

Internet Usability and Accessibility Guide: The Facts

A brief summary of the issues relating to Accessibility and why your current website as of October 1st 2004 may be illegal

Web accessibility is about making your website accessible to all Internet users (both disabled and non-disabled), regardless of what browsing technology they're using.

There are a number of myths surrounding accessibility – “Do I need a text only site?” “Should I have 2 sites - one with accessibility and one without?” “Accessibility is expensive and good design and accessibility don't go together” “Blind/disabled people don't use the Internet”

You basically need one well-compiled site developed by an accessibility specialist

And there are substantial benefits to accessibility...

- You won't have to incur legal costs if taken to court
- Your website will be easier to manage via style sheet sets
- Your website will be compatible with new technology as it evolves such as PDA's and mobile phones
- Your website will appear higher in the search engines -The more confident a search engine is of what your website is about, the higher it'll place your website in the search rankings.
- Your website's download time will significantly improve – accessibility improves download time
- The usability of your website will be enhanced - Improved usability has been known to increase traffic by up to 100%
- You'll gain good publicity from site promotion surrounding accessibility

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Since October 1st 2004 accessibility is now law in the UK.....

In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act was passed

- In 1999 part III of the Act, which refers to service providers, came into force .It refers to the provision of goods, facilities and services. The Code of Practice specifically mentions websites
- In 2002 the Code of Practice for part III of the Act was published and specifically mentions that accessible websites are now a legal requirement

"The Act makes it unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person by refusing to provide any service which it provides to members of the public."

"For people with visual impairments, the range of auxiliary aids or services which it might be reasonable to provide to ensure that services are accessible might include ... accessible websites."

"For people with hearing disabilities, the range of auxiliary aids or services which it might be reasonable to provide to ensure that services are accessible might include ... accessible websites."

- From October 1st 2004 it is a legal requirement that your website adheres to certain minimum standards. **As of October 1st 2004 the majority of websites are already in breach of the law.**

What do you need to do to comply?

It's widely believed that *when*, a case makes it to court that the W3C accessibility guidelines will be used to assess a website's accessibility and ultimately decide the outcome of the case. The W3C is the Internet governing body and its web accessibility guidelines can be found on its website

The W3C offers three different levels of compliance. Priority 1 guidelines, (which *must* be satisfied according to the W3C) will almost certainly have to be adhered to. Priority 2 guidelines (which *should* be satisfied and are the EU recommended level of compliance), or some part of, will probably need to be adhered to too.

Non disabled accessibility

For obvious reasons the more people that can see your site the more traffic you are likely to get.

In the 21st Century websites can be viewed in a variety of different formats, each one facing different accessibility issues. Not everyone is using the latest version of Internet Explorer, with all the plug-ins and programs that you may require them to have for your website.

Your website must be able to function with all different browsing technologies. You must therefore provide alternatives to:

- **Images** - in the form of ALT text
- **JavaScript** - through the <noscript> tag
- **Flash** - with HTML equivalents
- **Audio & video** - by providing written transcripts

By separating structure and presentation your website will be flexible enough to be ready for the future of the Internet: PDAs, mobile phones, in-car browsers, WebTV and ISOOpx screens.

The structure of a document is how it is organised, usually with navigational menu items, headings, sub-headings, paragraphs, lists, and links. The presentation of a document is how these words and images are presented to the end user.

Disabled accessibility: So what types of issues do the disabled face?

Visually impaired users

Internet users who have no sight at all utilize a screen reader, which reads the content of the web page, or rather the HTML code of the page, back to them. These machines sift through the HTML code and the technology deciphers what needs to be read aloud and what should be ignored.

Partial/poor sight

To take full advantage of the Internet, users with partial or poor sight need to be able to **enlarge the text** on web pages. Check if your website allows them to achieve this:

- Internet Explorer: View > Text size
- Netscape: Edit > Preferences > Appearance > Fonts
- Opera: File > Preferences > Fonts > Minimum font size (pixels)

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If your site is accessible to this group of users then the size of the text throughout the page will increase. Users with poor vision might also use a screen magnifier

Colour blindness It's estimated that one in 12 men and one in 200 women have some form of colour blindness.

Deaf users Deaf users are able to access the Internet in much the same way as able-bodied people, with one key exception - audio content. If it's a key function of your website for people to be able to hear a message, then be sure to provide a written transcript

Key board/voice only users

Some of your site users don't have access to a mouse when browsing the Internet. Try putting yourself in their position by navigating your website using only tab, shift-tab, and the return key.

Epileptic users who must always be careful to avoid seeing flickering Between 2 and 55 Hz

Website Accessibility Checklist

Check your site

| | | Yes | No |
|----|--|-----|----|
| 1 | Check Informational Images for Alternative text | | |
| 2 | Check decorative images for alternative text | | |
| 3 | Listen to video or audio content with volume turned off | | |
| 4 | Check forms are accessible | | |
| 5 | Check that text can be resized | | |
| 6 | Check your website in a Lynx Browser | | |
| 7 | Check you can access all areas of your website without a mouse | | |
| 8 | Check there's a site map | | |
| 9 | Ensure link text makes sense out of context | | |
| 10 | Check web pages with a specialist company | | |

For further information please contact:

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