

AODA TIPS FOR YOUR WEBSITE

Hotsheets

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Not sure how to make your website more accessible, or even why you should? You're not alone. Many people I've spoken to are at a loss, confused or consider it an inconvenience. I get it: it seems like another layer in your process.

But consider that almost 4 million Canadians reported a disability in 2012 and that that number increases exponentially with age, rising to a quarter of people ages 65-74 and almost half for 75 or older¹. A disability can be permanent or episodic, it can be physical, cognitive or sensory and it informs how we design products to facilitate ability rather than design to disable access. A person is not disabled; rather it is the environment that is disabling².

REFRAMING ACCESSIBILITY

Think of accessibility less as a compliance process and rather as an exemplary design process, the objective of which is to reach people of all abilities. The defining demographics of your brand persona may be the 25-45 well-read single urban male or the 35-55 mother who enjoys cooking and politics, but don't forget that within those demographics, your reader presents a large range of diverse abilities. Those diversities include vision impairments, hearing impairments, mobility challenges and cognitive differences, all of which inform how your audience can access and interact with the content on your website. So by creating a brand environment that is accessible to your "complete" demographic, you broaden your reach, and by broadening your reach you open up greater opportunities for your bottom line.

OMG! AODA, W3C AND WCAG AND MAGAZINE WEBSITES?

"The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect." — Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web

The AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) has identified guidelines to help you make your website accessible. These guidelines are from W3C's (World Wide Web Consortium) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG, pronounced Wuh-Kag). W3C is an international community made up of member organizations, staff and public contributors, and houses international standards for the Internet. WCAG is a set of open standards intended to ensure the long-term accessible growth of the Web.

WCAG consists of 12 guidelines organized under four principles. The 12 guidelines each have a series of testable success criteria (61 of them) as well as informative techniques for web content authors and evaluators. The four accessibility principles—**Perceivable**, **Operable**, **Understandable** and **Robust**—support the intrinsic qualities of accessible web content and help to frame accessibility as a core value rather than items on checklists. Learn more about the principles here: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-web/principles#compatible>



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THE FACTS UNDER THE AODA

As of January 1, 2021, all public websites and their web content published after January 1, 2012 (information that may be found on a web page or web application, including text, images, forms and sounds) belonging to and controlled by a private, public or non-profit organizations with fifty or more employees must conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA (excluding live captioning and pre-recorded audio descriptions). While you don't have to make content prior to January 2012 accessible you will be required to accommodate anyone who asks for alternative and accessible content.

NOTE: there was a deadline in 2014 for new and significantly refreshed websites to comply to WCAG 2.0 level A (50+ employees applies here as well): "Beginning January 1, 2014: new public websites, significantly refreshed websites and any web content posted after January 1, 2012 must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A."

What this means to you:

In order to meet AA WCAG 2.0 standards—which is what the AODA has identified as the guidelines for accessibility compliance—only half (plus a few) of the success criteria under the 12 guidelines in WCAG 2.0 need to be addressed. Find that list here, under heading 4. How to comply: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-websites-accessible>.

Many other jurisdictions have passed an accessibility act, including Manitoba and B.C. is likely next. The US has Rehab 508 and the recent 21st century communications and video accessibility act of 2011. Other jurisdictions are likely to be following WCAG 2.0 standards in the near future ³.

Under the lens of a designer and content creator many of the principles found in the guidelines fall under the purview of good design and good journalism—contrast, readable typography, clear tracking of elements, clearly written content and hierarchy of content, for example.

KNOW HOW YOUR USER ACCESSES YOUR CONTENT

Eight out of 10 persons with disabilities reported that they use aids and assistive devices to carry out daily activities. The types of strategies and assistive hardware and software used to access and navigate web content include:

- screen readers and magnifiers
- voice recognition software
- selection switches
- text size increase
- mouse speed adjustment
- keyboard tabbing
- captioning

It's important to remember that there are more ways to operate a computer than a mouse. And as designers, we should be considering in our design process that all content and navigation should also be keyboard accessible. Taliesin L. Smith, e-learning technologist at Memorial University and creator of Ramp it Up!, an action-based guide for building accessible websites, shared a few tips with me:



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- Check that your templates are structured using semantically correct HTML—that is, HTML that is tagged to indicate specific structures on the page—and that your site-wide structure is consistent across all pages. That includes regions: Header, main and footer, and consistent and logical structure within those regions (h1, h2, etc.).
- Remember that any design decision that communicates something visually needs to also be communicated through code (making it perceivable—accessible—in another mode). By making it perceivable in another mode you’re enabling screen readers to communicate that design decision to the user. For example, visual distinctions for a Head (visual distinction=big cap type at top of page) and Deck (visual distinction=medium sized type underneath the Head) could be coded as an ‘h1’ and an ‘emphasized paragraph’ respectively. Then continue your logical hierarchy into the body copy with an ‘h2’.
- Images require descriptive text, referred to as alternative (or alt) text, to make them perceivable by screen readers.
- Colour contrast is important for low vision users. Save time and money by checking your background and foreground colours for sufficient contrast early in your process—including hover colour (when using a mouse to navigate around the site) and focus colour (when using a keyboard to navigate around the site).
- If you’re using a WYSIWYG editor consider using the structural elements in the editor’s menu, instead of styling individual elements on a one-by-one basis. For instance use a style designated as a headline (h1) instead of highlighting the content and applying 14pt bold. This ensures the style of the content on your page stays consistent with the site’s overall design.
- When Taliesin works with designers she also likes to share the following quote from Léonie Watson, because it reminds us that accessibility is ultimately about people and not technology: Accessibility is not a challenge to creativity; it’s a creative challenge.

BEING PROACTIVE AND KEEP CHANNELS OPEN

The AODA understands that you can’t be everything to all people therefore it’s important to offer opportunities for readers/users to let you know what they need. Keeping the channels of communication open between you and your readers is good practice, now it’s even better practice to extend that invitation to readers who encounter access challenges. Jan Richards, digital accessibility specialist, suggests “having an accessibility link in your footer to your accessibility practices—while some organizations prefer their lawyer to draft that information in a defensive way, it is better to reach out to customers instead. Saying ‘We would like to hear from you, let us know if you had any accessibility problems with our site’ is a good idea. Where you may get in trouble with compliance is when a user can’t use your site and can’t get in touch with you about it. By having an open channel with your user you can often avoid an escalation.”

Thank you to: Jutta Treviranus, Jan Richards, Taliesin L. Smith and the Inclusive Design Research Centre.



¹ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2013002-eng.htm> retrieved March 4, 2016

² <http://idrc.ocadu.ca/index.php/resources/idrc-online/library-of-papers/443-whatisinclusivedesign>

³ <http://www.lflegal.com/2013/05/gaad-legal/>



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HERE ARE A FEW RESOURCES:

Check your website to see if it's accessible:

<http://achecker.ca/checker/index.php>

<http://idrc.ocadu.ca/index.php/research-and-development/478?qclid=Cj0KEQiA3t-2BRCKivi-suDY24gBEiQAX1wiXHmwOJbsMQMB3PYdBjLjr1mt69mBqD75tH3nw5axKCMaAoNe8P8HAQ>

Check your markup for accessibility best practices:

<http://validator.w3.org/>

<http://adod.idrc.ocad.ca/>

Check your colour contrast:

<http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

Considering outsourcing your website to bring it up to WCAG 2.0 level AA? Here's a guide to help you:

<http://www.gaates.org/alCwebdev/cont.php>

Web content accessibility guidelines: introductory guide for web developers:

<http://www.gaates.org/alCwebdev/cont.php>

Authoring tools accessibility guidelines (ATAG 2.0):

<https://www.w3.org/TR/ATAG20/>

Understanding users of all abilities:

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-web/Overview.html>

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/quicktips/>

Other:

http://rgd-accessible-design.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/RGD_AccessAbility_Handbook.pdf

<http://terracoda.ca/ramp/>

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-rules-businesses-and-non-profits>

50+ employees: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-websites-accessible>

Minister Qualtrough's site: <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/consultations/disability/legislation/index.page>

https://www.wlu.ca/docs/EnablingAccessHandbook_online.pdf

<http://www.usabilitymatters.com/a-web-accessibility-primer-part-2/>

<http://webaim.org/resources/designers/>

<http://idrc.ocadu.ca/index.php/resources/idrc-online/library-of-papers/443-whatisinclusivedesign>

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/Policy/>

<http://www.ami.ca/about-ami/web-and-mobile-accessibility>

<http://www.lflegal.com/2013/05/gaad-legal/>



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