

Accessibility: Is your website causing you to loose potential clients?

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Accessibility: Is your website causing you to loose potential clients?

By Leslie Durand

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With millions of people going online everyday the potential for your business is almost unimaginable! However, the great challenge is creating an environment that is positive, effective, and accessible to all of your potential clients.

No two people see everything exactly the same way. In addition to our own paradigms that shape how we interpret things presented to us, there are also very real obstacles that affect many people surfing the web. By removing barriers to accessibility and addressing these obstacles you open the door to new business and greater success.

"The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect." – Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director (Web Accessibility Initiative)

The most common obstacles facing many individuals are auditory and visual. This includes people with various levels of hearing, language barriers, color blindness, visual perception, level of sight, and complete loss of sight. Any of these challenges can render your site potentially useless to a visitor and potential client who may simply be unable to distinguish the color variation of your text on your background.

In the United States a new Bill has been proposed to legislate the web and enforce handicap accessibility standards for all government related websites. While there is currently no policy in place for the private sector, the issue has provided insight and opportunity for every business to be more accessible.

Some basic steps you can take to open your site to potential clients:

1) Make sure all of your relevant and core content is in text-based format. For example: if you have power statements as graphics embedded in your content they will not be readable by a speech

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synthesizer (a tool used by people to turn written content into an auditory format).

2) Make sure your images have alt tags that say what they are. If someone is using a Braille display to view the web, untagged images show up as a large blank space that could easily be interpreted as the end of the content.

3) Try changing your setting to quickly view your site in black and white. This is an option that people with color blindness in any degree often use so they can avoid missing valuable content. Check to see if your color palette allows text and hyperlinks to still be clear and readable.

New technology is bringing more and more people online everyday. Is your site ready and open to everyone?

Have a successful day!

Leslie Durand

Web Accessibility Myths

By Trenton Moss

With more and more countries around the world passing laws about blind and disabled access to the Internet (including the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK), web accessibility has been thrown into the spotlight of the online community. This article attempts to put a stop to the misinformation that has been thrown around and tell you the truth behind web accessibility.

1. Creating a text-only equivalent is sufficient

Webcredible Handbook

Creating a separate text-only equivalent can lead to a number of problems: A text-only version is not necessarily accessible. Two versions of the same website represents a huge time and money investment for you. Your primary site may not be accessible to many users. An 'extra' accessible website for blind and disabled users can be one more way to make them feel marginalised from mainstream society.

Web accessibility isn't just about blind and disabled Internet users being able to use your site – it's about everyone being able to access it successfully. It really doesn't have to take very much time or money to make your website accessible.

2. It's complicated and expensive to make my website accessible

To develop an accessible website from scratch will cost virtually the same as to develop a website that isn't accessible. A very large, highly inaccessible website may take a bit more time and money to fix up, although the basic layout and design usually need not change.

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Web accessibility is not complicated and anyone with basic web design skills can easily implement it.

3. Accessible and attractive web design can't go together

Many advocates of web accessibility tend to have rather dull, unattractive websites. This is unfortunate, as web accessibility need not affect the design of the website in any way whatsoever. To fully dispel this myth, have a look at the CSS Zen Garden ([http://www.zen-garden.com](#))

) – a beautiful website

offering 100% accessibility.

4. Accessible websites stifle creativity

Web accessibility actually places very few restrictions on website design. In fact, as with regular websites, you're only really limited by your imagination when creating accessible websites. Have a look at the CSS Zen Garden ([http://www.zen-garden.com](#))

) to see for yourself that accessibility doesn't

have to affect creativity in any way.

5. My site visitors don't have a problem accessing my website

Not necessarily. See Benefits of an accessible website – part 1 ([http://www.zen-garden.com](#))

) to see just how many Internet users you may be excluding from your site. You can be sure

that with 35 million websites to choose from it's unlikely that a site visitor prevented from accessing your website is going to waste his time contacting you to ask you to fix the problem.

6. Web accessibility places restrictions on the web page design

Not at all. As with regular websites, you're only limited by your imagination when creating accessible websites. Text size can be as large or as small you like (provided it's resizable), you can use any colour scheme you like (provided colour isn't the only way you differentiate information) and you can use as many images as you like (provided an alternative description is provided).

These accessibility provisos mostly happen behind the scenes and don't affect the presentation of the website.

7. Blind and disabled people don't use the Internet

On the contrary, blind and disabled people benefit from the Internet perhaps more than anyone else.

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For example, visually impaired people have to phone up a supermarket when they want to go shopping to inform them of their arrival. When they get there, a store assistant will accompany them around the store. Through accessible websites blind people can now shop at home, and in their own time.

Conclusion

Web accessibility isn't brain science. It's not just about disabled users being able to access your website – it's about everyone being able to access your website, including people using handheld devices, WebTV and in-car browsers. Any web developer with basic HTML and CSS design knowledge, and a bit of time on their hands, can easily learn and implement web accessibility.

Trenton Moss is crazy about web accessibility and usability – so crazy that he went and started his own web accessibility and usability consultancy (Webcredible –

) to help make

the Internet a better place for everyone.

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