

In a nutshell guide to commissioning an accessible website.

The purpose of this document is to assist UK businesses, charities and individuals alike raise the standards of the web, by commissioning an accessible website.

Ok so you've read about your commercial advantage, your legal obligations, you've decided you'd like to be morally great and commission a website which is deemed to be accessible.

December 2010 the UK published BS 8878 Web accessibility Code of Practice is the first British Standard to address the growing challenge of digital inclusion. Should you like, you could purchase this guidance for £50 - £100 depending on your status.

(<http://shop.bsigroup.com/en/ProductDetail/?pid=00000000030180388>)

However should you agree with me and think that such guidance should be readily available free of charge, for the good of all, or you do not have the luxury of the resources recommended in this guidance... Then I'm providing a short, sweet, 'what it comes down to' guide of what you should be asking your website developer for.

These recommendations will be practical and obtainable for most businesses, individuals and charities.

So if you are still interested here's what to do.

Ask your website developer to meet a set of recognised accessibility standards, and including some basic accessibility guidance in your website training sessions. We would also recommend putting in place a checking mechanism to ensure you're getting what you are paying for. It's that simple!

The website accessibility standards we purpose you use, are the W3C Website Content Accessibility Standards 2.0, (<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20>). These standards have become for all intents and purposes 'the standard' used worldwide for the creation of accessible websites.

There are 3 levels : Conformance levels A (basic), AA (recommended) and AAA (highest)

Let's not forget that every one improvement you make to your website is not only improving the quality of your site but the internet too. Let's do what we can... let's aim high but don't beat yourself up if you come across a few tough decisions which drop some criteria to a lower conformance level. Providing you meet the minimum level A, across the board, your website is on the right road. You can also revisit the site in a years time with further improvements and solutions?

Having said that, it is highly recommended that charities meet a minimum Double-AA conformance level .

You will need to inform your website developer of the conformance level you wish to obtain.

What technical talk do you put in your commissioning document?

All you need to do is to ask your website developer or put in your tendering specification document that you require your new website to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 with the conformance level you would like to be met, for example: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 conformance level AA.

You will also want to ensure W3C's CSS and XHTML web standards are met. You may like to request the use of their validation logo's to be displayed on your website. These logo's will be linked to the W3C's CSS and XHTML validation tools, hence if clicked will provide a live report.

You may want to define which website browsers you would like your website to work on... and the fact that it should be tested to be working on both Mac's and PC's.

A suitable specification could be:

Windows Operating Systems

- Internet Explorer 6+
- Firefox 3+
- Google Chrome 7+

Apple Macintosh Operating Systems

- Internet Explorer 6+
- Firefox 3+
- Safari
- Google Chrome 7+

Please be aware that the inclusion of Internet Explorer 6 in your specification should be thought about carefully.

Many website developers no longer support IE6 with good reason. It was and is a difficult browser to satisfy and can add many hours to a development project.

4.4% of the international market still uses IE6.

(December 2010. http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_explorer.asp)

One prime example of a good reason to support IE6 is that it is still integral to some large institutions, which are proving slow to upgrade.

With the ever growing market in hand-held mobile devices you may decide to include requirements for devices such as mobiles, palms and pocket PC's.

A website which is designed to comply with standards is likely to be accessible to the hand held market, however due to the screen size on such devices a different design specifically targeting this market would be more user friendly.

Let's not forget to ask your website developer to include a little accessibility training. It's your team be it you alone or an office of web editors that will, after all, be presenting your information to the world.

How do you know if your finished site is accessible?

The truth of the matter is that there is no online tool which will automatically test your new site and give you the thumbs up or down. Much of the criteria involves a manual testing process. Some points are also considered to be subjective views.

Having said that we are going to include a list of useful tools (please note these are not always 100% accurate either!) but may provide an indication of whether accessibility work has been taken seriously on your website.

<http://wave.webaim.org>

<http://validator.w3.org>

<http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator>

<http://juicystudio.com/services/luminositycontrastratio.php>

Toolbars:

IE on windows only: <http://www.paciellogroup.com/resources/wat-ie-about.html>

Mozilla Firefox: <http://wave.webaim.org/toolbar>

Paid for testing services do provide a higher level of assurance.

We offer an expert accessibility evaluation for £70.00. This involves a brief once over of your new website reporting on any obvious failures found.

A more robust full accessibility audit may be commissioned with a number of organisations:

<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/webaudits>

http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/webaccessibility/services/siteaudits/Pages/site_audits.aspx

We also offer full website accessibility audits starting at £300.



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