Accessibility Benefits Everyone

As enrollment increases and technology becomes integral to the higher education experience, institutions rely on their websites more than ever. Higher education websites are designed to provide resources, information, and communication to current and future students, parents, and communities. With so many kinds of people using them, it’s imperative that everyone, regardless of disability or ability, has access to the same resources and information. When websites are inclusively designed, the online experience becomes better for everyone.

What New Accessibility Requirements Mean for Your Website

Higher education institutions often experience concern about possible action from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) over web accessibility issues. The OCR is a branch of the U.S. Department of Education that investigates any complaint presented by individuals or advocacy groups who feel that a person or group of people’s rights have been violated.

In 2017, the OCR saw a total of 1,000 complaints and it’s likely that 2018 will bring more. The OCR process is lengthy and can be costly so having extra assistance from a third party is often helpful.

What is Alt Text?

Alt text is a word or phrase that is inserted into the HTML so that screen readers or other assistive technology can tell users the nature or content of an image. For those not using technologies like screen readers, it appears in a blank box where the image would be.

Five Accessibility Myths Busted

Myth: A website redesign resolves all accessibility errors.
Truth: If web accessibility is a puzzle, the design of your website is only one piece. A redesign can lay the foundation for an accessible site, but rarely offers a clean slate since old design elements and content will likely be transferred. A successful accessibility strategy includes processes for making new content and design elements accessible, as well as processes for identifying and resolving accessibility issues that were carried over during redesign.
Where to Begin

Whether you’re a web professional already tasked with making your institution’s website and content more accessible or you are just learning about the importance of web accessibility, Siteimprove can help.

How to be Proactive about the Accessibility of Your Website

1. Audit Your Site:
Find out where you’re starting from. Here are a few things to consider:

- Do you have descriptive alternative (alt) tags for every image on your site? This includes carousels, links embedded from social media, and JPEG files.
- Does your website offer enough color contrast for those who are visually impaired? Be sure not to rely on color as the only means of conveying information and choose ones that are easy to see in any lighting.

2. Find the Right Resources:
Accessibility isn’t a path with a finish line. Collaborate with an accessibility partner that can work with you to develop an ongoing process that’ll keep you committed for the long haul.

3. Track Your Progress:
If faced with an OCR complaint, it’s crucial to show your organization’s active progress toward accessibility compliance. Whether you track your progress with a platform like Siteimprove or with a spreadsheet, it’s important to understand (and be able to prove) how far you’ve come.

Myth: I don’t need to worry about making my website accessible until I receive an OCR complaint.
Truth: Making your website accessible should be a given. OCR complaints are often under tight timelines, forcing you to expedite processes like video captions that are time-consuming and expensive. It’s best to view web accessibility as the right thing to do, rather than something you should only pay notice to if your organization is in trouble.

Myth: An OCR complaint is a lawsuit.
Truth: It’s important to note that while this is a significant legal notification, the OCR complaint and resolution process is not a lawsuit. You are being given the chance to fix the issues in the complaint with the resolution agreement and are voluntarily agreeing to resolve them. However, failure to act on this opportunity could escalate into a lawsuit.

Myth: My CMS takes care of all accessibility issues.
Truth: The strongest CMS platforms might make sure the basic infrastructure of your online presence is accessible, but that doesn’t include the design and content of your site.

Myth: No one with a disability visits my site.
Truth: There really is no way to know if someone with a disability visits your site or not. Factor in the fact that 20% of the US population experiences a variation of disability and you could be excluding a sizable chunk of the population. Also, accessibility serves more than just those who require assistive technologies to browse the web, it makes everyone’s experience clearer, easier, and more enjoyable.

Act With Digital Certainty

Siteimprove transforms the way organizations manage and deliver their digital presence. With the Siteimprove Intelligence Platform, you gain complete visibility and deep insights into what matters, empowering you and your team to outperform the status quo with certainty every day.

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