

# How is COVID-19 Impacting Digital Accessibility?

A Deque Systems survey launched in partnership with the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP) and G3ict Research.

## Overview

In partnership with the IAAP, Deque surveyed accessibility practitioners from around the world on the impact COVID-19 is having on employees and customers with disabilities, as well as on their organization's accessibility program and testing efforts.

As the world has become increasingly impacted by the COVID-19 virus, an emphasis on digital accessibility is becoming more necessary. Navigating these changes and delivering up-to-date information to employees and customers is paramount for businesses to effectively perform their daily functions and keep people informed of any changes to operations.

The results of this survey provide insight into the level of awareness surrounding the digital channel and digital accessibility. In turn, we hope these results will help organizations highlight priorities to ensure equal digital access to employees and customers with disabilities at this critical time.

## Summary

Deque and the IAAP surveyed 292 accessibility practitioners during the months of March and April 2020. The survey consisted of 15 multiple-choice and 2 open-ended questions that were collected via Survey Monkey's online survey platform. Answers were solicited by both parties through email and social media.

Individuals who took the survey varied in job roles, industries and organization size. The majority of respondents reported their role as "accessibility specialist" (58%). The industry representing the most number of respondents was Education (33%).

**Overall, the results indicate an increased awareness around the digital channel and accessibility.**



**Heightened awareness around the digital channel and accessibility.** 83% of all respondents said that "COVID-19 has raised the profile and importance of digital channels for their organization" and 62% reported that "COVID-19 has raised the awareness and impact of accessibility on the digital channel."



**COVID-19 creates opportunity to spread accessibility across teams.** With attention drawn towards digital channels, now may be a good opportunity to spread accessibility across different facets of an organization, when teaming up to meet demands on the digital channel.



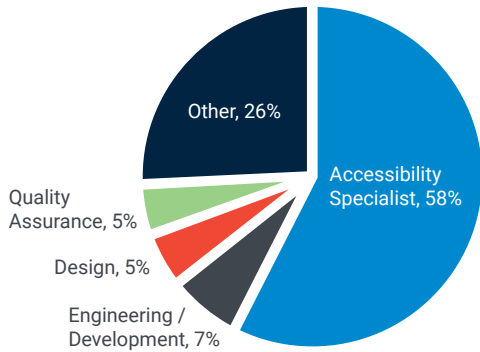
**Increased volume of work forces teams to adapt and work together.** A majority of respondents (90%) also predict that they will see either an increase or no change in their volume of work over the next three months at the time of taking the survey (i.e. April/May through June/July).

62%

of respondents reported that COVID-19 has "raised the awareness and impact of accessibility for their organization."

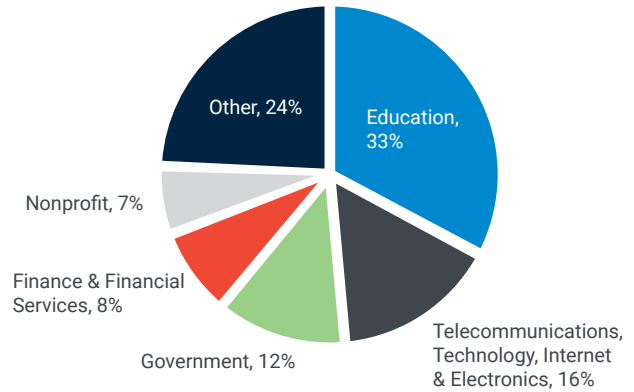
# Survey Demographics

**Roles**



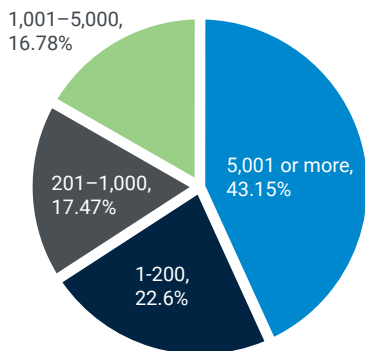
Of the 292 surveyed respondents, **58% of respondents identified as “accessibility specialists.”** Other roles included Engineering/ Development (7%), Design (5%), and Quality Assurance (5%).

**Industry**

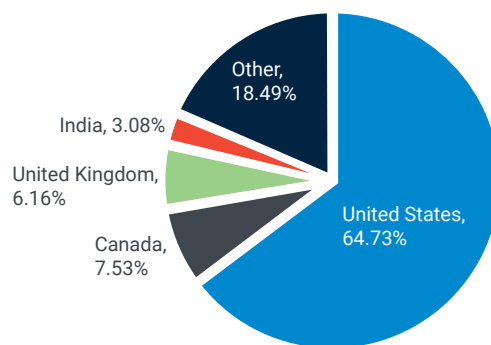


**A third of respondents (33%) work in the Education industry,** followed by Telecommunications, Technology, Internet & Electronics (16%), Government (12%), and Finance / Financial Services (8%).

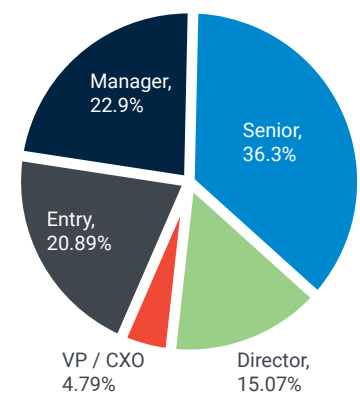
**Organization Size**



**Location**



**Job Seniority**



The majority of respondents reported working at organizations larger than 1,001 employees (60%), were located in the United States (65%), and have job seniority at Senior level or higher (56%).

## Key Findings

### Awareness of the digital channel and accessibility

The majority of respondents reported heightened awareness surrounding their organization's digital channels and accessibility. 83% of respondents reported that COVID-19 has "raised the profile and importance of digital channels for their organization." 62% of respondents also reported that COVID-19 has "increased the awareness of the impact of accessibility on the digital channel."

**83%** of respondents reported that COVID-19 has "raised the profile and importance of digital channels for their organization."

When further segmented by industry, 70% of respondents in the following industries said COVID-19 has "increased the awareness of the impact of accessibility on the digital channel": Business Support & Logistics, Education, Government, Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals, Nonprofit, and Retail and Consumer Durables.

However, less than half of respondents (49%) in all other industries said COVID-19 has increased the awareness of the impact of accessibility on the digital channel, including but not limited to: Advertising and Marketing, Finance and Financial Service, and Telecommunications, Technology, Internet, and Electronics.

We saw mixed sentiments regarding the awareness of digital accessibility in the open-ended questions. Some respondents lament that accessibility appears to be deprioritized, while others are optimistic that accessibility is now getting more attention:



"I don't think **accessibility** in the wake of COVID-19 is being highlighted enough."



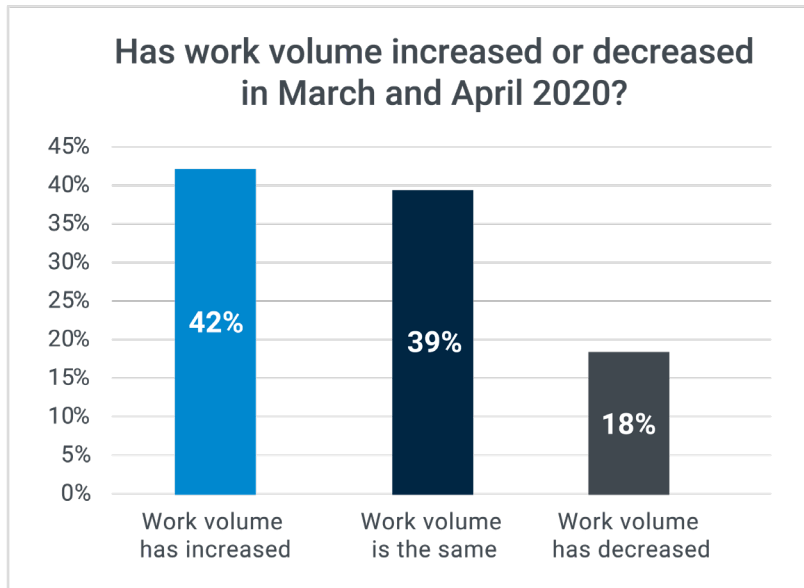
"**Accessibility for students** is the main impact we have seen. In the quick scramble to get courses online, accessibility is often an afterthought - if a thought at all."



"We discovered that the **university staff lacked accessibility awareness** and suddenly realized the importance."

## Impact on work volume in March & April 2020

When asked whether respondents' work volume has increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the months of March and April, 81% said that their work volume has increased or stayed the same.



92% of respondents in Education reported that their work volume has increased or stayed the same, compared to 79% of all other industries surveyed.

Overall, the data suggests that COVID-19 has partially increased people's work volume in March and April, across all roles and industries. When predicting work volume for the next three months, 90% of total respondents indicated that they expected their work to increase or stay the same. Of note, Education, Government, and Finance/Financial Services were the top three industries to report that they expect work volume to increase within the next three months.

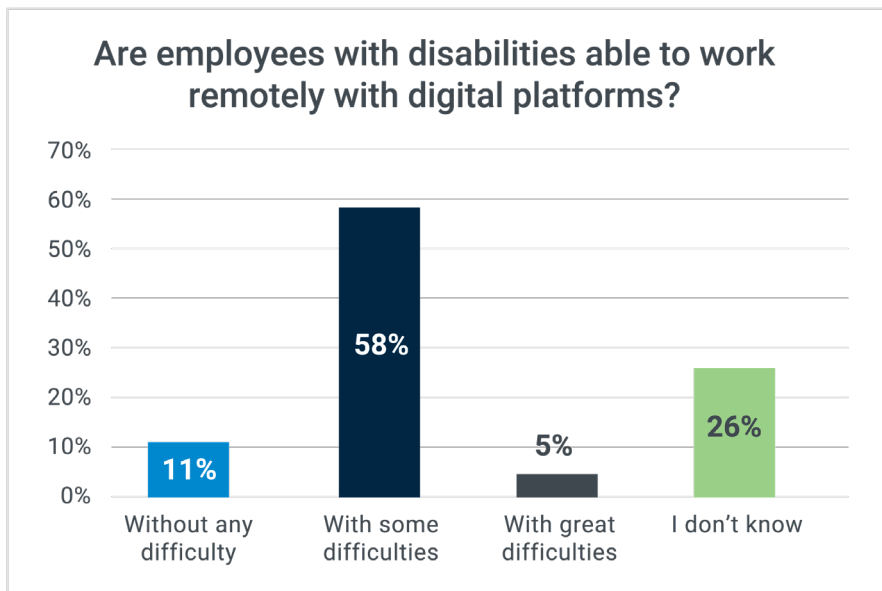
One respondent describes the stress that COVID-19 has placed on their organization by saying, "Our web teams are rushing to push out COVID updates to our website, both information and new processes/flows/forms. Even our best trained teams for accessibility are being forced into rush jobs and accessibility checks are being sidelined and handled after initial release...It has exacerbated existing cracks in our accessibility training and monitoring."

**90%** of respondents expect the volume of their work to "increase or stay the same" over the next 3 months.

## Reported difficulty for people with disabilities

The majority of respondents have not heard reports that users with disabilities are having increased difficulty accessing their services during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, only 37% of respondents said they have heard reports of increased difficulty from users with disabilities.

Multiple respondents from the Education industry say they are surprised by how few reports of students having difficulties. One person notes, "I have been shocked at how little our students have tried to reach out for help with accessibility during the move to online classes."



Only 11% said that employees with disabilities are able to work remotely without any difficulty.

The data suggests that a significant amount of people with disabilities are faced with some difficulty in working in a remote-only setting.

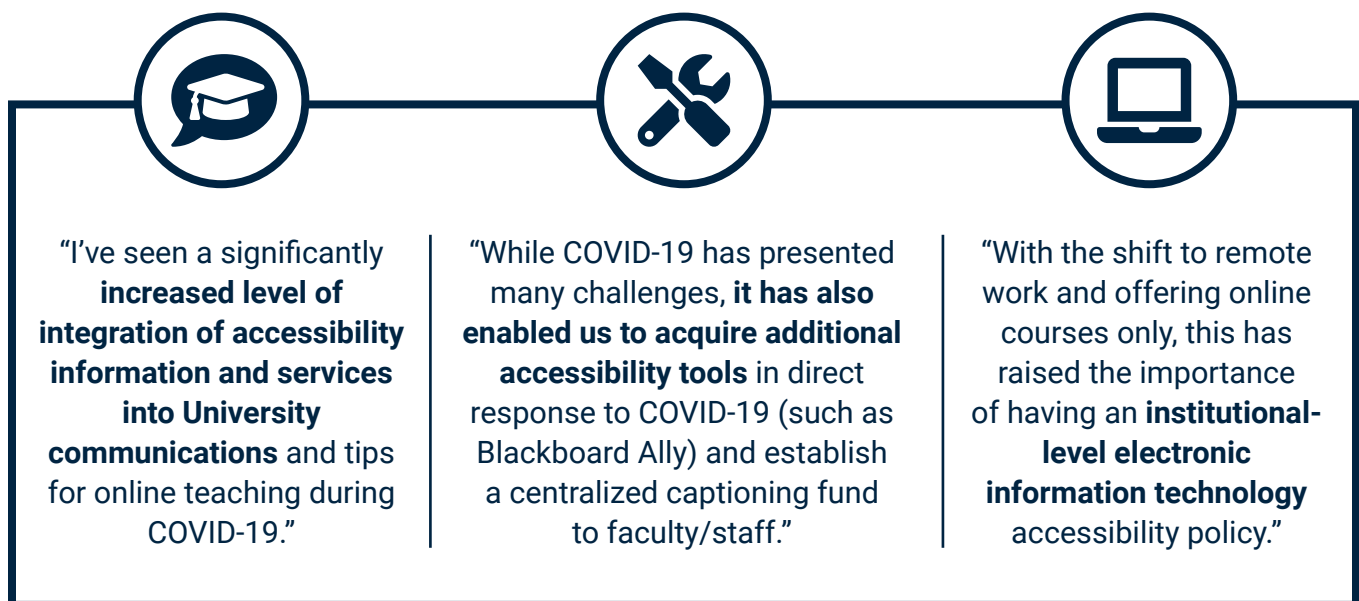
## Conclusion

### Heightened awareness around the digital channel and accessibility

The survey results suggest an increased awareness of the importance of the digital channel due to COVID-19. This finding is consistent with how countries around the world are closing physical places of business, forcing organizations to move their business activities exclusively online.

The results also show an increase in awareness around digital accessibility. However, the results do not necessarily suggest that increased action is being taken to address accessibility concerns across organizations.

In the Education industry, heightened awareness may indicate an opportunity to devote more resources towards accessibility. This is supported in a number of open-ended responses:



### COVID-19 creates opportunity to spread accessibility across teams

With 83% of respondents across industries agreeing that COVID-19 has placed “increased importance on digital channels,” we can assume that this attention may be long-lasting well after the COVID-19 pandemic. With attention drawn towards digital channels, now may be a good opportunity to spread accessibility across different facets of an organization, when teaming up to meet demands on the digital channel.

This sentiment is illustrated in an open-ended response from an accessibility consultant: “Our UX team has been asked for advice and we feed accessibility into our responses for better understanding and knowledge sharing.”

Additionally, only 5% of respondents indicated that people with disabilities would have “no difficulties” performing remote work. This finding perhaps reflects a severe lack of attention given to organizations’ internal digital systems, and indicates that now is a critical time to assess the accessibility of internal systems used by employees.

### Increased volume of work forces teams to adapt and work together

The survey suggests that COVID-19 has partially increased people’s work volume in March and April across industries and roles. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents are expecting their work to increase over the next three months (May-July 2020). This leads us to speculate that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a substantial impact on how much people are working within the accessibility field and an increased demand for accessibility services.

While heightened awareness on the impact on accessibility does not necessarily mean action is concurrently taking place within organizations, it is an important first step and often a catalyst for future systemic change. For organizations and accessibility professionals experiencing strain under this increased demand, it’s important to share the responsibility with other key groups internally. By shifting accessibility testing left into design and development, organizations will experience increased efficiency without a burdensome work effort.

Access the full data at: <https://www.deque.com/covid-19-digital-accessibility-report/>