

Creating an Accessible Website

By Judi Singleton

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Whether one is aware of it or not your customer base probably already includes a lot of people who have disabilities of one kind or another. Providing access regardless of the situation can be a complicated matter.

How well are your webpages set for people who have disabilities?

Are you losing a lot of customers because they can't navigate your pages?

While many webmasters and designers are designing websites that are compatible for many browsers, they are not considering that people with disabilities may not be able to navigate your site at all.

We each want to reach as many readers as possible:

- * People using telephone-based browsers interact with the page using voice input and voice output, are encountering many of the same problems as people with both visual and physical disabilities.
- * People with slow connections (including most people outside of North America and Western Europe) turn off graphics, as do people who are blind.
- * People restricted to low-end browsers that don't understand constructs such as tables and frames.
- * People with disabilities

Some things you can do to make your site more accessible are:

- * Allow automation tools such as search engines to access, index, manipulate, and reuse your information, accessing it much the

same way as accessibility aids;

- * Comply with future telecommunication regulations, which may require accessibility of information distributed over the Internet;
- * Earn the use of the Web Access symbol;
- * Avoid angering customers and harming relationship with the disabled community.

On May 5, 1999 W3C came out with recommendations on Web content accessibility which may be used by the website owner or designer to review their site. There are 14 guidelines to make a site more accessible to the disabled. You can earn a Web symbol of accessibility by complying. This information is available at: <http://ncam.wgbh.org/webaccess/symbolwinner.html>

Other resource sites include:

<http://www.w3.org/TR/1999/WAI-WEBCONTENT-19990505/> - This site gives you the tools to become a winner of this symbol.

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/GL/> - This site will give you:
Getting Started: Making a Web Site Accessible
Quick Tips for Accessible Web Sites
Fact Sheet on WCAG
Curriculum on Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
Translations of WCAG 1.0

<http://ncam.wgbh.org/bp/news/webnewsindex.html> - has a series of articles explaining web accessibility for the disabled. These are great articles. I learned a lot from reading them.

You may have to provide alternative pages that are less attractive but more functional. You can link these to each page.

<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/dev/web/checklist.htm> - here you will find 14 tips for making your website more accessible.

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/Resources/#te> - provides a checklist to see if you have covered the major accessibility topics and example of HTML code.

<http://www.cast.org/bobby> - provides an overview of repairing your site to make it more accessible to not just the disabled but to all of your customers.

Accessible design also benefits other Web users, for instance by promoting device-independence for Web content.

Checkpoints that support Web access for people with visual disabilities also help people accessing the Web from mobile phones, hand-held devices, or automobile-based PC's; when connection speed is too slow to support viewing images or video; or when a person's eyes are "busy" with other tasks.

Checkpoints such as captions support access for people with hearing impairments but also help people who are using the Web in noisy or in silent environments; and they make it possible to index and search on audio content.

Use of CSS for control of presentation not only facilitates accessibility, but also speeds download time of pages and can reduce costs of maintaining or updating the look and feel of sites.

Other ways it may help is for the non-reader or for the a person accessing your site that speaks a different language. For instance, symbols instead of text sometimes can be followed very easily like an arrow pointing left to go back and one right to go forward, including a clear statement of go back to the previous page or go forward to the next page.

I have been evaluating my site for several weeks now and having several other people evaluate it. These articles that I have written in the past weeks: "Creating the website of your dreams not your nightmares" (part one and part two) and "Color and your website" (part one and part two) are meant not only for the newbie but for many of us who have already created websites and now have to go back and reevaluate them for saleability.

(Note: these articles are available by autoresponder at:

<mailto:jassminesarticles@sendfree.com>

and on the website at:

<http://www.gotojassminesitenow.com/journal/freecontent.html>

If someone can't navigate your website, or are turned off by its colors, or if your website is just a junk yard for unrelated material, one is not going to sell very much. Reevaluating on the simplest level and getting ready to serve a global market is essential.

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