



**BrailleWorks**

Making the world a more readable place™

# Accessible Formats for Your Business



# Here's the Thing: Accessibility is Not Optional

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Making your business accessible to customers with disabilities is more than just a feel-good option – it's also a legal requirement and a smart business strategy.

Try to adjust your thinking if accessibility feels like the enemy. Yes, it's extra work. But isn't hard work what you pride yourself on? And in this particular case, the reward is tremendous.

## It's the law.

Over 53 million Americans have a disability. Their right to equal access and protection from discrimination has been protected for decades. The American with Disabilities Act--the nation's first comprehensive civil rights law specifically addressing the needs of people with disabilities--was enacted in 1990. The law states, "No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability or accommodations."

Discrimination isn't always a willful, deliberate act. Oftentimes it's a matter of oversight that can--and should--be corrected. Businesses that find themselves outside of ADA compliance can be subject to legal action, including hefty penalties and fines.

## It's good business.

Avoiding legal consequences is only one reason your company should become accessible. It also makes good business sense. Ensuring people with disabilities can access your goods, services, and information, including on the web, increases your potential customer base. Not to mention the ripple effect of their friends and families after they share a positive review. There are also tax incentives available for small businesses to help cover the costs of accessibility.

Taking into account the potential new revenue from these customers and the possible tax incentives, it just makes good business sense to start getting accessible now.

## It's the right thing to do.

Your customers depend on you to do the right thing. Show them you value their business by making sure everyone is included. Your business becoming compliant also sends a message to your peers: *We are doing the right thing. Why aren't you?* Companies of all sizes can become more accessible; it starts with an accessibility plan.

**Need a little help?** Don't worry; we've got you covered.





## Your Accessibility Starter Kit

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ADA compliance calls for **removing barriers** that prevent people with disabilities from accessing your goods and services. And it's not just talking about physical ones. Communication is a critical part of any successful business, as are customer service and employee training. These should also be included in your accessibility plan.

Your first step is to review your business for possible compliance pitfalls. Where do you need to make changes? Don't forget to include all customer-facing communications, including your marketing, website, and social media.

### Structural changes.

The ADA states that businesses are required to make "reasonable modifications" when serving people with disabilities. Look for structural barriers that would prevent entry to a person using a wheelchair or other mobility-assistance device. To help create an accessible space for customers with a visual disability, make sure there are easy navigation routes through your location.

### Documents.

All of your customer-facing documents should be available in alternative formats, and print versions should contain a statement alerting customers that these formats are available. Don't forget your digital documents like PDFs as well. PDFs are not necessarily accessible to screen readers and are not considered accessible unless they undergo a process referred to as 508 remediation.

**Next Step:** Audit your documents and create an action plan to have alternative formats developed immediately.

## Website.

The introduction of screen readers and text-to-speech (TTS) technology on mobile phones has dramatically increased web accessibility for customers with blindness or visual disabilities. However, not everything on the web is accessible and can be read by a screen reader, and design elements such as color contrast choices and font types can affect accessibility.

**Next Step:** Have your website reviewed by a qualified web accessibility vendor and put together an action plan to make changes sooner than later.

## An accessibility advocate.

Accessibility should not be an afterthought; it needs to be someone's dedicated priority. Select an accessibility advocate in your company, and make sure they are properly trained. They should know the laws surrounding accessibility compliance, your accessibility statement and plan, how to access your accessible documents, and--last but not least--provide training for employees on properly interacting with customers with disabilities.

**Next Step:** Assign an accessibility advocate or hire one. Task this individual with staying up to date and creating action plans.

## Accessibility statement.

Your company may already have an accessibility statement. Review yours and make sure it not only includes language about your employment practices, but your customer accommodations and available accessible document alternatives. This accessibility statement should be easily found online and provided to in-person customers.

**Next Step:** Revise your accessibility statement. Get a second opinion, or better yet, a legal opinion. Share your revised statement.





# The Accessible Formats

Having your menu or legal contracts available in braille is great, but only for your customers with blindness who can read braille. The ADA states that businesses must provide accessible alternatives to the print documents in the format the customer prefers.

## Braille

Braille isn't a language; it's a tactile code used to transcribe text. You have language options in braille transcription. English transcription processes need to meet or exceed the standards set forth by the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) and Unified English Braille (UEB).

Work with an accessibility company who can produce braille transcription and embossing in-house and confirm a standard of quality and accuracy. [Quality braille](#) is comfortable to the touch, easy to read, and maintains its shape over time, reflecting well on your company.

## Audio

When using a human reader, audio material should be read professionally, by a clear reading voice, at a moderate speed. Each audio recording should be segmented and identify the page, headlines, and subheadings of the document. Audio files are saved to CD, flash drive, or MP3 files, can be distributed in-person, mailed or emailed to customers so they may listen on their personal computers.

If your company opts for a TTS audio option, use accurate voice technology to create audio documents anyone can follow.

## Large print

Many people with visual disabilities have some sight and can read large print. Large print is also an excellent option for adults age 40 and over, customers with cognitive or reading disabilities, and some ESL readers.

What makes large print different than enlarged font? Large print has simple formatting:

- › **Arial or Sans Serif Font**
- › **Minimum color contrast ratio that meets WCAG 2.0 AA standards**
- › **Difference between foreground and background colors**

## 508 Remediation

PDF files are the standard for sharing richly formatted documents. More than 20 million documents are available using this format on the web, with more than two million on government websites. If you have marketing materials, member guides, contracts or agreements online in PDF format, you must remediate these PDFs to make them accessible to screen readers.

# Accessibility Beyond Documents

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Remember, as we hope we've illustrated, accessibility is about removing any barrier – physical or otherwise – that keeps your customers from comfortably and easily doing business with you.

## Customer service affects accessibility.

Show your employees how they can better assist and serve a customer with a disability. This may be as simple as reminding them that service animals are allowed anywhere the customer goes within your business, including lobbies, restrooms, changing rooms, and offices.

Other training tips might be less obvious: When assisting a customer with a visual disability, it's important not to grab their hand but instead offer your arm, and if you are giving directions to use clear directionals that the customer can understand and relate to.

For more tips on training your employees to deliver a great experience to all of your customers, check out our eBook, *"10 Tips for Improving Accessibility, Service and Experience for Customers with Blindness or Visual Impairments."*

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# The Real Reason Accessibility Matters

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## There's money left on the table.

We all invest money to make money. Accessibility retains employees because workers want to work for companies that care about the world and make a tangible impact. Accessibility attracts customers for the same reason: it feels good to do business with inclusive companies and make accommodations for customers that need them. Accessibility retains customers because the entire customer service experience accommodates their needs from beginning to end.

## Accessibility affects branding.

Your future customers want you to know their needs and be known for accommodating practices. Now more than ever, people want to give their business to companies who are socially responsible.

As Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, famously put it, "Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room." A company that strives to be accessible, and pushes that message out to customers, can **positively impact their own branding and marketing efforts**. Happy customers that share your values make the best promoters.

## The most important reason is humanity

We are an accessible document company, but accessibility is more than a product to us. We believe accessibility is a human right. Accessible documents, services and physical locations empower people with disabilities to conduct business with more independence, safeguards their dignity, and promotes a culture of belief that everyone deserves to be treated equally.







The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the most extensive piece of accessibility legislation in the US. There is a strong need for standards, and we'll see more in the coming years. Instead of easing up, we're likely to see explicit and unwavering standards, as the internet's impact on the economy accelerates. Make accessibility your standard now, you won't be rushing when it becomes the standard later. What's that saying about the early bird getting the customer base?

**Ready to include and serve all of your potential customers?**

**REQUEST A CONSULTATION**