their accessibility outreach. And they, you know, so they've got now and they've prepared their local industry for this deaf scene, this 2000 room nights and there's disability in it's like 60,000 room nights. And just so there are all these conventions and things that people don't even realize that are looking for, you know, for locations. And so I think that's kind of the next area for us to explore is that sort of meetings and events side.

Bob Gilbert (20:40):

This is a fascinating subject. Not only is it the right thing to be focusing on, it's a growth opportunity for all within travel and tourism within the industry. You know, you've been a great guest. I always enjoyed meeting and chatting with you, Jake, and we've been listening and chatting with Jake Steinman, founder and CEO of Travel Ability, here on Tourism Heads and Their Tails. Thank you so much, Jake.

Jake Steinman (21:08):

Thank you Bob for having me. I really enjoyed it.

Bob Gilbert (21:13):

Thanks for listening to part two of this episode. Please like, subscribe and leave a review. You can also visit [EddyAlexander.com](http://EddyAlexander.com) to learn more about our tourism, marketing, and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies.