Accessibility Whitepaper.

> Imagine if 90% of the websites or mobile apps you use today locked you out. Everyone else continues to experience the convenience of mobile banking, the connectedness of social media, and the freedom of online shopping, but, for you, they're inaccessible. For the 57 million people with disabilities in the United States, this is their everyday experience."

Regine Gilbert, user experience (UX) designer, educator, and author of "Inclusive Design for a Digital World."

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WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY IN UX?

> *"People ignore design that ignores people."*
>
> **– Frank Chimero.**
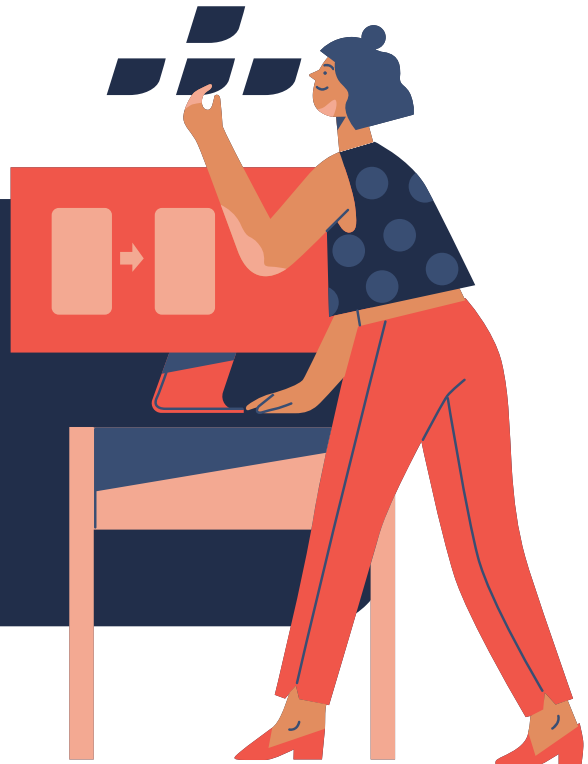
Web accessibility is about making sure that digital content can be accessed, understood and used by everyone.

With the internet now being used regularly by 4.66 billion people worldwide*, ensuring that your online business is accessible to all those that wish to use it is more important than ever. It's now estimated that over 15% of the world's population (over one billion people) are living with some form of disability or impairment.

It doesn't make good business sense to exclude such a large group of potential customers from being able to access your business online.

You want to design with accessibility in mind to enable people with a range of abilities and disabilities to navigate and engage with your corner of the web.

WHY ACCESSIBILITY IN UX IS IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESSES TO CONSIDER.

1 Inclusion

People with disabilities form the largest minority group in the world. Despite this, those with disabilities and impairments are often forgotten, and many websites still lack accessibility features. You want your business to be accessible to all those that may wish to use it.

2

Good
business sense

People with disabilities form one of the largest user groups in the world. Ensuring accessibility in your products will simply increase your market reach, as you will be appealing to a much larger number of people. Ignoring the needs of those with disabilities will lose you customers. More than 80% of people with impairments have decided not to trust a service provider due to barriers, with poor web accessibility being a major one. You don't want to be one of the businesses that is missing out.

The number of people considered to have a disability is also growing. On average, we now spend 6 years of our later years being disabled. With aging populations, the elderly world population is expected to double by 2050. Ensuring that your online presence is accessible will enable you to maintain lifelong relationships with your customers.

3

Good accessibility
can positively
impact your SEO

Anything you do online to better your business is intangibly linked to SEO. The longer the dwell time on your site, the higher you will be in Google's SEO rankings. The more accessible your website is, the more people will use it and the longer they will stay on it.

Furthermore, many modifications that make you website more accessible, (particularly for visually impaired users) will also be valuable to support search engines in deciphering your content. Adapting to the needs of visually impaired users will involve working on video transcriptions, image captioning, header tags, etc., to enable them to better decipher your content. These modifications are similar to those that will improve your SEO, as search engines also rely on these things to read and understand content. This will help search engines to present content to your users and/or determine the relevance of your content.

4

Reduce the number of future improvements needed

Although incorporating accessibility from the get-go in your web design can appear to increase the time spent on conception and increase costs on development, in the long-run it may save you time and money.

Ensuring a solid foundation of your website will prevent issues surfacing in the future. The cleaner your code, the fewer bugs you will face.

5

A good reputation

Putting in the effort to consider all abilities and disabilities, and adapting your website to these, will showcase your business as one that has social responsibility and cares about its customers. It will put you in good stead to be a reliable and reputable business. The more accessible your website is, the more people will use it and the longer they will stay on it.

"

The most important blind visitor to your website is Google! In the same way that creating accessible web pages helps disabled person access your content, it also helps Google index your pages so that the right people can find your service or product.

Jim Byrne
Founder, Guild of Accessible Web Designers

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A QUICK GUIDE TO WCAG.

The web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. They explain how to make digital services and websites more accessible to everyone, including users with impairments.

Organisations and individuals around the world cooperate to produce them, in order to provide a single shared standard for web content accessibility.

There are three levels of WCAG compliance; A, AA and AAA. Each level includes guidelines that must be met for the website to be considered accessible for all users. WCAG Level A is considered to be minimal compliance, WCAG Level AA is acceptable compliance, and WCAG Level AAA is considered optimal compliance.

WCAG is based on four design principles; making your content:

- Perceivable
- Operable
- Understandable
- Robus

To meet Principle 1:

Perceivable, you need to ensure users can use your service with the senses available to them. This means doing things like:

- Providing text alternatives
- Providing transcripts for audio and video
- Providing captions for video
- Making sure content is structure logically so it can be navigated and read by a screen reader

To meet Principle 2:

Operable, you need to make sure users can find and use your content, regardless of how they access it. To do this, you must:

- Ensure everything works well for keyboard-only users
- Ensure there is no blinking or flashing content
- Provide a 'skip to content' link
- Make it easy for users to disable and change shortcut keys

To meet Principle 3:

Understandable, you need to ensure all users can understand your content and how the service works. You need to:

- Use plain English
- Keep sentences short
- Make it easy for people to identify and correct errors in forms
- Make sure features look consistent and behave in predictable ways

To meet Principle 4:

Robust, you must ensure your content can be interpreted well by a variety of user agents. This means you need to do things like:

- Use valid HTML so that user agents, such as assistive technologies, can accurately interpret the content

For a more comprehensive guide to WCAG, please see the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 at https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/.

HOW TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY IN YOUR UX DESIGN.

There are many different abilities and disabilities to consider when designing your UX. There are sensory disabilities, such as sight and hearing problems. There are also motor and cognitive disabilities. Points will be covered below to help modify your website to adapt to all of these disabilities.
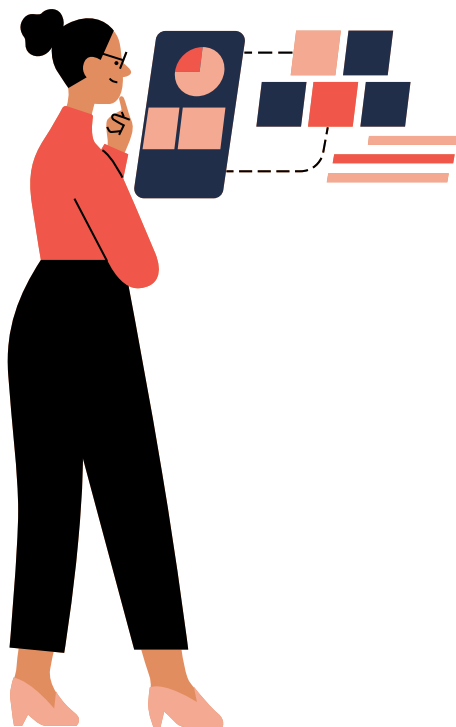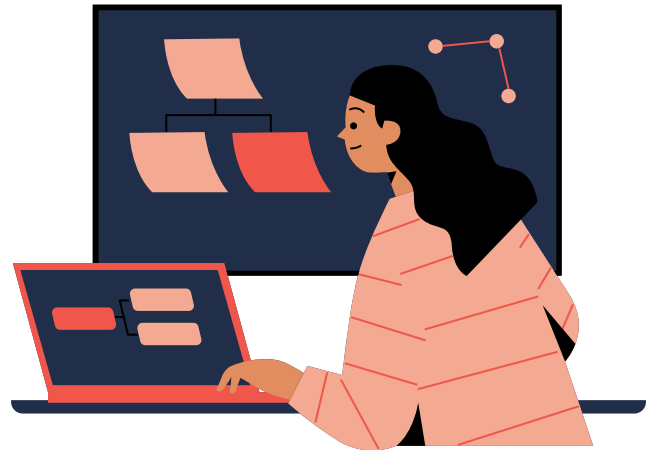
1. Identify your main users.

Understanding your audience has always been essential to the success of any business, and building with accessibility in mind for this audience, not only builds on customer experience but can allow you to expand your customer base. As it's important to remember that around 15% of people are living with some sort of disability. Don't try to design for every potential users' needs; identify your target audience, and then identify their needs. To truly create an experience inclusive of all, you need to spend time fully understanding the diverse needs of your audience.

2. Choose a content management system (CMS) that supports accessibility.

Your CMS needs to support different themes and templates that are accessible. Furthermore, it should have an easy-editing interface that has accessibility features built-in or have the design flexibility to change them yourself.

3. Use headings to effectively organise the structure of your content.

Screen readers can use heading structure to navigate your content. By using headings correctly and strategically, the content of your website will be well-organised and easily interpreted.

Tip: use <h1> for the primary title, and avoid using it for anything other than the title of the website and the individual pages. Do not skip heading levels (going from <h1> to <h3>) as screen readers follow consecutive order, and skipping levels could leave screen readers wondering if there is missing content.

4. Add alt text to any images.

Visually impaired people may have difficulty in seeing/unable to see any images on your website. However, those using screen readers will be able to read the alt attribute if you include one, to help them understand the images. Ensure the alt text you add describes the picture clearly and simply. Describing any images on your website through al text will allow visually impaired users to still absorb and engage with all the content on your website.

Tip: Add null text to any images that add no meaning in context to your content. Screen readers and other assistive technologies will read the picture as 'image' (or something similar), leaving users with vision impairments guessing if the photo is decorative or if it conveys important information that they cannot access.

5. Keep the visual aspects of your website in mind.

Ensure the features of your website are adaptable for those with visual impairments. For instance, allow users to enlarge the font sizes. Also keep contrast sensitivity in mind. Many people have low colour contrast sensitivity, and so high contrast between the foreground and background will help them to effectively read your content.

Tip: Avoid using green and red, as red-green colour deficiency affects approximately 8% of the population.

For those with learning disabilities, it would be beneficial to try and build a logical interface. For instance, use similar colours for similar actions to create familiarity within your navigation.

6. Make video and multimedia accessible to visually impaired and deaf users.

Provide closed captions to all video and audio tracks on your website, so those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing can still engage with the content. It is important to leave enough space for audio description between dialogue or speech, especially if there is visual content that you can't include in the audio track.
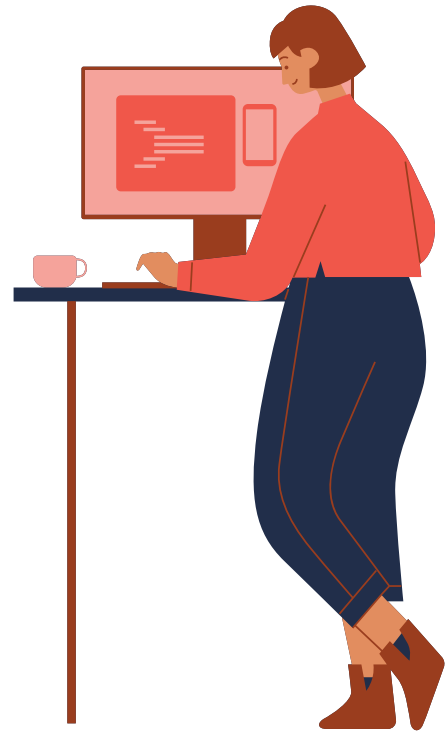
7. Ensure that all content can be accessed with the keyboard alone.

An accessible website does not rely on a mouse. Many users with mobility disabilities may not be able to use a mouse or trackpad. An alternative to a mouse is navigating content through the use of the keyboard (by using the tab and arrow keys), or through the use of an alternative input device, such as a single-switch input. To allow this function for those with mobility impairments, ensure the tab order matches the visual order, so it is possible to logically navigate the site content just using the keyboard.

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Driving web accessibility with Smart Energy GB

The Company

Smart Energy GB is the not-for-profit, government-backed campaign helping everyone in Britain understand the importance of smart meters and their benefits to people and the environment. Smart Energy GB's digital presence is the key to ensuring everyone in Great Britain understands smart meters, the rollout and knows how they can get one, including those in vulnerable circumstances.

The Challenge

According to accessibility regulations that came into force in September 2018, public sector bodies must work to make their websites more accessible by making them 'perceivable, **operable, understandable and robust'. Public sector bodies include both government organisations, and some charities and non-government organisations. As such, it's important that Smart Energy GB work to make their website accessible.**

Smart Energy GB tasked us to enhance the website with the 3rd party accessibility and translation tool 'Recite Me', which would ensure the campaign message can reach a large number of people with visual or hearing impairments.

An additional requirement from Smart Energy GB was to be WCAG compliant, which included optimising the press centre and resource centre for mobile access.

The Solution

Firstly, we enhanced their website with the 3rd party accessibility and translation tool 'Recite Me'. Recite Me is a software which allows people to adapt websites to fit their preferences, such as translating text into legible fonts, changing the colour contrast, and reading out the content on a page. Enabling this on Smart Energy GB's website ensured that their campaign message could reach a large number of people with visual or hearing impairments.

With web access on mobile devices being so popular, it's important to consider the accessibility of your web content on these platforms. Therefore, it was important that we optimised Smart Energy GB's press centre and resource centre for mobile access, so that these resources would be accessible to everyone that needs them.

Now, Smart Energy GB are many steps closer to achieving their goal to spread the importance of smart meters to everyone in Britain.

Their choice to implement the new accessibility features puts Smart Energy GB ahead of many not-for-profit organisations, and ensures that their digital message is able to reach all those who need it.

A WORD FROM KARL, THE CLERKSWELL WCAG EXPERT.

In simple terms, making a website accessible means making sure it can be used by as many people as possible.

Accessibility has not always been a digital focus, but things have changed in that websites are becoming, and are expected to be, accessible to people with varying disabilities.

Accessibility now has been prioritised to ensure companies are meeting level A and level AA compliance. This is great because it ensures that content and design is clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it.

A trend I've noticed is the increasing use of accessibility tools, like the Web Accessibility Evaluation (WAVE) tool. WAVE is a suite of evaluation tools that allows developers to make their web content more accessible to individuals with disabilities. WAVE can identify many accessibility and WCAG errors, but it also facilitates human evaluation of web content, so all in all a really useful tool.

For me, the most important thing with accessibility is to ensure the website is accessible to all users

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS, HOW WE CAN HELP.

Great accessibility is crucial in ensuring the digital aspect of your business is a success. If you fail to consider accessibility, you fail to include everyone, and you therefore exclude people from your business.

By following the WCAG, measuring usability, employing accessibility technologies and optimising your design systems, you can be sure that basic design principles are met and your UX is improved for all.

If you want to improve the accessibility of your website, contact us today.

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