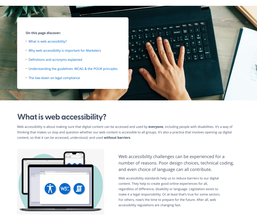
Web content accessibility guidelines & legislation

Digital accessibility guide for Marketers

Web accessibility guidelines & legislation

It's often said that world around us is a level playing field and we are differently abled. The sad fact is that this is often true, especially when it comes to the digital world. That's why web accessibility standards exist.

On this page we'll answer What is web accessibility? We'll talk about the web accessibility guidelines along with the 4 principles of web accessibility. We'll also explain the legal guidelines relating to web accessibility.



In this page discover:

- What is web accessibility?
- Why web accessibility is important for Marketers
- Definitions and acronyms explained
- Understanding the guidelines: WCAG & the POUR principles
- The low-down on legal compliance

What is web accessibility?

Web accessibility is about making sure digital content can be accessed and used by **everyone**, including people with disabilities. It's a way of thinking that makes up drop and question whether our web content is accessible to all groups. It's also a practice that involves opening up digital content, so that it can be accessed, understood and used **without barriers**.

Web accessibility challenges can be experienced for a number of reasons. Poor design choices, technical coding, and even choice of language can all contribute.

Web accessibility standards help us to reduce barriers to our digital content. They help to create good online experiences for all, regardless of difficulties, disability or language. Legislation exists to make it a legal responsibility. Or at least that's one for some sectors. For others, risks the time is prepare for the future. After all, web accessibility regulations are changing fast.

Podcast: Discover the past, present and future of web accessibility

In this podcast episode, we take you through the history of Microsoft's Global Chief Technology Officer, Ryan Jackson how web accessibility has evolved. Plus gain insights as he shares his thoughts on what's to come.

Read the transcript

Why web accessibility is important for digital marketers

Imagine a world where everything is working as it was, but not all of your needs. You struggle to access any piece of information, and every service you need is closed, every single day. For some people, that's their experience of the digital world. Because even in our digital first world, barriers still exist.

In fact, 97.4% of home pages have detectable accessibility failures (to the web accessibility standards of WCAG). A pretty shocking statistic, especially in a world that expects people to do more online now than ever before.

To put this into context, based on the top accessibility failures found:

- People who use color blind are greeted by homepages difficult to interpret because of poor color contrast (86.4% of homepages)
- Blind users aren't being given the same visual experience because missing alt text on images (58.0% of homepages)
- Those using keyboards to navigate will barely find success, 93.1% have empty links and 57.0% have empty buttons. Meaning, when they navigate to the form field, they're not given any information as to what it's for (56.4% of homepages)
- Screen reader users are also left in the dark as to where they can go next because of empty links. This means there's no text to explain where the link will go (43.6% of 2.3% of homepages)

Podcast: Why web accessibility matters

In this podcast, gain first-hand insight from a blind professional working in the digital inclusion space. Robin, Head of Digital Inclusion at AbilityNet, shares advice to help organisations improve web accessibility.

Read the transcript

Web accessibility for people with disabilities matters. In fact, web accessibility benefits everyone.

Take web accessibility for older users for example. In recent research, we found that 1 in 4 people aged over 50 face problems accessing online services. Web accessibility can help remove barriers even for many groups of people. Improving web accessibility helps us to be more welcoming to a wider audience online.

As a digital marketer, how can you do your part for web accessibility?

We each have a part to play in improving the digital world. For Marketers, our role can have a huge impact. After all, we write, produce and publish a lot of digital content. Here's a few ways we can do our part in the digital marketing space.

Web accessibility can be a complex topic. Here's a few ways we can make a difference in our day-to-day. Pick one or two of these and make a start. Or, if you're ready, take a look at our Content Marketing strategies.

Following web accessibility guidelines, such as WCAG, can help you to make your content more accessible.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) were designed to help organisations make websites accessible. However, we know they can be difficult to understand, because there's a lot to consider. That's why we've created a website accessibility checklist. Download it for free, and share with your colleagues.

Get accessibility checklist

How much do you know about web accessibility?

As you're increasing your knowledge around web accessibility, why not test the knowledge you've gained so far?

Take our free quiz to see how much you know about making web accessible content. Plus, find out how well your organisation performs across key resources, to provide suggestions for the next step!

Take the quiz

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11 web accessibility definitions and acronyms explained

If you're a beginner to learning about digital accessibility and web accessibility, there's a lot to get to grips with. Some of the terms, like web accessibility terms can be complicated and full of acronyms.

So, we thought we'd help to explain them:

- **W3C, World Wide Web Consortium**

  Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, in 1989.

  In 1994 he founded W3C to oversee continued development of the web. W3C is an international community that works together to develop web standards to benefit all internet users. They develop specifications, guidelines, software, and tools to help "lead the web to its full potential".
- **SEO, Web Accessibility Initiative**
- **WCAG, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**
- **WCAG 2.1 / WCAG 2.2 / WCAG 3.0**
- **Level A, AA and AAA**
- **POUR principles**
- **Assistive technology & screen readers**
- **HTML, Hyper Text Markup Language**
- **Semantic Markup, or Semantic HTML**
- **CSS, Cascading Style Sheets**
- **ARIA, Accessible Rich Internet Applications**

Get more questions? Check out our blog based on the most FAQs about web accessibility.

Understanding web accessibility guidelines: WCAG & the POUR principles

When it comes to web accessibility, it's important to remember that you're not alone. There's a whole community of people striving to make web content more accessible. Along with experts and organisations committed to providing education and outreach. As we've also noted, there's also a set of web accessibility guidelines to support your efforts.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (aka WCAG)

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) help make web content more accessible. That's because they guide us on how to make digital content accessible to people with disabilities. They take into account the design, structure and presentation of content.

WCAG is used around the world by many people. As such, they're known as the international web accessibility standards. There are 3 levels of conformance - Level A, Level AA and Level AAA. Businesses and organisations can choose which level they aim for at minimum. So as to achieve accessibility for a wide audience.

Learn more about WCAG

The POUR principles

For a website to be truly accessible, it must be Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust. The WCAG guidelines are based on these 4 principles of web accessibility - otherwise known as the POUR principles. Below, we explain what each means.

Perceivable

Every part of a website should be able to be perceived by every visitor.

This means that content should be available in multiple formats. It also considers accessible design choices. For example, good color contrast and typography. This makes it easier for users to see and hear content.

Operable

Web content must be able to be accessed by every visitor.

This includes people who use adaptive devices, and those who may have motor impairments. It must also be easy to navigate, having users find content, and decide where they are.

Understandable

Content that someone can access is not necessarily accessible. It must be readable and understandable.

Factors to consider are the use of language, abbreviations and pronunciations. This principle also considers how intuitive the website is, and how predictable it is for users of assistive technology aspect. Additionally, service actions are asked to input information, support should be in place. So that users can avoid and correct mistakes.

Robust

Each individual accessed the web using technology which suits their needs and preferences.

That means your website should be compatible for use across different devices and browsers. Including assistive technologies.

Free guide & accessibility checklist

Free guide: Understanding POUR & web accessibility laws

Gain simple actions you can take now, to make your website more perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.

Explore what this means for web accessibility laws, for example, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Get the guide

Free website accessibility checklist for Marketers and Designers

These accessibility checklists will help you keep accessibility in mind throughout your digital campaigns.

Pass to your colleagues, and share with your Design team. Work together to create a more inclusive brand that's welcoming to everyone.

Get accessibility checklist

4 examples of great accessible websites

An accessible website is one which considers web accessibility best practices. They're designed and maintained in a way that's inclusive of everyone. So that every person can discover, access and take action, including those using special devices and screen readers.

To help you get tips, **here's some great web accessibility examples**:

1. **Scope co.uk**

   Scope is a disability equality charity in the UK. Their website has been created in line with inclusive design. That means, it's been designed with diversity in mind. To achieve a website that's accessible and usable to all groups of people, **they actively sought feedback from users**. They also **tested their design at every step** along the way.

   Discover Scope's 7 principles for creating inclusive digital experiences.
2. **Gov.uk**

   The UK government website has been designed with **simplicity and consistency** in mind. Their website is easy to navigate, and as users navigate through the site, they can be sure that it looks and feels the same. Web accessibility guidelines have been considered **how visitors use their website**. Most notably, the accessibility of their forms shows how they've made their service easy to use.
3. **Mencap.com**

   Mencap is a digital-only bank with a mission to make money work for everyone. They actively support the needs of all users, and their website and apps have been created with disabled users in mind. From their choice of design, **right through to the simplicity of the language they use**.

   Recently, Sophie Kenyon, Web Engineering Lead at Mencap joined us on a podcast. **Listen as she debunks 5 myths marketers believe about web accessibility.**
4. **Nova.co.nz, New South Wales (NSW) Government**

   Nova is a digital-only mobile phone provider that's accessible, fair and effective government. Their website has been designed to comply with WCAG (at least AA standards), so that information is accessible to everyone. What's more, they realize that website are forever changing and web accessibility guidelines are often updated. As such, they continue to improve their website to meet current web accessibility standards.

WCAG Level AA and the Texthelp website

As an assistive technology leader, web accessibility is important to us.

Our website has recently been revamped. Not only has it been given a fresh look and feel, but it's also been made more accessible. Above all, we wanted to make it easier to understand and navigate, to make it more user-friendly.

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What you need to know about web accessibility laws

Web accessibility laws exist across the globe to protect people with disabilities. They help to make sure that the digital world is a fair and welcoming place for all. Below, we explain the legal guidelines relating to web accessibility.

Understanding ADA / Section 508

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act exists to make sure every US citizen has equal opportunities to all areas of public life.

Under Title III of ADA, businesses are required to make their "place of public accommodation" accessible to people with disabilities. Since a website is a place of public accommodation, to meet ADA compliance your website must be accessible too.

Under ADA, there's no defined standard of what makes a website accessible. So it's a good idea to follow existing web accessibility best practices. That means, to comply with the web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG). **More specifically, WCAG Level AA**.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act is a web accessibility law for federal agencies.

It requires federal agencies to 'make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities.' To meet Section 508, **federal agencies must comply with WCAG 2.0 Level A and AA**.

Understanding the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) has been set out by the Government of Canada in the hope to create a barrier-free Canada. As part of this, when it comes to web accessibility, they aim to make sure 'digital content and technologies that can be used by all'.

The Accessible Canada Act applies to parliament, the Government of Canada, and the federally-regulated private sector.

You can read more in our blog all about creating an accessible Canada.

Read more about the ACA

Understanding AODA

AODA stands for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005. It's a law that sets out accessibility standards for organizations in Ontario. When it comes to websites, organizations must meet WCAG 2.0 to Level AA. This is outlined under AODA's Information and Communications Standards.

You can read more on our page dedicated to Understanding AODA.

Read more about AODA

Webinar: Accessibility law & how to check your website for the top 5 WCAG errors

In this session, gain an overview of legislation. Discover the five most common WCAG errors, and learn how to find and fix them.

You'll hear from Zenab Khan, Accessibility and Usability Consultant at AbilityNet, and Stuart Blair, Product Manager at Texthelp.

Watch on-demand

Recent web accessibility lawsuits

As we work hard to bring organizations up to speed about web accessibility, there's one question we often get asked. That is, 'do organizations actually get sued?'

You'll have noticed that some web accessibility laws place a legal obligation on public sector bodies only. Others don't mention web accessibility specifically, but do prohibit discrimination. Despite this, **web accessibility lawsuits do happen across all sectors**.

A few examples include:

- **Nike** who faced legal action in 2017 for their websites nike.com and converse.com. This was because their websites were deemed inaccessible to visually impaired users
- **Beyonce Knowles (Park Entertainment)** faced a class-action lawsuit in 2019. A few reasons included that beyonce.com failed to provide alt text for images and had inaccessible drop-down menus.
- **Domino's Pizza** was sued by a blind user in 2019. That's because they were unable to order from the Domino's website and app despite using a screen reader.

Today it's estimated that almost 10 lawsuits are filed against inaccessible websites every business day.

As I'm sure you'll agree, facing legal action isn't great for a brand's image or reputation. Whether or not you're in an area that has web accessibility laws in place, it's a good idea to get ahead of what's required. Not only for your brand, but because it's the right thing to do.

Create equal experiences for all. Make your web content more accessible

In life we should all be rooting for equal experiences for everyone. As a Marketer, you can have a huge impact in the digital space.

So web accessibility is something we encourage you to strive for. Make it a priority to help every person feel included, important and valued online.

To help, here's some more resources around digital accessibility.

Creating accessible content

Learn how to create accessible content, and make sure all your online content is easy to access and understand.

Discover more

Accessible user experience & design

Discover what an accessible user experience looks like. Uncover how to design for accessibility and inclusion.

Explore more

View the complete guide

View our full accessibility guide. We've lots more areas of digital accessibility for you to explore.

View the full guide

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