

# Developing an Accessible Web Site

By Tanja Rosteck

Developing an Accessible Web Site

Tanja Rosteck  
tanja@words4nerds.com

Words4Nerds <http://www.words4nerds.com>

Developing an Accessible Web Site

-----

In today's marketplace, driving potential customers to your site isn't enough - you have to make them interested in staying there.

Technologies such as Flash, scripting, and cookies can be used to great advantage by providing an interactive and more personalized experience. But using these technologies ineffectively or designing your site for specific web browsers means you risk alienating visitors who can't use - or even view - your site.

## \* Why you need an accessible site

The basic goal of most websites is to provide information to visitors - people who may want to buy your products. If they can't easily view this information, chances are good they won't stick around to search for it, much less want to buy from you.

Don't risk alienating these potential customers! Ensure your core content is accessible to as many visitors as possible - regardless of their browser, operating system, connection speed, and so on. With a bit of work and planning, you can build a professional site that stands out from your competition but still remains accessible to as many web surfers as possible.

## \* Always provide an alternative

Cutting-edge sites built with Flash and Shockwave can be a great marketing tool - but is wasted on visitors who can't view it.

Don't assume everyone has the latest browser and plug-in or can

easily get it. Many companies have restrictions on what employees can download and install on their workstations. What's more, visitors to your site may not even be using an operating system or browser that supports such plug-ins.

For example, If your site uses Flash or Shockwave, you should provide an HTML-only version of your site, accessible from a visible link on the main page.

#### \* Optimize for slower connections

Chances are, many visitors to your site will not have a high-speed Internet connection. Ensure graphics and their file sizes are kept to a minimum so pages load as quickly as possible.

Many HTML editors can estimate the average download time for each page, and imaging applications such as PhotoShop can optimize your graphics specifically for Web viewing. If you use tables for page layout, ensure they are properly coded and streamlined.

#### \* Use ALT tags on images

Many web surfers on slow connections also have image-viewing turned off in their browsers so pages load faster. Each image on your site should include an ALT tag that briefly describes its content (for example, 'Company Logo'). Without these descriptors, visitors may think they are missing crucial information.

By the way, you should already be using ALT tags, since they are scanned by some search engines and can improve your ranking!

#### \* Be careful with JavaScript

JavaScript isn't supported by every web browser, and can be unstable in those browsers that do. Many people also have JavaScript disabled due to security concerns. And nobody enjoys endless pop-up windows, re-directs, and other similar annoyances.

Always provide an alternate way to access the content or functions within your script. Remember, the key concern is making your core content accessible to as many visitors as possible.

For example, if you have a Javascript-driven navigation system, provide a plain-text menu system as well (perhaps at the bottom of the page).

\* Crunch those cookies

Some browsers don't support cookies either, and they're another security concern for many Web users. Whether you think such concerns are valid or not, you still need to be able to provide your site's core content to these visitors.

In many cases, tracking site usage can be done effectively without using cookies. Research your tracking requirements and options thoroughly before implementing cookies on your site.

Realize that you may be alienating a significant number of potential customers if you decide to restrict access to core content on your site.

Developing a professional, creative and fun site that is accessible to as many visitors as possible CAN be done... and increased traffic and sales will be your reward!

Copyright 2001 Tanja Rosteck

-----

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Tanja Rosteck is the president of Words4Nerds, providing software companies with professional and affordable online help, user manuals, installation guides and web design/content.

Visit Words4Nerds online at <http://www.words4nerds.com> - check out our free monthly e-zine, chock-full of tips for improving the quality of your documentation and customer support!

You may use this article in your e-zine or website free of charge, provided you include the "About the Author" box and do not edit the article.

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)