

Why should you be thinking about web accessibility?

New regulations around accessibility of public sector websites are being enforced this year. Jason Cooper, Head of Customer Experience at Civica, discusses what constitutes accessibility, and why an accessible website is good for everyone.

For pretty much all of us, the web is an essential part of everyday life. But in the UK, one in five people has a disability — visual, hearing, motor or cognitive — that could make it difficult or impossible for them to use a website. In the past, an organisation whose website was unusable by people with disabilities could simply offer an alternative, such as a phone number to call.

Today, however, that's no longer enough. Creating an inclusive society is a global concern, whether creating accessible buildings, information, education, work or entertainment.. And rightly so.

So, what makes a website accessible?

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) established the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) which has now been adopted as an international standard across the globe.

To meet the guidelines, a website must be:

- ▶ **Perceivable** - people can see or hear the content
- ▶ **Operable** - people can access the content by typing or speaking
- ▶ **Understandable** - the language used is clear and simple
- ▶ **Robust** - people can access the content using a variety of assistive technologies.

What are the regulatory requirements?

In the UK, regulations around meeting WCAG (specifically, WCAG 2.1 level AA) apply to public sector bodies including central government, local government organisations, and some charities and other non-government organisations.

Unless an exemption applies, websites published on or after 23 September 2018 (the date the regulations came into force) have to comply within a year; and all other websites must comply by 23 September 2020.

Recommendations published by the Government Digital Service (GDS) to help public sector bodies meet the requirements include:

- ▶ **Think about accessibility from the start** of any new website project, to help ensure no-one is excluded. It's best to find out early if any parts of the service aren't accessible, as problems usually cost less to fix if you identify them early on.
- ▶ **Get the whole team involved.** Everyone on the project team must feel responsible for making the service accessible.
- ▶ **Involve users with disabilities in your research.** Include users who have disabilities or use assistive technologies.
- ▶ **Consider including accessibility as part of the contract evaluation** when you sign off on technology spend or procurement.

Peoples' needs change over time and designing with accessibility in mind means you are prepared for this change; for example, the ageing population may need larger text or screen-readers.

Accessibility for all with user-centred design

Civica has a team of certified UX practitioners who can help you build inclusivity and accessibility into your websites and services, and put people at the heart of your organisation.

We can also audit your existing websites, using assistive tools to help you identify simple improvements — from colour contrast to adding alternative text on images that are used by screen readers, for instance; and working with you to plan other, more extensive changes that may be needed for accessibility and UX reasons. We have plenty of experience to share, as we've been auditing the web services we provide for our public sector customers, and have updates in hand to ensure their compliance.

Civica believes all people should have equal access to the information they need for work and life and that digital world provides this level playing field.

Talk to us if you'd like to find out more about how the regulations will affect your organisation, get an expert review of the accessibility of your websites, or understand how to resolve accessibility or wider UX issues.

Jason Cooper

Head of Customer Experience, Digital

Jason.Cooper@civica.co.uk