



Milestone

Website Accessibility

Changing how you think about website accessibility conformity

Too often website owners think of conformity to the ADA guidelines as a burden. While it is true that having accessibility as a part of your website will minimize the risk of lawsuits, the reality is that by not thinking about impaired customers, you may be alienating a significant number of potential buyers.

40

Million Americans
have a disability

Source: **US census**

2200+

ADA lawsuits were filed in
2019, 7% of them against
hospitality sites

Source: **Jacksonlewis.com**

What is ADA?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a set of laws enacted by the US Congress to provide for equal access for impaired people across a broad range of industries and practices. Over 40,000,000 Americans are affected by some form of disability – that’s more people than there are the state of California. ADA was designed to make their life a little easier.

As part of the ADA, the law mandated that websites should abide by a minimum set of best practices to ensure that users with impairments would have equal access to the world-wide web. The challenge with ADA conformity, is that Congress never set any guidelines for what would be acceptable for websites “conforming” to ADA laws.

Over the years, as the legal system has had to deal with lawsuits related to accessibility, courts have leveraged the guidelines established by the world-wide web consortium, otherwise known as the W3C, as guidelines by which to interpret the accessibility of specific sites. The W3C has issued a set of guidelines, known as the WCAG in three distinct levels: A, AA and AAA guidelines. The court system has largely held that websites must meet level A and AA guidelines to be considered “conforming.”

Why does accessibility matter?

The default answer, of course, is legal protection. Over the past few years a series of well publicized lawsuits have been brought against website owners, particularly small to mid-sized businesses often resulting in awards in the tens of thousands of dollars. In fact, 2019 saw over 2,235 businesses sued for website accessibility violations, with over 157 of those being in the hospitality space. While protecting your business from ADA lawsuits is a very real and tangible reason to ensure your website is conforming, there are more important reasons. In fact, by not conforming to accessibility guidelines and laws, you are alienating the estimated 20% of US consumers who have some form of disability. In fact, in the US alone, there are 40.6 million people with some form of physical disability.

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There are four primary areas of impact to your website when it comes to accessibility



Tech

Accessibility is about far more than how your website is “designed,” you must also consider your CMS software

40 Million Americans suffer from disability

How accessibility impacts your site

Having established that having a website that conforms to accessibility requirements is a good business proposition, what exactly do you need to consider before making your site conforming?

Accessibility for websites focuses on four areas:

Visual

How does the website work when visually impaired visitors arrive? Is it screen-reader friendly? Are there elements of the site that are only accessible with a mouse and do not have keyboard access?

Auditory

Auditory conformity is largely focused on the interaction of audio and the user. More specifically, issues addressed are related to any video that is presented and whether it provides closed captioning.

Tactile

Can users access your website without relying on a mouse? Is keyboard navigation of all items on your site possible (including carousels)?

Cognitive

Cognitive conformity deals with issues around color, contrast and the ability for users who may have learning or interpretive impairments.

Keys to conformity

There are three key considerations to ensuring that your website becomes fully accessible: Technology, process, and design. On the technology front, the most important question is about your Content Management System (CMS). Is your CMS capable of creating accessible websites? Do you have alert-systems in place in the CMS that will flag when accessibility issues are introduced in your site?

When you consider that 50% of disabled people in the US use the Internet every day, the need for conformity quickly becomes a matter of good business, not just legal.

Accessibility is not a “do it and forget it” approach; modern websites are constantly evolving, constantly changing, and being updated, it’s critical to have a CMS that can not only create accessible content but is also able to dynamically warn you when you have problems in your website.



Process

Do you have an efficient process for designing and maintaining your conformity?

With the constant evolution of the ADA laws and website updates, having an accessible-friendly publishing process is also critical. If your website development is done in-house, you need to ensure that planning and testing for accessibility becomes a core part of your process. If you work with an agency or a third-party vendor, it's critical that you know the vendor's processes for updating and monitoring your website for accessibility issues.

Finally, from a design perspective, an accessible design must consider a full set of subtleties and nuances that might escape the untrained eye. Once again, it's critical to ensure that your in-house designers or agency designers understand the ADA guidelines and have had experience dealing with accessible design

Examples of website accessibility requirements

To understand the complexities of maintaining an accessible website, consider a couple of quick examples of some of the subtle changes that must be made to a traditional website:

- **Skip to content**

Accessible websites must provide a means for a user to quickly "skip" non-screen-reader friendly content (like hero images) and jump to the text part of your website.

- **Manual carousel control**

Website carousels may be popular and fashionable, but they can create problems for users who have disabilities. Accessible carousels must be manually controlled and avoid excessive use of animations.

- **Full keyboard control**

How much of your website can be controlled and used with just a keyboard? Having full access to all content without having to rely on a mouse is a critical part of an accessible website.

- **Screen reader friendliness**

Is your website friendly to people with visual disabilities? Is your content screen-reader friendly? This includes being able to read all rich media such as images, videos, and PDFs.

- **Calls to actions**

Are your calls-to-action buttons clear in the action the user will take? Using descriptive phrases as your links rather than generic text such as "Click Here..." help visually impaired users understand your site content.



Learn more about ADA

[Click this link](#) to learn more about ADA conformance

- **Field label problems**

Finally, consider something as simple and, seemingly, straight-forward as a form on your website. While placing field labels within the field may provide a “unique” look, it often makes the form unreadable for screen readers.

How to make your PDFs conform and avoid legal action

One option is to convert your PDF content into regular html. Another option is to follow a 20-step process that Adobe has specified which can be done using a paid version of Adobe Acrobat. Test it for accessibility, and if it is accessible, re-upload it to the site. Milestone can scan your site for **ADA compliance** violations and assist you in resolving all non-conforming elements, including PDFs.

Getting certified

Accessible website certification in the field of website design is a tricky word. There is no such thing as a “guarantee” that having an accessible website will provide 100% protection from lawsuits. It does, however, significantly lower your risk. While you can self-certify for website accessibility. Milestone would regularly scan your website for conformity, and provides a record to communicate the site’s conformity to the client.

Summary

The issue of website accessibility is not new and is not likely to go away any time soon. Any consumer-facing business, but especially location-based businesses like hospitality, retail, or financial-services businesses, should make accessibility a core part of their business strategy and of their website development process. Not having an accessibility as a central goal of your website strategy, leaves money on the table, and sends the wrong signal to your client-base.

To learn more about Milestone, visit us at: www.milestoneinternet.com or call us at (408) 200-2211.

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