
The Disability 50 Report
Accessibility of Fifty Leading
Disability Web Sites

Introduction

Web accessibility is increasingly being recognised as a core component of responsible business strategy. (see Appendix 2 - Business case for Web Accessibility)

As part of our website redesign, Ethical Media decided to perform an investigation of web accessibility by analysing 50 leading disability websites.

The research for this report was carried out between January and March 2004 and was conducted solely by Ethical Media without any external influence or commercial sponsorship of any kind. No beneficial or prejudicial preference was applied to any of the websites tested.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Technical Director
Ethical Media

keith@ethicalmedia.com
0207 833 8825

Foreword

In December, Ethical Media decided to refresh and redesign our company website. In addition, to the typical considerations given to website design and development, we decided to make sure our site was accessible to as many users as possible. This was driven by our desire to incorporate the latest ideas in accessibility derived from a benchmarking study of current good practice.

Throughout our research for existing examples of good practice, we analysed a selection of leading disability websites against the accessibility standards that have been set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) the global and industry-led standards body for the web.

In our benchmarking study we identified some impressive examples of good practice, notably AbilityNet www.abilitynet.org.uk and the British Council for Disabled People - www.bcodp.org.uk/. However, we were surprised to find that the majority of sites reviewed rated relatively low regarding compliance to existing available standards on website accessibility.

This report is intended to raise awareness of the exciting challenges we all face in demonstrating how accessibility can and should be an integrated part of website design and development.

We believe that this is the moment to grasp the opportunity not only to dramatically improve technical compliance, but also to explore how good visual design and innovative use of technology can be harnessed in ways that make sure websites provide an engaging, enjoyable and productive experience for all users.

Key Findings

Our analysis of the websites for 50 leading disability websites found that:

A Rating - "Compulsory"

58% failed to achieve the compulsory compliance level as set forth by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), as stated in the following quote "...one or more groups will find it impossible to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint is a basic requirement for some groups to be able to use Web documents."

AA Rating - "Important"

86% failed to achieve a compliance level which the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) states is important, "...one or more groups will find it difficult to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will remove significant barriers to accessing Web documents."

AAA Rating - "Desirable"

92% failed to achieve a compliance level which the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) states is advisable?, "...one or more groups will find it somewhat difficult to access information in the document. Satisfying this checkpoint will improve access to Web documents"

Adherence to Web Standards

84% failed to express and stick to defined web standards for their web pages. As the web standards project states "...Designing and building with these standards simplifies and lowers the cost of production, while delivering sites that are accessible to more people and more types of Internet devices. Sites developed along these lines will continue to function correctly as traditional desktop browsers evolve, and as new Internet devices come to market."

WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)

www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/

Web Standards Project

www.webstandards.org/about/

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)

www.w3.org/

Good Practice

Our research found two exemplary websites passing all technical accessibility checks with clear expression and adherence to existing web standards:

AbilityNet

www.abilitynet.org.uk

What we particularly liked about their website was:

- A) Clear navigation, easy to find out who they are, what they do and get in touch.
- B) Customisable user preferences and a help section on how to use the website
- C) Friendly web addresses, which can be easily bookmarked and memorised

British Council for Disabled People

www.bcodp.org.uk

What we particularly liked about their website was:

- A) Information easy to find, important information is close to hand
- B) Clear and good use of headings to structure the pages
- C) A wide range of content and opportunities presented clearly and consistently.

Our research covered a number of issues including adherence to web standards. While these two sites did not make our 'top two' list because of that, they did pass all the technical accessibility checks:

Disability Rights Commission (DRC)

www.drc-gb.org

Action for Blind People

www.afbp.org

Research

Selection of sample

We selected the 50 websites on the basis of their prominence in Google UK internet searches and by using the Yahoo Directory. We looked at the main home pages of each of the websites.

Selection of tools

We used the Bobby validation tool from Watchfire (<http://bobby.watchfire.com>) for carrying out automated checks in combination with manual checks on WCAG checkpoints.

We also used the W3C online validator to check the homepages of the websites for compliance with existing web standards for accessibility such as HTML and XHTML. (<http://validator.w3.org/>)

General comments

We understand and acknowledge that accessibility is concerned with only the most basic form of usability, as if you can't access something you simply can't use it.

It is possible for technically accessible websites to be highly unusable due for example to the nature of the content and visual layout of the navigation, which may be difficult for users to understand. Usability is not covered in full by the WCAG, as those guidelines are only focused on how documents should be made available to provide for basic accessibility to all users.

It is also possible for websites to be technically inaccessible, but still remain largely usable if the inaccessible features are in practice relatively minor or unobtrusive.

However, the results from checking on technical accessibility compliance for the leading 50 disability websites have been clear and unambiguous.

The above points do suggest that more advanced accessibility and usability testing for the organisations concerned would be advantageous in gaining a more comprehensive overview of the usability of their websites; as well as improving on basic compliance with existing web and accessibility standards.

Conclusion

Nomensa have recently released a report into the accessibility of the top FTSE 100 companies www.nomensa.com/resources/research/ftse_report.html

From the perspective of the disability sector, criticism of commercial organisations and their ignorance of web accessibility needs to be firmly balanced with a more rigorous adoption and promotion of web accessibility for disability related websites.

The results from the Ethical Media disability report provide an enlightening insight into the accessibility standards of leading disability web sites, suggesting a gap between the rhetoric and reality of web accessibility.

It is hoped that the report acts as a catalyst for increasing awareness of web accessibility within the disability sector and that the following organisations will address any outstanding accessibility issues in order to improve compliance, commerce and general usability for all who visit.

Appendix 1

Disability Websites

Ability	www.ability.org.uk
AbilityNet	www.abilitynet.co.uk
Action for Blind People	www.afbp.org
British Council of Disabled People	www.bcodp.org.uk
British Deaf Association	www.britishdeafassociation.org.uk
British Dyslexia Association	www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk
British Wheelchair Sports Federation	www.bwsf.org.uk
Calibre Cassette Library For Blind & Print	www.calibre.org.uk
DDA Government Page	www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm
DeafBlind UK	www.deafblind.org.uk
DELTA	www.deafeducation.org.uk
Disability Sport England	www.disabilitysport.org.uk
Dept. of Work & Pensions - Disability Home Page	www.disability.gov.uk
DFES	www.dfes.gov.uk
Dial UK	www.dialuk.org.uk
Disability Equality in Education	www.diseed.org.uk
Disabled Living Foundation	www.dlf.org.uk
Disabled Persons Railcard	www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee	www.dptac.gov.uk
Disability Rights Commission	www.drc-gb.org
Disability Information Services (DISS)	www.diss.org.uk
Disability Now	www.disabilitynow.org.uk
Disability UK	www.disabilityuk.com
Disability View	www.disabilityview.co.uk
Employers Forum on Disability	www.employers-forum.co.uk
Employment Opportunites for People With Disabilities	www.opportunities.org.uk
Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD)	www.glad.org.uk
Guide Dogs for the Blind	www.guidedogs.com
Hearing Concern	www.hearingconcern.org.uk
Job Centre Plus	www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
John Grooms	www.johngrooms.org.uk
Learning Disabilities UK	www.learningdisabilitiesuk.org.uk
Leonard Cheshire	www.leonard-cheshire.org
Mencap	www.mencap.org.uk
Mind	www.mind.org.uk
National Autistic Society	www.nas.org.uk
National Disability Arts Forum	www.ndaf.org.uk
National Federation of the Blind of the UK	www.nfbuk.org
National Library for the Blind	www.nlb-online.org
Paradigm UK	www.paradigm-uk.org
Queen Elizabeth's Foundation	www.qefd.org
Radar The Disability Network	www.radar.org.uk
RNIB	www.rnib.org.uk
RNID	www.rnid.org.uk
SCOPE	www.scope.org.uk
SENSE	www.sense.org.uk
SKILL	www.skill.org.uk
UK Disability Forum for European Affairs	www.ukdisabilityforum.org.uk
UK Online	www.ukonline.gov.uk
yourable.com	www.yourable.com

Appendix 2

Business Case for Web Accessibility

Ethical Media believes it's time business woke up to the potential of inclusivity in discovering new markets whilst improving the social value of their brands.

Outside of any moral imperatives, there are three key components of the business case for accessibility.

Legal Compliance

"Nothing concentrates the mind like a hanging"
-Sam Johnson

This is all about reducing risk and exposure to potentially costly lawsuits. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is based on the idea of making "Reasonable Adjustment" which depends upon the size and purposes of the enterprise and the nature of its likely customers/users. Because digital technology is rapidly developing and quintessentially 'plastic', the idea of compliance cannot be static. As the first high profile cases pass through the courts, threats are being acted on and there is simply no time to lose in making sure you make these reasonable adjustments

Hidden Markets

"There's gold in them there hills" -Anon

It is not difficult to see that if your products and services are not available to the following groups, then you are losing out on a potentially large market.

The UK Government's standard assessment of Internet exclusion is broken down into three categories which are:

- Disabled - 8-9 million
- Socially Excluded - 10.4 million
- Untapped Mainstream - 7.4 million (*1)

A breakdown of disability types includes:

- Cognitive/learning 20%
- Physical 14%
- Hearing 9%
- Visual 7%

Brand & Reputation

"What goes around, comes around" - Anon

The brand case for accessibility is strong. People are increasingly drawn to and stick with brands, which demonstrate social and environmental values, including openness, honesty and integrity.

From the Co-operative Banks Ethical Purchasing Index 2002:

- The EPI now stands at 125, an increase of 10 points over last year (1999 is the baseline year of 100)
- Sales in the ethical marketplace for the basket of goods measured grew by 19% in 2001
- Market share of our basket of goods grew at a rate of 9% in 2001
- The food category, including products such as organics and fair trade, saw a rise in sales of 24%
- Green mortgages is also a rising star - with market share having grown by 56%
- With banking and investment included, the total value to the UK economy of the goods measured was £13.9 billion in 2001

Companies that take a lead on issues such as accessibility, gain competitive advantage through delivering on the moral expectations of a growing proportion of modern consumers.

Appendix 3

Ethical Media Accessibility Services

We offer a wide range of accessibility services:
www.ethicalmedia.com/services/technology/accessibility/

- Workshops to introduce and discuss the concepts of usability and accessible design, scoping and helping develop action plans.
- Website audits with follow up presentation workshop, providing you with a detailed report on all aspects of the accessibility of your websites
- Regular reviews of your websites to ensure ongoing compliance
- Accessibility training and empowerment workshops with designers and information workers on the opportunities and challenges of accessible web design, particular around ensuring implementation and take up of audit reports.
- Pan-disability user testing in partnership with a leading UK university. This service provides you with a rigorous analysis of the usability of your website as well as accessibility issues.
- Research, design and development services including audiovisual production and game design.
- Web over phone solutions in partnership with phoneanything.com bringing web access within the reach of anyone with a standard phone.

For more information about anything you've read
in this brochure or just to have a chat, please
contact us at:

T 020 7833 8825

F 0870 131 6651

Ethical Media
5 Torrens Street
London EC1V 1NQ

www.ethicalmedia.com
info@ethicalmedia.com

EthicalMedia™

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REGISTERED IN ENGLAND AND WALES AS COMPANY NO: 3811581
REGISTERED OFFICE: SPURLING CANNON LTD, 194 CANTERBURY ROAD,
BIRCHINGTON, KENT, CT7 9AQ. VAT NO: GB740223573