ADA ACCESSIBLE WEBSITES

Does your organization's website contain information that's important for the public, your customers or your team? If so, it's important to make sure your website can serve everyone—or you may find yourself in legal, financial or reputational trouble.

This article discusses why it's important for community-focused organizations like public entities, schools, and even water treatment facilities to have an ADA accessible website—and 4 tips on how to do it.

WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY

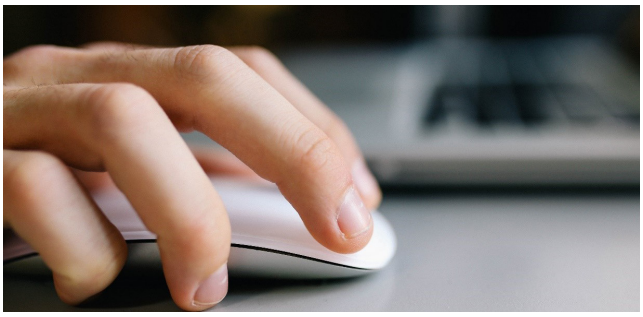
THE LAW, THE REQUIREMENTS AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

From ramps in your building to Braille on your signs—you've likely already taken some actions to meet ADA standards. But did you know that this law also includes a mandate that the websites of certain entities must meet compliance standards in order to offer reasonable accessibility to people with disabilities?

This mandate applies to any organization with at least 15 full-time employees that operates for 20 or more weeks and those that are considered a public accommodation (which is generally defined as publicly or privately-owned facilities or services that are used by the public at large).

This means that most community-focused organizations are required to have ADA compliant websites—but they may not be aware or don't completely understand what that means. And, unfortunately, it can be a bit confusing because there aren't official rules from the ADA at this time that are specific to website design and features.



Let's break down the basics and best practices—starting with what it means to have a website that offers "reasonable accessibility" to people with disabilities. According to *Business News Daily*, your website should be accessible to blind users, deaf users and those who must navigate by voice, screen readers or other assistive technologies. Here are a few resources and tips to help you achieve just that.

4 TIPS TO HELP YOU EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE,
MAKE CHANGES TO BETTER SERVE ALL CITIZENS AND
HELP PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION:

1. EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT SITE.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) offer resources to help solve problems that persons with disabilities may have while browsing a website. In their most-recent guidelines, *Principles of WCAG 2.0*, encourage website creators to use the "POUR" method to ensure websites are:

- Perceivable - Perceive your content and offer alternatives (like audio)
- Operable - Operate your website and offer alternatives (like utilizing voice control rather than a mouse)
- Understandable - Understand your content (Do you have clear terms and simple instructions?)
- Robust - A robust website is one that third-party technology (like web browsers and screen readers) can rely on.

2. LEARN BEST PRACTICES.

While the ADA doesn't have cut and dry rules for compliance—they do offer some best practices. Here are a few of their current tips:

- In general, keep your website as simple and clean as possible—and offer as many alternatives as you can. For example:
    - Avoid distracting colors and fonts
    - Use titles, context and heading structures to help users navigate pages
    - Include a "skip navigation" link
    - Avoid blinking, flashing or other distracting features—and allow those features to be stopped
    - Provide a static copy of pages that are auto-refreshing (or that require a timed-response)
- If your website has images, videos or sound:
    - Add an HTML alt tag or "alternative description" to every image to help those with a vision disability understand what's being shown.
    - Provide audio descriptions of images and text captions of audio in your videos.
    - Avoid sound and video features that automatically play.
    - Use a visual notification and transcripts with clear controls for all features (like stop, play and mute).
- If there are forms and downloadable documents on your website:
    - Text-based formats are most compatible with assistive technologies—so provide documents and forms in a text-based format (like in HTML in addition to your PDFs) and include HTML labels for individual form fields to give the information needed to complete and submit forms.

3. GET SOME ASSISTANCE.

Talk with the person or service who maintains your website (this may already be included in your service agreement), consult with your legal counsel and look into options to evaluate and improve the accessibility of your current website (some are even free).

4. STAY UP-TO-DATE.

We all know that technology changes rapidly—so it's important to continually evaluate your site for the latest best practices and make updates.

As an emergency responder, public servant, educator, religious leader or caregiver—you have a passion to help others. So, while this task may seem daunting, just remember—this is just another step to help your organization do just that and further instill community communication and trust.

We thank you for all that you do to help your community thrive—whether it's online, on the front lines, in a townhall, in a classroom, on a church pew or in a clients' home. You make a difference.

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