Why Web Accessibility Matters

Government websites exist to provide information, resources, and communication to members of the public. Since nearly 20% of the worldwide population lives with a disability that may affect their ability to use the internet, it’s more important than ever to think about access for all users.

Who Benefits from Accessible Websites?

When people hear the word “accessibility,” the first thing that likely comes to mind is people who are blind, deaf, or living with a physical or cognitive disability. What people don’t realize is that accessibility features benefit everyone. An accessible website enhances site organization, user experience, the mobile version of your site, and even Search Engine Optimization (SEO) results. Still not sure? Check out these other reasons to prioritize your accessibility efforts:

- Inclusive design helps more than just those with disabilities – the aging population, those using a website in their second language, and even just the average user all benefit from common accessibility features, sometimes without even realizing it.
- Working toward compliance mitigates risk – an inaccessible website opens your organization up to the threat of litigation. By working toward compliance with WCAG 2.0 guidelines¹, you can avoid the costly process of working through a lawsuit.
- Accessibility is here to stay – just as accessible design makes buildings accessible for people of all abilities, it is increasingly important that people are able to access the same information online.

Accessibility Fun Fact: What is Alt Text?

Alt text, a common accessibility feature, is a word or phrase that is inserted into the HTML so that screen readers or other assistive technology can tell users the nature or content of an image.
Where to Begin

Whether you’re an accessibility professional who’s ready to show off your site or this is the first you’ve heard of web accessibility, we’ve got you covered.

Steps to a More Accessible Website:

1. Educate Your Team
   - Understanding accessibility principles allows content contributors, developers, and anyone else on your team to address issues from the beginning, saving time and energy later. Provide training and resources for your team on web accessibility and how it plays into their individual roles.

2. Audit Your Site:
   - What issues are present on your website? What resources do you need to identify and/or remediate them? What problems should you address first?

3. Find a Tool:
   - Accessibility is an ongoing process and is nearly impossible to accomplish manually. Find a tool to alert you of issues and help save time working toward accessibility.

4. Track Your Progress:
   - Whether you use a tool or a spreadsheet, you’ll need a way to know how far you’ve come. More practically, if faced with litigation, tracking progress can prove you’re working toward accessibility compliance.

Common Issues and Quick Wins

Missing Alt Text
Images on your site should have descriptive alternative text so assistive technology can describe them to the user. Alt text also makes it easier for search engines to interpret visual content, giving SEO results a boost.

Links Identified by Color or Location
If a link is only called out by the color of the text, it can be nearly impossible for those with visual impairments like colorblindness or low-vision issues to identify that a link is present. Similarly, those who use assistive technologies are not well-served by directions like “click the link in the bottom right of the page”. With descriptive in-line text, links can be properly identified and used by all visitors.

Generic Link Text
Assistive technologies often provide links in a list for easier navigation. As a result, terms like “click here” become relatively useless to assistive technology users. When links describe their destination, site navigation is easier for those with and without disabilities.

Inaccurate Heading Structure
A clean heading structure (h1, h2, etc.) helps screen readers and other assistive technologies scan your site more easily. Additionally, consistently labeled headers can make your site easier for all users to navigate and understand.

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