Digital Accessibility Compliance:

A Guide to Getting Started

About this Guide

This guide will walk you through the steps of initiating and completing your first accessibility compliance project. It assumes the following:

1. Your organization has very little (if any) experience with digital accessibility testing and remediation.

2. The content/applications that need to be made accessible are already live or are nearing their shipping dates.

3. Your organization may be working under a critical deadline for compliance.

If these assumptions don't apply to your project, ask a Deque team member how you can take your digital accessibility process to the next level with Deque products and services.

For more information about digital accessibility solutions, training, and more, visit www.deque.com.

If you're reading this, you probably already know that digital accessibility is important. You already know that failing to make sure your website or mobile app accessible to people with disabilities puts your organization at risk for legal action - you may even be facing deadlines for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 508, the Air Carrier Access Act, or some other regulation that refers to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

What you don't know is what to do about it. Your company has a sophisticated website, a customer portal, mobile app, and countless other web-based properties -- how do you even get started on the Herculean task of making all of this accessible?

Don't worry - the Deque team is here to help.

Know your Accessibility Project

Before you start looking for accessibility consultant and vendors, make sure you can answer these questions about your accessibility project:

1. What is your compliance **deadline**?

2. What accessibility **regulations** or standards does your site/application need to comply with?

3. What parts of your site/application need to be made accessible? What are the **essential functions** of the site/app?

4. Are any parts of your site/application outsourced or managed by **contractors**?

5. What is your internal web/application **development and testing process**?

Digital Accessibility and ADA Compliance

Many new web and mobile accessibility efforts have been motivated by concerns about ADA compliance. If this sounds familiar, you may have noticed that the ADA doesn't actually provide specific rules for digital accessibility compliance, so how do you know when you're compliant? The answer: WCAG 2.0. WCAG 2.0 was developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and serves as the basis of accessibility regulations across the globe including Section 508 regulations for the US Federal Government, as well as regulations in Canada and the EU. These regulations usually call for conformance with WCAG 2.0 Levels A and AA, and shooting for that is your safest bet when you're not sure about your compliance requirements.
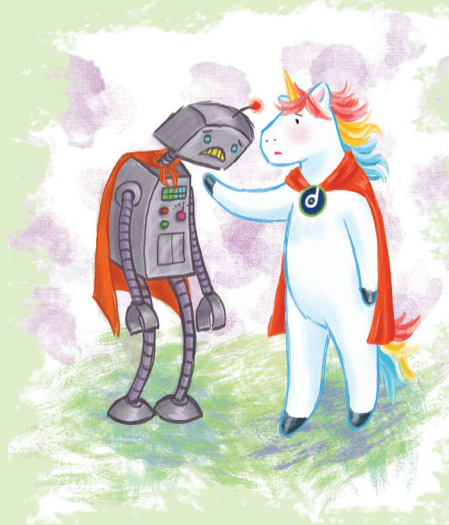
Step 1: **Get an Assessment**

Now that you've outlined the key info about your accessibility project, you're first step is to get an Accessibility Assessment of your site or app.

What should I be looking for in an accessibility assessment?

The assessment is the most critical piece of any project that requires fixing existing web pages or applications, and it's a pretty big investment. When you start researching different vendors and consultants, you'll want to make sure that...
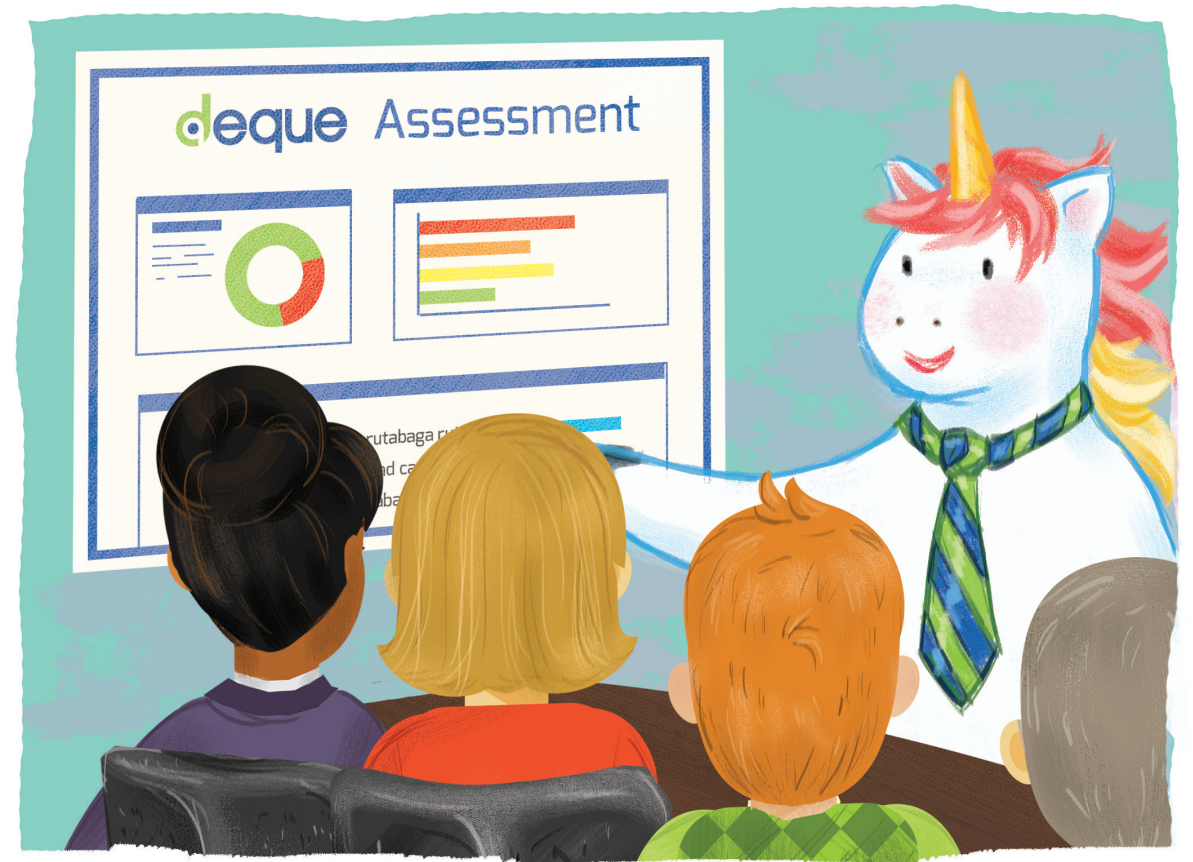
- The accessibility assessment will use a combination of **manual testing and automated testing**.

- The assessment will be performed with **more than one test configuration**.

- The final assessment report will be clear and provide **information** about the accessibility issues **that your development and QA teams can follow and act on**.

Software to the Rescue?

Right about now you may be wondering why you can't just buy a few licenses for accessibility testing software and have your own team put together an assessment. We are big fans of automated testing here at Deque - accessibility testing software is one of our passions and a key part of our business, but a lot of critical accessibility issues simply cannot be detected with automated testing tools. Manual testing with assistive technology (like screen readers) has to be part of the assessment process.

We encourage all of our clients to work towards making accessibility part of their own development process, but there is a pretty steep learning curve. When you've got a deadline, invest your time and resources in getting some expert help.

Deque's Detailed Assessment

We take our Accessibility Assessments very seriously, and our Expert Team has spent years establishing a testing methodology that produces clear, consistent, and actionable results without sacrificing precision.

- Our Assessments are based on **manual and automated testing** in **multiple configurations** based on your situation (don't worry, we will help you make good choices about this).

- **Automated testing** is performed and tracked with our **WorldSpace** suite of testing tools.

- **Manual testing is performed by accessibility experts** who have undergone rigorous training in our particular testing and reporting methodology.

- Accessibility **experts with disabilities are included on testing teams** to ensure our assessments represent how a real target user experiences your content.

- Each assessment includes **in-depth guidance** on the results of the assessment and advice on the remediation approach.

Step 2: Fix those Issues!

You've got your assessment, now the real work begins.

The Remediation Process

1. Prioritize your accessibility issues and outline the order for fixing things.

2. Convert the accessibility issues from the assessment into actionable tickets for your defect tracking system (e.g. JIRA, HPE ALM, etc.).

3. Fix the issues in the site or application code.

4. Test each fix to ensure that it really has resolved the issue.

Many common accessibility issues like "missing alt text" or "insufficient color contrast" are pretty easy to fix, but your development team will find that there are also many instances where it's not at all clear how to fix an issue. The best ways to facilitate the remediation process are to **provide accessibility training for your team**, or get a temporary **accessibility expert-in-residence to support your team** and provide guidance through the development process.

Deque's Remediation Assistance

At Deque, we treat the Remediation process like an Accessibility Immersion program. One of our Accessibility Experts will work alongside your team to guide and empower them to make thoughtful, effective, and successful accessibility fixes. Your Expert-in-Residence will:

- Provide **guidance on prioritizing and sequencing** fixes

- Create **detailed tickets for your bug tracking system** that include user stories, remediation guidance, and other instructive information

- Directly **assist developers** with issues requiring a more complex solution

- **Provide testing instructions** to ensure that each issue has been fixed

We also offer extensive accessibility training in topics for web developers, mobile developers, designers, and content creators through Deque University..

Step 3: Validation

Your third step is a Validation Assessment to verify that your site or application has been thoroughly remediated and now complies with the accessibility regulations or standards in your project requirements.

Validation Assessment

The Validation Assessment can be restricted to the page or to application components that returned accessibility issues in the initial assessment, or you can choose to do a full reassessment. Whether you do the limited or full reassessment depends on your particular needs and circumstances, but a full reassessment is your safest bet and will catch any new accessibility issues that were introduced due to unrelated updates to your site/app or that may have been caused by an attempt to fix an accessibility issue. In either case, further remediation will almost certainly need to take place as part of the Validation Assessment.

Conformance Statements

After the Validation Assessment is complete, you may also want to get a Conformance Statement or VPAT verifying that your site or application was reviewed by a 3rd party and documenting your level of conformance at that time. The VPAT (Voluntary Product Accessibility Template) is specifically for documenting Section 508 compliance and is a common requirement for any organization wishing to build or provide online content or other software for any US Federal Agencies. Conformance Statements are for documenting WCAG compliance and, though not necessarily a legal requirement, are worth keeping on file in case you run into a legal complaint regarding your accessibility.

Deque's Validation Assessment

The Validation Assessment is the home stretch. You're ready to see that all this hard work has really paid off. During the Validation Assessments, our team will work closely with your team to execute a few rapid iterations of testing and fixing. Our experts will deliver the results of their testing as tests are completed or at regular intervals, depending on your team's needs. You team can then immediately respond to new or remaining accessibility issues. This cycle then repeats until you decide your newly remediated site or application is ready to ship.

A Conformance Statement or VPAT can easily be included as part of the Validation Assessment depending on your preference and needs.

PROJECT COMPLETE!

Early accessibility projects can be stressful and overwhelming, but they're also an opportunity to provide people with disabilities a level of autonomy that the rest of the population often takes for granted. Whether you're selling underwear or home insurance, you're making a real impact on someone's quality of life.

The Deque Team works hard to set our clients up for success. Our accessibility solutions are tailored to your particular needs and software development process. And while we absolutely want you to reach your compliance goals as quickly and efficiently as possible, we also want to set you and your team up for success in the long term. Once those early projects have wrapped up, you can equip your team to build accessibility right into your development process so your content is accessible before it even gets out the door.

When you're ready, Deque will be there to help.

To be continued...

Looking for action you can take today?

Talk to your legal team about getting an Accessibility Statement on your website. An Accessibility Statement is a public page on your website (linked in your footer or wherever you might link to something like a Privacy Policy) that states your dedication to accessibility, provides a form or contact info for people to submit accessibility issues they've run into, and can also include information about any ongoing efforts for accessibility compliance. It's a great way to show users with disabilities that their experience is important to your organization. Organizations that are open about their efforts to address accessibility challenges and provide a direct way for users to get help when they run into a problem are often less likely to run into severe legal trouble due to those accessibility issues. If you're ready to respond to accessibility complaints (and your legal team says it's okay), you're ready for an Accessibility Statement.