Fostering a Healthy AT Ecosystem

Rob Sinclair, Chief Accessibility Strategist, Microsoft
Laura Ruby, Director of Accessibility Policy, Microsoft
Norm Hodne, Principal Program Manager, Windows

Agenda

- Introductions
- Accessibility at Microsoft
- 3 Key Topics
  - Business Case for Accessibility
  - Challenges with the AT Ecosystem
  - Potential Solutions
- Q&A

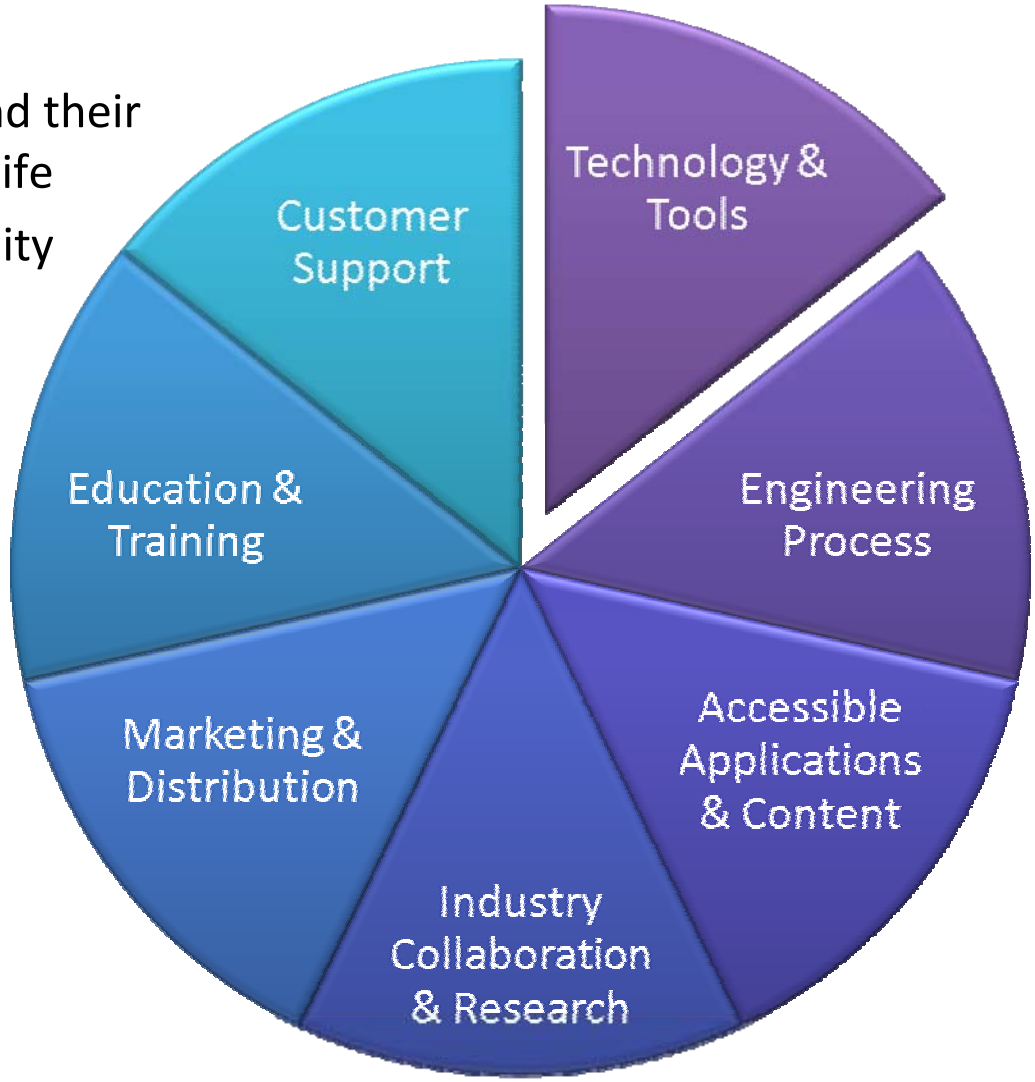
Essence of the Business Case

- Accessibility is Good Business:
  - Improves usability for all customers
  - Increases addressable target market
  - Improves product relevance in emerging markets
  - May enable new mainstream user scenarios (e.g. speech)
- Accessibility Contributes to a Healthy Workforce
  - More flexible products keep aging workers productive longer
  - Improves employability of people with disabilities
- Important component of:
  - Corporate Social Responsibility
  - Qualifying for sales to federal agencies and enterprise orgs
  - Customer and partner satisfaction

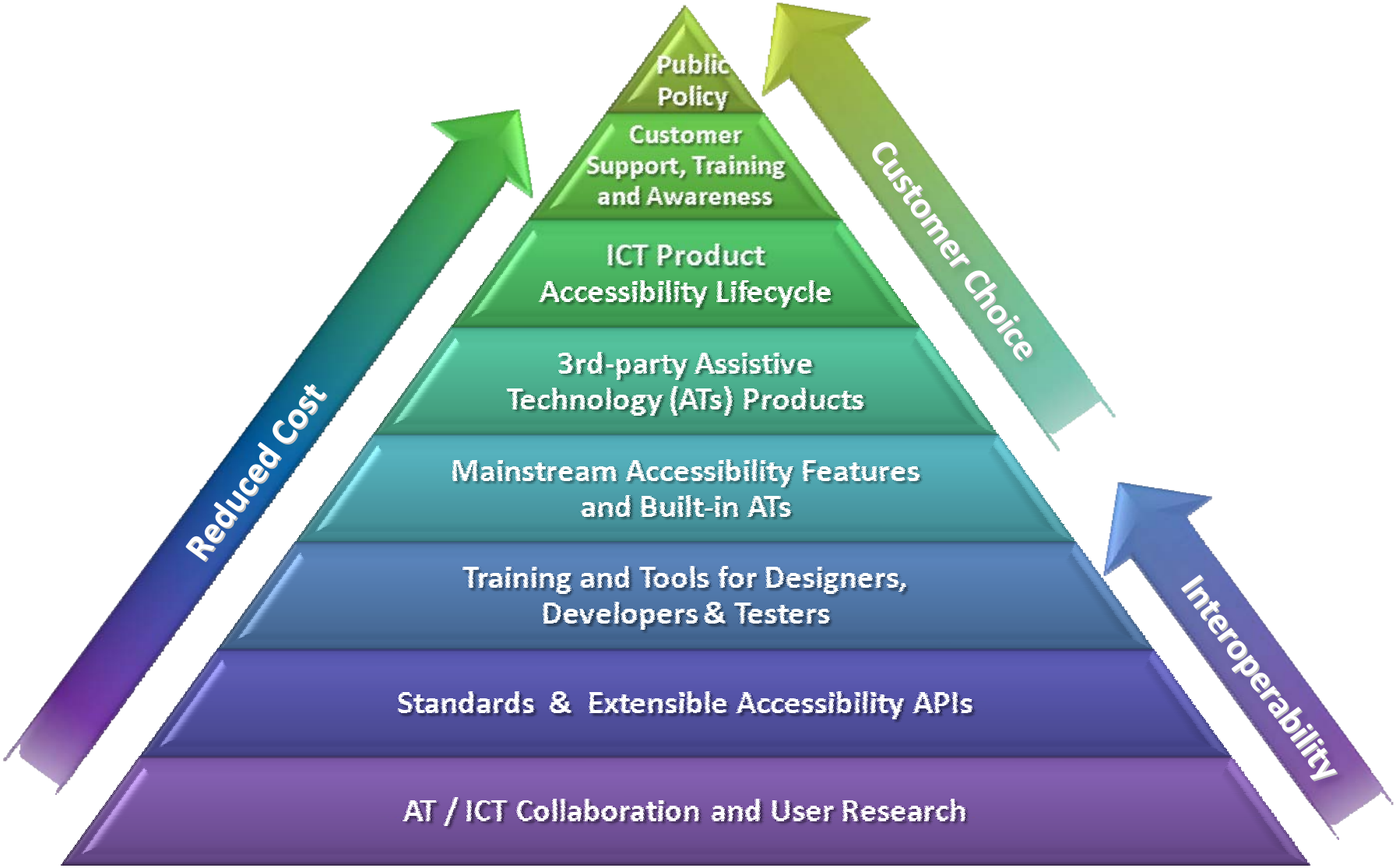
Framing the Challenges and Solution

Key Issues for Consideration

- Low awareness of AT products and their potential to transform a person's life
- Complexity of AT/IT interoperability
- Localization & distribution of ATs
- Difficulty supporting customers
- Value of current products and technologies in the market
- Pace of technology innovation
- Proper balance of built-in and 3rd party features or products
- Need for collaboration

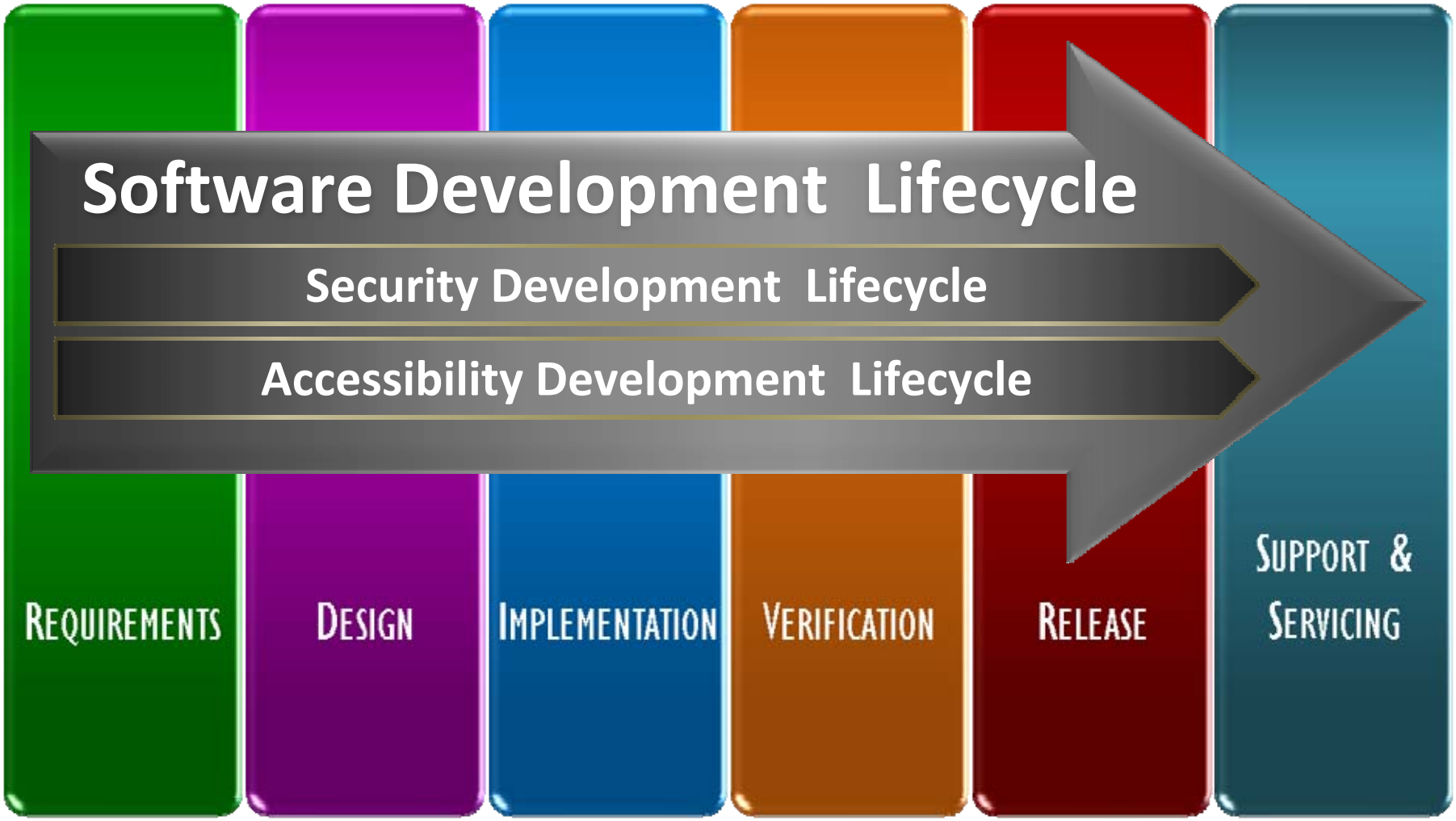


Enabling a Vibrant AT Ecosystem



Microsoft's Accessibility Development Lifecycle

… an integral part of modern product development



Ecosystem Actively Working to Lower Costs

Examples in the market today:

Web or USB ATs	Web-based ATs (textHelp's BrowseAloud or Jeffrey Bingham's Web Anywhere) and portable USB-based versions of ATs available from Claro, Dolphin, Freedom Scientific, GW Micro, etc.
Free ATs	Windows, Mac and Linux include ATs; Free, open-source ATs exist for Windows (e.g. NVDA funded by grants from Mozilla, Microsoft, Adobe)
Free Tools	Free access to Microsoft's professional development tools (BizSpark & DreamSpark programs); Microsoft's open source accessibility testing tools (AccChecker, AccVerify)
AT & IT Collaboration	Accessibility Interoperability Alliance (AIA) offers engineering collaboration between ATVs, mainstream ICT companies, NGOs and researchers; Working closely with ATIA
Free APIs	UI Automation API is now freely extensible so any developer can add features needed for their ICT or AT product; Contributions can be reviewed and endorsed by the AIA.
API: Cross Platform	The AIA and Linux Foundation working to achieve cross-platform Accessibility; Novell work on UI Automation provides cross-platform interop between Windows and Linux.
New Biz Models	Commercial ATVs are exploring new models for funding and distributing their products: ad-funded, monthly subscriptions, free-to-consumer-paid-by-enterprise, etc.

Other Opportunities to Improve Accessibility

Technology & Tools	• Encourage AT & ICT companies to implement platform accessibility APIs (improves interoperability and reduces maintenance)
Engineering Process	• Use procurement to encourage adoption of an Accessibility Development Lifecycle (improves predictability of outcome)
Accessible Applications & Content	• Consider public funding to help existing AT vendors migrate to modern Tools and APIs (not something we can do as industry)
Research & Collaboration	• Endorse the AIA where ATVs + ISVs + NGO + Researchers can work side by side to resolve engineering challenges; Invest in research to understand how to better transform GUIs into alternate experiences
Marketing & Distribution	• Create public/private partnerships to increase awareness of AT solutions and to keep consumers and rehab professionals up-to-date
Education & Training	• Help promote the importance of including Accessibility APIs and industry best practices in university engineering curriculum; include information about AT products in education & rehab curricula
Customer Support	• Open a dialogue on funding objectives and strategies between EU, US, Korea, Japan etc. to educate and support people with disabilities

DISCUSSION