

Web accessibility and how it affects businesses

What is web accessibility?

Web accessibility refers to the way that websites are designed and developed so that they are accessible to all people using the internet. Accessible websites are built using technologies that enable users to access them from a wide range of user agents and devices regardless of what browsing technology they are using. Accessible websites allow access to both disabled and non-disabled people.

Do all businesses in the UK need to have accessible websites?

Yes. In the UK, it is illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities, as outlined in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). In 2002, the DDA published a Code of Practice, which specifically states that web accessibility is a legal requirement. As the DDA has not provided instructions on how to create accessible websites, The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the Internet's governing body, has created guidelines for web designers and developers to adhere to in order to create accessible websites. The combination of the DDA's Code of Practice and the W3C guidelines form the basis for adherence to the DDA.

How many disabled people are there in the UK?

According to The Disability Rights Commission (DRC), there are over 10 million disabled people living in the UK, which is over 16% of the total UK population of 60.2 million (National Statistics).

What are the benefits of web accessibility?

Although the need for web accessibility has been driven by the DDA, accessible websites benefit all internet users and website owners.

Accessible websites:

- allow access for all Internet users through a wider range of user agents (such as screen readers, self-voicing web browsers, speech recognition software, screen magnification software and search robots) and devices (such as mobile phones and PDA's),
- enhance usability for all users - pages load quicker and are more responsive,
- increase search engine optimisation and ranking potential,
- reduce costs of bandwidth and hosting,
- are simpler to develop and maintain and provide the ability to make rapid, site-wide changes for styling and layout, and
- are future proof – as the technologies used are the way forward for the Internet

How do businesses ensure they have an accessible website?

As there are many technologies currently used to build websites, not all web agencies adhere to the W3C guidelines, so companies need to ensure that they engage an agency that specializes in Accessibility and Web Standards. In 2006, the DRC and the British Standards Institution (BSI) published "PAS 78: A guide to good practice in commissioning accessible websites".

What are Web Standards?

Web Standards are a set of rules and guidelines, set out by the W3C, for those who design and develop websites. Web Standards provide the foundation for the creation of accessible websites. Web Standards are the leading web technology over other existing technologies and will become the norm for the industry over the next few years.

Links

[Disability Rights Commission - DDA and related statutes](#)

[Disability Rights Commission - Code of Practice](#)

[Disability Rights Commission - PAS78](#)

[W3C - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)

[W3C - Homepage](#)

[The Web Standards Project - Homepage](#)

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