

## Podcast Name: Article 19, Min-podcast Episode – The Tamman Website!

Marty:

Hello and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Malloy, chief of staff and catalyst at Tamman and I am the host for our mini pod conversation today. I'm joined by my excellent colleague, Jessica DiPonziano, full-stack web developer and the lead developer on our new website. Fake fact about Jess: she once thought about rooting for the Dallas Cowboys but quickly regained her sanity. Jess, how are you doing today? It's so nice to talk with you.

Jessica:

I'm doing good, Marty. How are you?

Marty:

I'm great. So, this is a little bit different than our usual podcast. We're going to dispense with a lot of the other pieces around here. It's going to be a mini pod. So, I just want to jump right in. Before I go with my questions though, can you just folks a little bit about yourself?

Jessica:

So, I'm Jessica DiPonziano, full-stack developer at Tamman, like Marty said. I've been in the web development game for about – I want to say six or seven years now. I'm coming up on two years with Tamman. And just for the record, I rooted for the Dallas Cowboys once and that's because the Fantasy Championship was at stake.

Marty:

Oh wow; I'm shocked. I know how big of an Eagles fan you are.

Jessica:

It was very, very painful but I won a few hundred dollars, so I had to go with it.

Marty:

You have to weigh those things sometimes. I have to say, in my fantasy – I've been in a fantasy league for years and years and years. For the very first time, I chose my very first Dallas Cowboy. It was not easy; it was the kicker though, so it was like, OK. You know.

Jessica:

I didn't feel as guilty because it didn't affect the Eagles in anyway. It was just fantasy.

Marty:  
Yeah.

Jessica:  
It's like, "God, I do have to root for them."

Marty:  
So, let's talk a little bit about our new website that you were the lead developer on. I know I worked with you very closely throughout. What are you most proud of or something maybe that you solved that you really want to pinpoint to highlight on this brand new website?

Jessica:  
For lack of a better term, we Rumpelstiltskined it. When, as a team, we first received the site it wasn't quite up to where we would want to be for launch. Some standards weren't met, there were some accessibility shortages, where we really shined in the last few years with our clients weren't being represented in our sites. So, I was really proud of the fact that in the short timeline that we had, we were really able to bring the code up to a better standard as well as implement some major accessibility changes that really improved the experience on the site for all users.

Marty:  
Is there one accessibility thing that you did that you just think, "Man, that was awesome," once it was done?

[00:02:51]

Jessica:  
Probably the biggest overhaul was the navigation, adding menu items. Navigations can be very tricky when it comes to screen readers. A lot of people sometimes tend to look for more tabbing with a keyboard but not always realizing that screen readers, most of the time, follow the same motion a keyboard will but sometimes they don't. So, it has become a challenge even internally when we've done projects finding those solutions that work for every screen reader, which has led to coding challenges and not always following the ways that someone would normally code such a thing. But we've had to make weird, alternative choices in order for the screen readers to do what we wanted them to do. But when we were one, we successfully made our nav easily navigable across multiple platforms and multiple readers, even IE 11, which was always a challenge. So, that was probably our biggest improvement from where it was before you could even tab to the menu and the menu wasn't showing.

Marty:

This is a living website; this is a website that's not static. We are going to be working in and around this website moving forward. Is there anything that you are working on or that you are looking forward to working on to tweak and make even better or more accessible?

Jessica:

If I don't say so myself, Marty, it's pretty accessible. It's kinda hard to find something that isn't. I'm just saying. Unless there's a technology up to date. The only challenges we face in terms of continued accessibility is anywhere we're – because this is a WordPress platform, so accessibility challenges are always going to be user-input. If someone's writing an article or doing something and they don't quite know the rule about something, there could be issues with things being used incorrectly that we weren't able to solve for technically or prevent it from happening. Also, the use of third-party plugins, as sites are always growing and using, WordPress is very popular for having these extensions that are always used and we don't always have control over that extension, and even if it's the best extension out there for this particular thing, it doesn't mean they've put in the amount of effort, accessibility-wise, that we would hope or they're still working on it. So, those things, you know, it requires conversation. Luckily, a lot of the WordPress world is opensource. So, it's just a matter of contributing or talking to the people who produce the plugins, saying, "Hey, is there a way that we can make this, we'll work with you to make this thing more accessible because we like what you're doing, it's just missing these two pieces." So, we'll always continue to, maybe, improve that especially with people and plugins we like to use a lot, maybe help continue those conversations. Other than that, the backend, if someone with any sense of technology needs the backend maybe challenging. Part of that is WordPress. I believe they are making improvements to it as they go, but it is a challenge because it is a WYSIWYG Editor, for the most part. But there are things that we can do in the custom blocks that we built that we can make sure that they're more accessible if that's a path that's going to be continued on, at least from the editors' standpoint.

Marty:

That's great. As a developer, you received the designs. You talked a little bit about this, that it wasn't where it wanted to be. Was there anything in the designs more from a functionality standpoint or something that you just didn't agree with or that you would have liked to have seen done differently?

[00:05:51]

Jessica:

There's always two things that tend to always be a hang-up for everyone that always causes issues because it never looks as nice as it does on a Photoshop

document. The first one is always hero images. Solving a problem for hero images, and if you're in a scenario where it is not a one-size-fits-all and the original design is coming up with, "Hell, how do we make text always accessible on any possible background that a person could upload to this platform?" It's always a challenge, people don't always like the alternatives to the design – a lot of times adding a color behind the text to create that contrast. It's always a challenge to figure out, and people still struggle with ways to have hero images the way they really want it and be accessible. The other one is more of a UX issue-ish, is the search mechanism. Search is always complicated, especially when you apply filters and understanding what that user experience is like walking through it and talking. It's like, "Does this filter make sense if you can't see it as a filter? Do you put it before or after the search box? If you click a filter, does it load the new stuff, or do you want until all the filters are clicked and then you hit the search button?" The way we have it is accessible. I personally think it's a little confusing, the order of operations and you can only select one of this or one of this. I think it's something as a team we're probably going to go back to the drawing board and be like, "Let's really walk through this. What is it we want people to do here? And how do we want them to do it?" And it might lead to even a design change because I think that the short amount of time we had at the time, it was thought about. We were trying to fit the functionality to the design versus the design to the functionality of what we truly wanted to happen. Like I said, it's not inaccessible but we think we can definitely improve on it.

Marty:

Improve on it. That leads me to my last question for you and that is, it sounds like – you know, well, I happen to know, so I'm not even going to say, "it sounds like." I know that you put accessibility at the forefront of a lot of your work and as you're thinking through those different personas, would you say that different personas and that user flow, and that user-first mentality, is that a part of how you approach your coding?

Jessica:

It is. When I was learning to code or when I was a young programmer around people many years older than I am in the field, they would always say, "Usually a good user experience requires less code." And good design requires less code because you're not trying to break things; you're going with the way things normally go. So, to me, simplicity is everything because it's already hard enough to program anything. But the more complicated you make it, you're more prone to bugs, you're more prone to trip ups. And if you're doing something that's not a normal UX pattern that's widely accepted, you're trying to break something to make something else happen, which is never good. So, clean code, clean experience – they tend to go together. But when I also think, when you said, "personas," I always think of my mother because I told her, my sister is a user experience designer, so we're complementary. We've worked a lot together in the

past. And she's like, "What is the difference between what you two do?" And I said, "She creates the design." And I said, "Do you know like when you go to a website, and you can't find what you're looking for or you can't find the shopping cart button?" And she's like, "Yeah, they make me so mad." I said, "That's a bad user experience." I said, my sister fixes those and makes better design, so you can find that shopping cart, and I build them. She always now goes and looks at every website and says, "Wait, this pop-up keeps getting in the way." She's like, "This is a bad user experience. You should call them and redo their website for them."

[00:09:17]

Marty:

That's great. That's great.

Jessica:

Now she points it out when she finds bad user experiences on websites.

Marty:

Mrs. DiPonziano, Tamman's secret salesperson. That's great; I love it. So good. Jess, I appreciate you hopping on and doing this quick mini pod with me. Your information is spectacular, but no less so than the site that you really took a lot of leadership in. And I for one, as one of the users on the backend, really appreciate the time and effort that you clearly put into this to make it work so well. So, thank you so much.

Jessica:

You got it.

If you like what you heard today, and want to explore more about digital accessibility, inclusivity, or to schedule a time to talk with us, you can find the whole Tamman team at [tammaninc.com](http://tammaninc.com). That's [tammaninc.com](http://tammaninc.com). Or follow us on social media @tammaninc on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. We'll talk to you again next time.