



Interview with Thad McIlroy

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(recording)

MUELLER: Our report contains our findings and analysis and the reasons for the decisions we made. We conducted an extensive investigation over two years. In writing the report, we stated the results of our investigation with precision. We scrutinized every word. I do not intend to summarize or describe the results of our work in a different way in the course of my testimony today. As I said on May 29th, the report is my testimony, and I will stay within that text.

(end of recording)

KENNEALLY: Hundreds of pages of carefully worded legalese, including footnotes and citations, large portions even blacked out. Not the usual summer reading, yet the book is a big hit with readers, and the made-for-TV version of a sort arrived on screens this week.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Officially titled Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, and better known as the Mueller report, the unlikely-sounding bestseller is available for free as a download from the US Department of Justice. However, multiple editions, including from Scribner, Melville House, and Skyhorse, have sold hundreds of thousands of copies at prices starting at \$9.99.

One group of readers, though, couldn't learn for themselves what Robert Mueller and his investigative team had uncovered. Available editions of the report failed the accessibility test for the visually impaired. So publishing consultants Thad McIlroy and Bill Kasdorf set to work making a fully accessible, freely available edition a reality. Thad McIlroy, who blogs at thefutureofpublishing.com, joins me now from his Vancouver office. Welcome back to Beyond the Book, Thad.

McILROY: Thanks very much, Chris. Glad to be back.

KENNEALLY: Well, it is good to have you back in a very timely way. This week, of course, Robert Mueller is testifying in Congress about his report. The report has



been available since April, when it was first released by the Department of Justice. This challenge that you and Bill Kasdorf confronted regarding accessibility for the visually impaired is one that's a fascinating story. Let's start at the beginning. Describe for listeners the condition of that 448-page PDF that was first released in April.

McILROY: It's as ugly as it could be, as Duff Johnson said with the PDF Foundation. When I first downloaded it, it was like, gosh, it's just a scan. They took the printout of the Mueller report and scanned it. You can't search it. You can't recognize any of the text. The redactions is what pulled everyone towards the document to try and see what was underneath, and they used a method that just made that impossible, but also made it inaccessible.

KENNEALLY: And inaccessible – we are speaking here specifically for the visually impaired. Help us understand, those of us who are happily not confronted with that challenge daily – for the visually impaired, the internet, the web, e-books, PDFs, all of that present a whole host of roadblocks to reading and to learning.

McILROY: They do. Bill Kasdorf likes to point out that when we think about accessibility, we think of blind. That's sort of a reasonable enough cliché. But of course, the extent of disability goes from I'm not wearing my glasses to fully blind, and along the way, there's a need to be able to work with the text at different sizes. One of the sort of simple accessibility features is enabled by e-books, which is make that text as big as you want to make it if you can't see the small text on a screen. So that's something that's accessible to all.

But when you reach a point where vision is no longer sufficient, then you have to get into text to speech. You have a whole variety of assistive devices that are available to people with true vision impairment. And the structure that we build into these EPUB files makes those completely flexible and completely accessible – kind of getting back to that word, but that's the one we want to use – accessible to a full range of sight-impaired readers.

KENNEALLY: Yet though the technology exists, it took a while to get there, and it was not as if others didn't try to address some of the challenges that that original PDF presented. So there were various versions along the way. They included links. They took care of spelling errors and did all sorts of things to improve the usability of the text. But they still left out those visually impaired, and you recognized that. Talk about the way that assistive technology addresses some of these points, particularly, for example, how it handles illustrations.



McILROY: That's a very important base feature for accessibility, of course, is if you can't see the picture, what is the picture? There's a fundamental technology called alt-text, where a description of the picture is added to the document – to the accessible document – so it's described, and that's second-best to being able to see it. It's sort of a pretty good substitution, assuming the description is well created.

KENNEALLY: And when you and Bill Kasdorf took on this challenge, you turned to the Digital Public Library of America. What about what they are trying to do matched with your objective in this case?

McILROY: A couple things. The Digital Public Library of America is a number of years old – about 10 years old now, maybe a little less than that. And when it was announced, I was really excited about the concept of trying to be America's public library, to have the documents that are the most important to the nation, rather than to one state or one city or one district or territory, whatever. That seemed like a very worthwhile objective. They haven't been able to fully realize that, but they're providing all kinds of documents that you would not find elsewhere and also finding ways to find documents that make them more accessible than other repositories. But most importantly, they're a public nonprofit institution, and we didn't want to work with a for-profit. This wasn't about trying to make any money. So DPLA seemed like the perfect national partner.

KENNEALLY: And another of your partners was a Boston-based outfit called codeMantra. They've developed something called Accessibility Delivery Hub that automates creation of accessible documents.

McILROY: Yes. codeMantra – they started off as an offshore document production factory, let's call it. With accessibility becoming more and more prominent and important, and with publishers finally getting on the train and saying, yeah, we do want accessibility in our websites and documents, codeMantra built some pretty powerful technology. You can't fully automate it. The degree of complexity's too hard. But they've added a degree of automation that will make it less expensive, higher quality, faster than any other system, and that seemed, again, an ideal partner for this project.

KENNEALLY: So your project is completed, and the accessible book is now available. Tell listeners where they can find it. Where should they go?

McILROY: DPLA's website is a little different than the usual structure. It's dp.la. And when you go to that, you'll see a link right from the homepage that will take you to the report.



KENNEALLY: Well, that's been taken care of. But really, this raises the question of why government documents and other very important records shouldn't be born accessible at the beginning. Tell us about the importance of that – why that would really change things for everyone online.

McILROY: Yeah, that's a great question, Chris. It's a basic right, and it shouldn't be that we have to create after the fact for this community as if they were in some way a lesser community of readers. It seems essential to me, and to Bill and others working in this community, that it should be just part of the process. The same day that an e-book is available for any prominent or less-prominent publication – why should the sight-impaired have to wait six months for someone to get around to building a special accessible version? So our view of the future kind of publishing workflows will have accessibility built right in.

KENNEALLY: Well, we want to thank you for your efforts together with Bill Kasdorf in making the Mueller report available for the visually impaired. We've been speaking today with Thad McIlroy, who blogs at thefutureofpublishing.com. Thad McIlroy, thanks for joining me on Beyond the Book.

McILROY: Thanks very much, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The complete Beyond the Book podcast archive is available at beyondthebook.com. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on CCC's Beyond the Book.

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