Spotlight Session & Special Olympics #6

[00:00:00] What's your story? What does accessibility mean to you?

**Josh:** Hello and welcome to another episode of the special edition of Inclusion Revolution Radio, collaboration with accessiBe's Spotlight Sessions, the Special Olympics World Games berlin 2023 have officially concluded. We are so excited to be speaking with a guest today that played a huge part in making the games a resounding success.

**Josh:** My name is Josh Basile, and I'm your host for today's show. I'm a C 4/5 quadriplegic, paralyzed below my shoulders and a power wheelchair user. I'm the community relations manager at accessiBe and a passionate disability rights advocate and trial attorney focused on breaking down barriers to [00:01:00] access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

**Josh:** Today we'll be talking with the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for the Games, Albert Tuemann. While the games were an incredible event, they required fans cheering on athletes and media from all over the world, covering the stories as they crossed the finish line. That's exactly where Albert and his team came in.

**Josh:** They turned the entire city of Berlin into one huge fan of the games. Bringing attention and support to every athlete. Thank you so much for joining us today, Albert. And welcome to Inclusion Revolution podcast.

**Albert:** Thank you very much for having me appreciate it for the invite and being part of the Inclusion Revolution podcast.

**Albert:** Hope that we did not only turn the city of Berlin in a huge fan game and hopefully beyond to the states and to every country as well. And as Novi mentioned, you [00:02:00] know, seeing athletes back in town and sharing all those emotional moments are incredible.

**Josh:** That's awesome. I love that so much, Albert.

**Josh:** And if we could go back in time, how did you get first involved in the games and have you ever worked with the Special Olympics before?

**Albert:** Starting with a second question, Josh. So I never was involved in this movement, to be honest, I just had slightly information about Special Olympics itself, you know, if you are somehow around and having some experience in sports, of course, and be open-minded on the other end side, you know, there's Olympics, there are Paralympics, there are different World Cups, et cetera, et cetera.

**Albert:** but at that time it was 2019. I worked for a huge rental company called Six and I have still, my hometown is and was Berlin at that time. So I got a call from my two girls. I said, dad, you have to come [00:03:00] back. So I said, okay, what should I do right now? You know, working in another city out of Berlin.

**Albert:** So the priority was clear set by my girls, and now I have three ones, but that's another thing. But the two set, clearly you have to come back and said, okay, let's look what, what is around? So I saw this, open vocation, or this open position. And of course I tried to figure out what is Special Olympics at first and what is the movement and what is the rank of the World Games itself, so the level of the World Games, so you know, you get familiar with this movement and with the World Games. So I applied for this job and lucky me, I got the job at 2019. By end of 2019, I was one of three or four at that time for the organizing committee.

**Albert:** So besides the German program, [00:04:00] how we call it. And as you know, there are different programs around the world. So Germany got the bid at that time and created a local organizing committee with four in the management role. So I took the management role of marketing and communication at that time.

**Josh:** So lucky, but lucky games that they were able to have you, Albert, and I'd love to learn more about your role at the games and your perspective on the importance of marketing and communication on such a large scale event.

**Albert:** Yeah, as mentioned already before, so my role is actually responsible for everything, what is related to marketing, PR, and media at that time.

**Albert:** So that means that within our management team, I'm responsible for the, let's make it clear for the visibility and the media coverage on various channels. So if you start actually to consider how this could [00:05:00] look like after a couple of years if you start really from scratch and normally the athletes gives you actually the importance of marketing and communication.

**Albert:** So we did it quite clear the importance of marketing can be de described very easily from my point of view, how much visibility you want to have. So if you ask all the athletes, and we did a couple of workshops before, they said we want more perception, more visibility. So the importance of marketing communication is clear set.

**Albert:** It's very important. It's actually very, very important for each athlete. Yeah, I, you know, I just can add, tons of stories, which I experienced, from single athletes to different team competitions, whatever it is, athlete, disco, even the closing ceremonies. So there were a lot of moments, but for me was actually we got prepared for the opening ceremony. And what is [00:06:00] left is, of course there are the opening ceremony. You have different sports, you have different medals, you have different competitions, whatever it is, tears laughing. That's all about sports, of course, but coming back I have my 174 moments.

**Josh:** Albert, you talked a little bit earlier about kind of the marketing communication, but we wanna pick your brain. Can you dive into like kind of the deeper strategies of really kind of reaching that global stage?

**Albert:** Wow, that's a good one Josh. When I look back, of course, you know, and you're gonna get this role, and you said, okay, how this should look like actually after four years.

**Albert:** So what is the outcome at the World Games? So, never was expecting something big like this, to be honest, you know? I think you can't be prepared, but [00:07:00] then of course you have to make up your strategy. You are coming back, you know, with a couple of experience from different agencies from different companies. You have your experience in due to sports, due to your sports experience. So actually my goal was to create a team, from scratch, to be honest. So I got the first organizing structure. I turned the, I turned actually the paper and said, can I start like this?

**Albert:** You know? And she said, of course you can. So I scratched my team and from my point of view, you know, you are like a coach. Your'e like a coach of a team. So you have to be prepared and if you wanna play the World Games, if you wanna play at the Champions League and you're gonna win, you have to create your team, not just of leaders, not just of people which are knowledge, but you have a, you have to create a team out of [00:08:00] mixtures of seniors, of juniors, and those who are creating the same vision as you have. So of course I created at the beginning my vision, and I gave trust to my team. I gave, and I get. Trust back. So we created then the strategy together with our athletes. And this is actually the main thing because within the organizing committee, we had athletes, former athletes, which said, I don't want athletes.

**Albert:** I don't wanna be a taking part as an athlete. I wanna be part of the local organizing committee. So the point actually, we got really clear feedback from our athletes, from our, let's say, employees, you know, not athletes anymore, employees. They give us tremendous feedback, which we can use, to create the real strategy because, It's not just what we know and what we have to implement.

**Albert:** The athletes gives us back what they need. So in [00:09:00] terms of, let's say more empowerment, more participation for people with ID through power sports, but also beyond the sports. So we slowly, slowly formed the roadmap and the ramp up for, especially for awareness. This is what I mentioned before, everybody is seeking for awareness at that time.

**Albert:** So they wanna be visible. You know, if you, if you see, we, you know, we passed Covid two years, so we had inflation. We have war in Europe, so there are a lot of things going around and, but the main thing, what if you ask athletes, they want to be visible, not hiding. So always from the athletes perspective and not ours. That was actually the strategy and we put, and I put athletes always first. So we created the logo together, we created Campaignings together, you know, from their perspective. We created the mascots together, we created the channels together. There we had an inclusive, team, journalists team, for example.

**Albert:** But [00:10:00] I think what we put on top is we are just not focusing on sports itself. We combine it with different other industries as well. So there are two. From my point of view, there are two main industries which are very emotional as well, is fashion and music. So we combined sport, fashion and of course music.

**Albert:** And everybody who sees the opening ceremony and beyond, you know, you have always the sound, you are always singing, you are always in a happy mood. So I think that's one of the secrets and it worked out.

**Josh:** Great job putting the team together and making sure that all the right players and athletes and abilities and perspectives had a seat at the table. That's awesome. Albert, what do you think the messaging around inclusion and accessibility resonates with so many people and how can those who participated in the games continue to push that messaging?

**Albert:** Yeah, you would say [00:11:00] it's purpose. You would say it's momentum, whatever. It's currently also more than a momentum, I would say. We are all looking for purpose. We, whether in our private lives, in sport at work, Maybe due to covid, maybe due to inflation, maybe to private circumstance, whatever it is.

**Albert:** And as I said, we are a performance oriented society. That's what we all know. But we must not focus just on performance and commerce. We need. That's the reason why we are of course doing that. We need from the perspective of inclusive society, one society not separated. We need one, with each other not differentiated.

**Albert:** And we need actually one humanity. So, if we understand this vision, the this idea of inclusive world and we are all ambassadors of those visions, I think then we are, how we call it, unbeatable together.

**Josh:** I like that, and what can other [00:12:00] companies or organizations do to replicate the inclusion strategy that your team so successfully implemented?

**Albert:** Yeah, there is not such the, this strategy what you can, you know, took and implement. I think always, you know, if you are in this position and you have to create an sporting event or something, or another event, it could be a small one even, so the point is actually understand your target group.

**Albert:** Understand your customer. As we said, understand your partners. Be open, empathic, allow, and this is one of my main things, allow mistakes and be self critical and of course learn. So it's, you know, even if I create, and I have more than 30 people in my team, I'm learning every day from them, you know, how they, you know, how they move on, how they implement strategies.

**Albert:** Of course, you know, you are the [00:13:00] coach as I said, and you have to and you have to have a bit of a, of much more of a leadership in another term, but not. Not from the knowledge side. So that's the reason why you have your people here. That's the reason why you give them trust. But in general, I would say allow mistakes, be self critical and learn.

**Albert:** And then you, I think then you can do whatever you want.

**Josh:** Learning every day allows us to grow in beautiful directions and keep moving forward.

**Josh:** I would love to also like to know what steps or things can kind of marketing and communication departments do within other organizations to make certain that kind of information is accessible to all?

**Albert:** Yeah, accessible for everyone and for all is a very huge challenge, of course, but I would say by making it accessible to all who need it actually is one thing. We share our way within the frame of [00:14:00] transfer of knowledge, for example, you know, it's open, we share them. It can work for Germany, for Europe, but it always needs an individual adaptation.

**Albert:** So of course somebody who wants to create an accessible event, what does it mean? Barrier free event. What does it mean? it's always from your perspective, or is this, is it a perspective from the, let's say from the other organizing committee, but in general, I would say, people, regions, culture are different.

**Albert:** Work is differently, but the principle actually of an organizing event remains the same, as is in a successful company. Understand the power of sharing and caring, I would say, especially in the present time.

**Josh:** And you can learn more about accessiBe, Inclusion Revolution Radio and Special Olympics by subscribing on YouTube and following us on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Josh:** Find us on our handles at accessiBe underscore community and at Special Olympics. [00:15:00] Thank you all and we are looking forward to our next episode. Thanks, Albert.

**Albert:** Thank you very much, Josh. Thank you very much. Was a pleasure.