

## How Accessible is Your Website?

In this day and age, optimum accessibility to your [website](#) is of utmost importance. Any visit to your site should be a positive, user-friendly experience for everyone, including people with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) doesn't formally state that websites must be accessible — as it was created well before the internet was a daily necessity in most of our lives — but, increasingly, it is both a functional and moral obligation to optimize your website for access, conforming with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) or similar guidelines/standards. This is even more important (if not mandated) if you do business in specific sectors, like [education](#) and [non-profits](#), or if you have contracts with the Federal or state government.

Without even attempting to touch on all the facets addressed by WCAG — or the various methods/strategies one might seek to achieve compliance — what are some of the kinds of high-level areas of concentration you will want to consider when seeking to make your website more accessible?

### 4 Key Elements for Website Accessibility

#### 1. Forego Fancy Fonts

When picking the default font(s) for your website, it is best to opt for simple and highly legible fonts that are also, no surprise, more likely to come automatically installed on most computers or are web-friendly. Common fonts that fall in this category are Arial, Helvetica, Lucida, Sans, Tahoma, and Verdana.



#### 2. Contrast Counts

When designing your user interface or online experience, consider colors and/or photos with lots of contrast to aid in legibility. A best practice for color contrast is a ratio of at least 4.5:1. Also, color should not be used as the only indicator for interactive elements on your website. For example, instead of using color to designate required fields, mark them with an asterisk instead. And lastly, try to avoid overusing text atop images.

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### 3. Make Your Text Machine-Readable

Text on your website (including associated and downloadable documents) should be readable by both humans and whatever technology they rely on to access the web, navigate your site, or utilize your software or cloud-based dashboard. And, we're not just referring to words here: In order to "read" text, machines need to be able to interpret both the structure of the text and its metadata.

### 4. Speaking of Metatags...

It goes without saying that photography, charts, graphs, and myriad other graphics add aesthetic and functional value to your website — but for those users with visual impairments, they can have the opposite effect, acting as barriers to entry and a successful online experience. As such, it is important to be mindful of their use — and, when appropriate, to provide accurate and meaningful descriptions using alt text, descriptions, captions, and other identification techniques.

### Embarking on an effort to increase accessibility? Just curious to see how you rate as a baseline?

There are plenty of online accessibility checkers out there to give you a sense of how good (or abysmal) your current website is in this regard. Just be aware that the 'free' ones will often only give you a smattering of your full report, as an enticement to pay for the full analysis. And, likewise, be careful about services or website builders that promise 100% accessibility (sadly, unscrupulous players and the lawsuits they inspire are a' plenty in this fast evolving technology arena).

In our view, it is best to think about accessibility as an ever-changing continuum on which your current website can be found and thereafter measured against today's accessibility standards, best practices, and measures. Through diligence, deliberate decision-making, and genuine mindfulness about — and respect for — all users, you can keep the needle moving toward the current ideal.



If your [website needs an update](#) — including taking steps toward increased accessibility — reach out to Gail Cowley today at 315-475-8453 extension 1 or via email at [gcowley@cowleyweb.com](mailto:gcowley@cowleyweb.com).

