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ready-to-use NEWS

Web accessibility benefits everyone

Is your website accessible to all visitors? Are you aware of all of the features it should include to ensure that visitors who need specific accommodations can access the content? There are standards to help you understand accessibility requirements and features and build them into your site.

Web accessibility standards benefit everyone because content is easier to perceive. Accessibility makes content responsive across devices and accessible when situational limitations arise. Web content should be accessible, perceivable and navigable to all people, regardless of their abilities, demographics or locale.

Content and software need to work together for a website to adhere to accessibility standards. This includes browsers, text, multimedia content and every component used for producing, managing and accessing websites.

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act doesn't specify website compliance requirements, the consistent interpretation is that websites are included in Title III of ADA because they are "places of public accommodations" (www.ada.gov/ada_title_III.htm). The Web Accessibility Initiative, as part of the World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3.org), created internationally recognized standards for web accessibility. This is a summary of the most essential accessibility practices.

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Key considerations

Web users may have a variety of challenges when it comes to sight, hearing, movement and cognition. Think about these considerations when you're designing a website and producing digital content.

Sight: Text and background colors must have high color contrast for legibility. The same goes for all graphics on the site. All visual elements, including charts, icons, buttons and images, must be accompanied with alternative text, and data visualization must include text descriptions to enable audio descriptions. Animated and flashing web elements are not accessible because they can cause seizures or physical reactions.

Hearing: Closed-captioning or transcriptions must be included for all videos and sounds. Videos and sounds also need to be accompanied with brief descriptions. Sign language is also an acceptable method of making audio accessible.

Movement: All aspects of the website need keyboard functionality, meaning a mouse is not required for navigation. Additionally, all tools must provide keyboard support.

Cognition: Time limitations should be removed or extended for people who may need more

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time to process and engage with content. Likewise, all elements and navigation should maintain continuity throughout the site.

Aspects that are often overlooked

Content or copywriting should be composed of short, concise sentences that avoid additional characters, abbreviations, acronyms or jargon.

Text headings need to be labeled in order of appearance, which is often referred to as page hierarchy. This helps reader programs maintain accuracy, and it makes the website easier to navigate. In fact, all page elements should be used properly. Web content management and design platforms usually have an accessibility guide available that explains how to use their programs in the context of accessibility.

Downloadable files should be created as accessible before they're added to the site. This includes flyers, PDFs, Word documents, Excel files, PowerPoint and slide presentations. Newsletters that are embedded on the site also need to be made with accessibility standards. Crafting embedded content with accessibility in mind will save time and resources.

Test content before publishing

Test your work before you publish content. Accessibility website Webaim.org offers resources to test content scaling, find screen readers, and check color contrast. For help with technical implementation, review the accessibility checklist: <https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>.

Practicing web accessibility is more than staying in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It's a pragmatic way to increase engagement with your audiences that gives broader access to your communications and values. Building a website and its digital content with accessibility standards at the helm is a tangible way your organization, agency or business can practice inclusivity. A website that is easy to use must be easy to use for everyone.

Additional resources

Web Accessibility Initiative

www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/

Portland State University Digital Accessibility Training

www.pdx.edu/accessibility/training#basics-series

Web Accessibility Initiative Alt Decision Tree

www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/

WebAim Contrast Checker

<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

FCC Closed Captioning

www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/closed-captioning-television

National Center on Disability and Journalism Disability and Language Style Guide

<https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>