

A top-down view of a wooden desk. On the left, a portion of a silver laptop is visible, showing the keyboard and trackpad. On the right, a white coffee cup filled with dark coffee sits on a bright orange saucer. The background is the natural wood grain of the desk.

Quick guide to website accessibility

How to keep your business
compliant with WCAG

Quick guides for growing businesses

it'seeze websites
Helping your business grow

Growing your business, mindfully

There are so many things to consider when you're creating a website for your business, and key among these is customer experience. At first it seems as though the fundamentals of your website's user experience (UX) should be fairly easy to achieve: you want it to be visually striking, easy to read and simple to navigate. Ideally, visitors to your website should quickly be able to find the information they need in a format that they can use. But when you're planning your website, are you considering the needs of every potential customer, or are you missing something crucial?

In the UK, **one in five**¹ people are classed as having a disability or long-term illness and in Ireland **one in seven**² people report having a disability. In each case, this may affect their ability to use a website. By forgetting to cater for their needs not only are you missing out on a significant and valuable portion of the marketplace for

your goods or services, but you may be in danger of falling short of your legal obligations as defined by the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines** (known as WCAG 2.1)

This quick guide covers the essentials of website accessibility, to help you understand how to create an inclusive user experience and the business benefits of doing so.

This guide covers:

- **WCAG 2.1 in brief**
- **Principles of accessible design**
- **Achieving compliance**
- **Benefits of accessibility**

¹ Family Resources Survey 2016/17 p7

² NDA Factsheet 1: Disability Statistics

WCAG 2.1 in brief

Disabilities such as hearing or vision impairments, or problems with movement can make websites harder to use. Web accessibility is the practice of ensuring websites can be used by people with such disabilities.

For UK businesses, the law on website accessibility is governed by the Equality Act 2010 (EQA), which requires that websites must comply with equal access and web accessibility standards. Enforcement of these standards is the job of the UK Human Rights Commission, whose statutory Code of Practices requires website owners to anticipate the needs of disabled users.

Accessibility and the EQA

EQA Section 20 requires service providers to take reasonable steps to provide an equal experience for people with disabilities both online and offline.

EQA Section 29 prohibits discrimination by failing to provide adequate accommodations for use.

While the EQA itself does not explicitly list the actions private businesses must take to adhere to anti-discriminatory legislation when creating a website, the UK government now requires that all public sector websites meet **level AA of the WCAG 2.1** guidelines as a minimum. This is therefore also considered a sound approach for private sector organisations and using this best practice standard will prevent businesses from falling short on their legal obligations - and ethical responsibilities.

Accessibility standards in Ireland

In Ireland, website accessibility is governed by The Disability Act 2005 and enforcement is the responsibility of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Legally binding standards have also been published by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in their approved Code of Practice. The NDA gives the example of AA conformance with WCAG as a best practice standard which can ensure compliance.

WCAG was developed and published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and is now recognised as the best practice standard for website developers and UX designers in the UK and Ireland - and across the globe. **This means that when your website meets WCAG standards, you can rest assured that you are fulfilling your legal obligations on accessibility, no matter where your website users are based.** WCAG 2.1 is the latest version of the guidance.

WCAG 2.1 accessibility levels explained:

As of **September 2020**, all public sector websites in the UK must comply with the WCAG 2.1 AA standards. The aim of the regulations is to ensure that services and information provided by public sector bodies – for example, on a parish council website or a university website – are accessible to everyone, by making sure these websites follow specific accessibility standards, also known as ‘success criteria’:

Level A – This is the minimum level of accessibility and covers critical issues which need fixing, as users with disabilities will find it very difficult or impossible to access information on your website if these standards are not being met.

Level AA – This higher level of accessibility means that your website is compliant with standards in the UK and Ireland - but there are still important issues you should fix to remove accessibility barriers. One or more groups will find it difficult to access information on your website, but the most common and problematic issues will have been removed.

Level AAA – This is the gold standard of WCAG compliance, which website developers and designers should eventually aim to achieve. This will make your website fully accessible for all users. (It’s important to note that full AAA compliance is rare as it is difficult to meet the strict requirements and not all content can be made accessible to all users.)



Principles of **accessible design**

WCAG 2.1 aims to make web content more accessible to a wider group of people. It is based on four broad design principles, which should make developers and designers think harder about the different ways that people might interact with their content, so that they can build in accessibility from the start. This thought process is therefore a great place to begin when planning a new website for your business.

Accessible design should be:

Perceivable: ask if users can recognise and use your service with the senses available to them.

Operable: ask if users can find and use your service regardless of the tools they use to access it, e.g. a keyboard rather than a mouse.

Understandable: ask whether the language you use is easy to understand and if the features of your website are well labelled and function in predictable ways.

Robust: ask if website content can be interpreted reliably by

a wide variety of user agents, including reasonably outdated, current, and anticipated browsers and assistive technologies.

It should aim to cater for people who have:

- **Impaired vision, including colour blindness**
- **Impaired hearing**
- **Impaired mobility**
- **Differences in thinking or learning, such as dyslexia, autism or learning difficulties.**

Therefore, think about how you would change your website to cater for people who:

- **Use a keyboard or voice control instead of a mouse**
- **Change browser settings to make content easier to read**
- **Use a screen reader or screen magnifier**
- **Use other assistive technologies, such as voice control, which may not be the latest available version.**

Achieving compliance

Achieving WCAG 2.1 compliance might seem like a complex task, but it's an important one and the required Level AA success criteria are more easily achieved when accessibility is built in right from the start.

The accessibility of your website will be affected by everything from its visual design and embedded or uploaded content to the way it works behind the scenes. It's always worth discussing accessibility with your web designer before work begins, to make sure they have covered off some of the most important things needed for compliance. To make this easier, we've created a handy [WCAG checklist](#).

WCAG 2.1 AA – what your website needs

Working closely with your web designer and always being mindful about the content you add to your website is the best way to reach and maintain WCAG compliance up to AA standard, the requirements of which are shown below. For a list of A and AAA level requirements, please see the complete [WCAG guidance here](#).

- **Captions for live videos** - Media containing both audio and video may be inaccessible to those with hearing impairments, so add captions to any live recordings with sound.
- **Audio description** - Media containing both audio and video may be inaccessible to those with vision impairments, so an audio description must be provided.
- **Orientation** - Your website should not be restricted to a single display orientation such as portrait or landscape. Having a mobile-friendly website will address this as your site will be able to automatically adapt to the orientation of the device that it's viewed on.
- **Identify input purpose** - Form field labels aren't meaningful to assistive software, so the expected format must be made clear in a way software can understand so that users know what kind of information to enter.
- **Contrast** - Text that has low contrast against its background can be hard to read, especially for visitors with vision impairments, so it must be possible to view the text with sufficient contrast. The requirement is a contrast ratio of 4.5:1 for text below 24 pixels tall and 3:1 for larger text. You can check colour contrast using [this tool](#).

- **Resize text** - Text on your website should be able to be enlarged by up to 200% without the need for assistive software.
- **Images of text** - Text contained within an image may be hard to read and can't be adjusted by the visitor, so must not be used, except as part of a logo or where a particular presentation is essential, such as a photo of a product that has text printed on it.
- **Reflow** - Your website must be responsive – this means it is able to adapt to all devices and screen sizes.
- **Non-text contrast** - Icons and diagrams that have low contrast between their parts can be hard to understand for visitors with vision impairments, so you must ensure that parts that need to be distinguished from one another meet the required 3:1 contrast ratio. This means the brightness of neighbouring colours will be different enough to tell them apart.
- **Text spacing** - The text settings on your website must be able to be overridden by visitors wishing to improve the reading experience.
- **Content on hover or focus** - Any website content that appears when a mouse hovers over it or a keyboard focuses on it must be dismissible, hoverable, and persistent. This means the content can be easily closed, can be moved over without disappearing, and remains visible until closed.
- **Multiple ways** - Your site should include navigation on every page but some visitors, particularly those with cognitive impairments, may find other ways of locating pages easier to use, so you must provide at least one alternative, such as links on each page to other related pages, a search feature, or a site map page with a list of all pages on the site.
- **Headings and labels** - Headings and labels help visitors understand the structure of the content, so must accurately represent the topic covered by the content that follows them. Form field labels help visitors understand the purpose of form fields, so must clearly describe what information the visitor is expected to enter.
- **Focus visible** - Keyboard focus must be visible and clear, to indicate what part of your website is currently selected by the visitor.
- **Language of parts** - Wherever a language other than the default language appears on your website, you must specify the language through correct HTML.
- **Consistent navigation** - Your navigation menu must appear in the same location and order on every page of your website.
- **Consistent identification** - Inconsistency can make a site harder to understand, so consistent terms must be used for similar functionality. For example, download links labelled 'Download Report' and 'Read Report' are inconsistent as one starts 'Download' and the other 'Read', so visitors may not

expect the 'Read' link to download the report. Changing both links to start 'Download' or 'Read' means that visitors who have used one link will know what to expect from the other.

- **Error suggestion** - When a visitor makes an input error on your website, suggestions for correcting the error should be provided – such as entering a value into a required form field.
- **Error prevention** - Mistakes when filling in forms that result in legal commitments or financial transactions can have serious consequences, so there must be either an additional confirmation or the ability to reverse the action carried out.
- **Status messages** - When an action is carried out on your website, the status of that action – success, failure, a result – will often be displayed as a visual message – this message must be compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers.

If you can cover each of the above in your website build, you will be well on your way to providing a digital user experience that is accessible and useful to a broad and diverse audience. However, it is crucial to remember that accessibility needs to be a consideration each time you upload new content to your site, to keep it compliant with WCAG standards.



Benefits of accessibility

For most businesses, websites are no longer an added extra; today they are considered a commercial essential. Customers expect to be able to find you online, to access all of the important information about your products and services, and to interact with your business without picking up the phone or making a journey. A website that is well designed and professional in appearance has become a key consideration for establishing a reputation and growing your business.

And for some people with disabilities, websites are much more than a convenience; providing digital services makes things possible for them that might previously have been out of reach and helps them to achieve a greater degree of independence.

There are many altruistic and ethical reasons why you should consider people with disabilities when designing a website, but it's important to recognise that doing so will also create significant commercial benefits for your business.

FACT: There are more than 13.9 million people classified as disabled in the UK, representing 22% of the total population³. In Ireland, 13% of the population has a disability. That's approximately 643,000 people.⁴

Boost your usability

Website accessibility broadens the marketplace for your products and services, putting them within reach of potential customers who may have otherwise given up trying to find out about your business. What's more, when you design a website for accessibility you automatically increase its usability, so people with very mild conditions, temporary limitations, or impairments caused by age will also find it easier to access and enjoy a better user experience. In fact, every potential customer who visits your website should find it easier to use and will therefore be more likely to stick around and make a purchase.

³ Family Resources Survey 2016/17

⁴ NDA Factsheet 1: Disability Statistics

Did you know...?

Apple's Siri was initially created for people with sight loss but is now commonly used by sighted people as well.

Move up the search ranking

While some of your potential customers will reach your website through social media or by typing in your URL, it's always wise to think about how they find you on a search engine and how you can push your business up the search results page.

A website designed for accessibility will provide useful alternative text to help users understand images, audio, and video content. This inclusion is also popular with Google's index bot, making your website easier to find and recommend and providing a relatively quick and cost-efficient way to increase your search ranking.

Strengthen brand image

In the UK and Ireland, and across the globe, ethical awareness is growing. Put simply, your potential customers are more likely to buy from a brand that can demonstrate that it cares about people - and acting in an inclusive and non-discriminatory way is a big part of that. Of course, it's not enough to say you care - you also have to 'walk the walk' by making your products and services accessible to everyone. Your WCAG compliant website will be the perfect first step to achieving that.

According to a recent study⁵, people really do care about how brands act:

- **86% would be more likely to purchase products and services from a company that leads with purpose; taking ethical issues seriously.**
- **three-quarters (75%) believe companies should take a stand on issues like equal rights.**

Meanwhile, the Co-Op's 2019 Ethical Consumerism report⁶ tells us that ethical spending in the UK has increased four-fold since 1999.

Secure more contracts

Operating ethically becomes even more important if your business provides products or services as part of a supply chain. Big businesses are under ever-growing pressure to prove their ethical credentials right across their value chain and ethical operations could mean the difference between them choosing to award a contract to you or your competitor.

With so many great reasons to take an accessible approach to your business website, why would you do it any other way?

⁵ p16/p6 2019 Cone/Porter Novelli Purpose Study

⁶ Twenty Years of Ethical Consumerism

We hope you've found this quick guide useful.

If you want a website that is visually striking, easy to use, and has accessibility and WCAG compliance built in from the start, our experienced team is here to help.

If you'd like to find out more about what it'seeze has to offer, get in touch with us today.

Call on 01482 880 929 or email hello@itseeze-hull.co.uk

Web accessibility made simple, by it'seeze

it'seeze websites
Helping your business grow