

This fact sheet gives an outline of some recent research findings and developments in website accessibility and sources of further information and support. **Website Accessibility** can be defined as the practice of making websites usable to all those who desire to use them. At present the majority of websites either make it difficult or impossible for millions of potential users to take advantage of their sites.

For example, someone with a visual impairment may require textual information as an alternative to a picture. While another person who has difficulty controlling a mouse would prefer a larger section to click on a link. Alternatively someone may require sign language with a video or a means to navigate the website...etc

Sections of society with sensory, mobility and learning impairments are usually overlooked in the planning and development of websites.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_accessibility

Ability Net, an organisation which provides information about computer technology, checked ten charity websites for accessibility. Only one, Cancer Research UK, scored their minimum of 3 stars for accessibility. For more information and brief details of their criteria, visit the Ability Net website. The Ability Net helpline can be contacted on **0800 269 545** or **01926 312847**, email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk. Their website www.abilitynet.co.uk contains useful information on making information technology accessible to disabled people.

The former Disability Rights Commission (DRC) launched a formal investigation into 1000 websites, of which over 80% were virtually impossible for disabled people to use. They issued a stern warning that organisations will face legal action under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the threat of unlimited compensation payments if they fail to make websites accessible for disabled people.

For more information:-

www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-accessibility/uk-website-legal-requirements.shtml

The local government Society of IT Management (Socitm) published a report in May 2008 on website accessibility which included the five most common accessibility errors. These were:

1. No alternative text for images
2. The inappropriate use of JavaScript
3. Errors in simple data tables
4. Errors in complex data tables
5. Use of features with no accessible alternatives

Legal Requirements

It is a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act that websites should be accessible to disabled people if goods and services are offered over the Internet. Websites may also be covered under the employment provisions of the Act if they are used to advertise job vacancies.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and historical development

Due to the lack of political leadership **The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)** which is affiliated with the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** and other organisations drew up a list of guidelines to make the web more accessible.

As part of this work the WAI published the first version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) in 1999. These were accepted as the definitive set of international guidelines used for building accessible websites. All other guidelines and standards tend to originate from these.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 1 (WCAG1)

The guidelines originally put in place were WCAG1. These comprised of 65 checkpoints broken down into three conformance levels, priority one (A), two (AA) and three (AAA):

- **A** - The most basic standard. Websites **must** comply with all of the priority one checkpoints to achieve this standard.
- **AA** - A higher standard than A. Websites must comply with all of the priority one and two checkpoints to achieve this standard. A Web content developer **should** satisfy this checkpoint. This is EU recommended.
- **AAA** - A high standard of accessibility. Websites must comply with all priority one, two and three checkpoints to achieve this standard. A Web content developer **may** address this checkpoint.

Read about the Web Accessibility Content Guidelines version 1 here:-

www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/full-checklist.html

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines WCAG 1.0. In recent years, these have been widely accepted as the definitive guidelines on how to create accessible websites. The principles and objectives of WCAG 1.0 still stand, however due to the short-lived nature of technology many of the recommendations became meaningless after a short period. W3C published corrections for, and extensions to, the WCAG1.0 which is known as WCAG Samurai in February 2008. On 11 December 2008, the WAI released the WCAG 2.0 as a Recommendation. WCAG 2.0 aims to be up to date and more technology neutral. A technology-neutral approach does state preferred software but instead recommends software applications to be chosen based on a number of other characteristics, such as cost, reliability, security, availability of

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www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

support, etc.

For further information these websites may be helpful:-

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag20.php>

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/from10/websites.html>

The new guidelines focus on four fundamental principles:

- **Perceivable** - all content must be perceivable, ie provide text for non-text content.
- **Operable** - interface elements in the content must be **operable**, i.e. access via a keyboard or keyboard interface.
- **Understandable** - content and controls must be **understandable**, i.e. text should not be ambiguous.
- **Robust** - content must be **robust** enough to work with current and future technologies, i.e. will work with old, new and future technology.

For further information:-

www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/1024-New-Accessibility-Guidelines-Part-II-Operability

WCAG 2.0 explains how content can become a problem, rather than dictating how the content should be presented. Providing an accessible website does not mean excluding rich media, such as Flash or JavaScript/AJAX; nor does it mean eliminating all traces of video, audio, or graphic content from your site. Rather, accessibility is about implementing these resources in such a manner that the maximum number of users can take advantage of them.

The DRC later sponsored the British Standards Institution (BSI) to develop new good practice guidance on commissioning accessible websites. This includes info on how disabled people use websites, accessibility policies, testing, auditing, contracting, upholding and managing existing WC3 specifications, and involving disabled people in website development. It is called the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 78. One electronic copy of the guidance is available free. This is available from Equality and Human Rights Commission's website:

For further information:-

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/pas78_word.doc

Otherwise, PAS costs £30, is available in different formats and can be ordered from BSI Customer Services on **020 8996 9001** or e-mail: orders@bsi-global.com.

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PAS 78 is now being developed into a full British Standard, number BS8878. An umbrella specification for website standards, including references to usability and accessibility standards, has been published by the British Standards Institution. The Publicly Available Specification 124, covers 11 categories of website quality, of which accessibility and usability are two. The new British Standard for web accessibility BS 8878 Web Accessibility should be published late 2009.

“BS 8878 has been designed to introduce accessibility, usability and user experience for disabled people to non-technical professionals, some of whom may be completely new to this subject. It gives guidance on process, rather than on technical and design issues, including recommendations for:

- Involving disabled people in the development process and using automated tools to assist with accessibility testing
- The management of the guidance and process for upholding existing accessibility guidelines and specifications.”

For further information:-

<http://www.bsigroup.com/en/Standards-and-Publications/How-we-can-help-you/Consumers/Accessibilty-day/BS-8878-form/Thank-you/>

The Advantages of an Accessible Website

- More users visit your site
- Making business's goods and services accessible to disabled people increases income and encourages repeat business – a US survey found that for every \$1 spent there was an overall return of \$30
- Less website crashes or slowdown and the need for higher bandwidth as website accessibility usually means a well designed code.
- Move up Internet search engines.
- Positive PR as your company is satisfying its users
- Easier management for employees to use the website can result in higher productivity and less mistakes.
- And less chance of having legal action taken against you.

Further good practice information is available online at
www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

Prominent Court cases

The Sydney Olympics organising committee were sued by a visually impaired person in Australia 2000 over an inaccessible website. And in New York, Ramada.com and Priceline.com were also successfully sued for inaccessible websites.

For further information:-

<http://www.afmss.co.uk/accessibility.htm>

In 2006 Target.com agreed to pay £6 million dollars. “The lawsuit alleged that Target had not made the minimum changes necessary to its Web site to make the site compatible with screen access technology and to allow blind users to access the site to purchase products, redeem gift cards, find Target stores, and perform other functions available to sighted customers.”

For further information:-

http://www.dralegal.org/cases/private_business/nfb_v_target.php

For more guidance and advice on website accessibility and on ways to remove barriers for website users, visit the Website Accessibility Initiative website at:

www.w3.org/WAI

The E-access Bulletin is an excellent source of information on developments and debates in the field of website accessibility. Visit the website below to subscribe to the regular bulletin or look at past copies:

www.headstar.com/eab/

For more information, contact the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre on:

Tel: **0161 273 5412**

Answerphone Text Phone: **0161 273 5727**

Email: advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk.

Please tell us about any access requirements you require when you get in touch, and share with us any good and bad experiences you have of websites you have used or attempted to use.