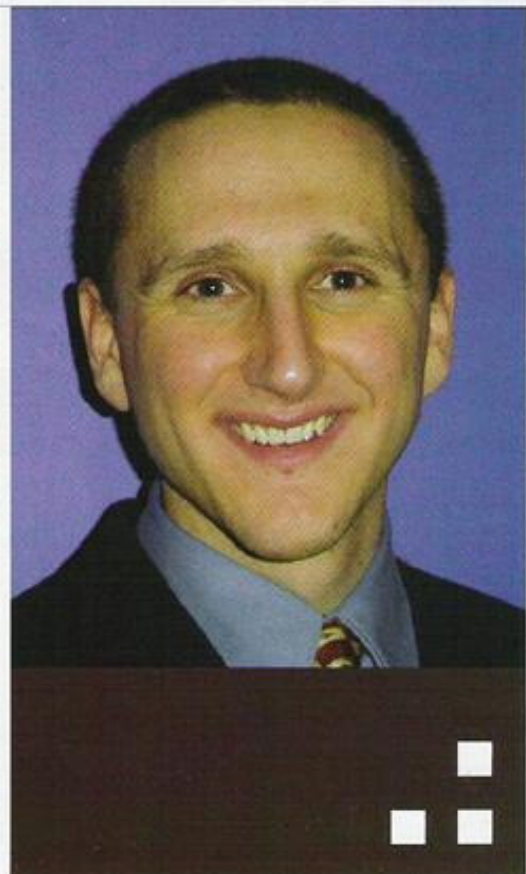


# Is your website

## user-friendly?



### Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) & web accessibility

Trenton Moss is crazy about web accessibility and usability - so crazy that he went and started his own web accessibility and usability consultancy to help make the Internet a better place for everyone.

Based in London, Webcredible is a web usability, credibility, accessibility and search engine specialist. Its tailor-made solutions include website evaluations, accessible web design, website optimisation, usability testing and search engine services.

Let's Talk Business Today spoke to Trenton regarding the Disability Discrimination Act and the effects it has on the way websites should be designed and managed.

There's been widespread speculation about the new legislation being introduced under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which will ensure that websites are accessible to blind and disabled users. Try to find specific information about it on the internet and chances are you'll come up empty handed.

The RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) and the DRC (Disability Rights Commission), two of the most renowned advocates for the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) and accessible websites, have no specific information about the laws and what websites specifically need to do in order to meet the legal requirements.

#### What does the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) state?

Part III of the DDA refers to the provision of goods, facilities and services. The Code of Practice, which specifically mentions websites, can be downloaded in its entirety from the DRC website.

The relevant quotes from this 175-page document are:

- 2.2 (p7): "The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person by refusing to provide any service which it provides to members of the public."
- 4.7 (p39): "From 1st October 1999 a service provider has to take reasonable steps to change a practice which makes it unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of its services."
- 2.13 - 2.17 (p11-13): "What services are affected by the Disability Discrimination Act? An airline company provides a flight reservation and booking service to the public on its website. This is a provision of a service and is subject to the act."
- 5.23 (p71): "For people with visual impairments, the range of auxiliary aids or services which it might be reasonable to provide to ensure that services are accessible might include ... accessible websites."
- 5.26 (p68): "For people with hearing disabilities, the range of auxiliary aids

or services which it might be reasonable to provide to ensure that services are accessible might include ... accessible websites."

#### When does the DDA come into force?

It's widely believed that the new laws will be implemented in October of this year, when the final part of the DDA comes into force. This final piece of legislation actually refers to service providers having to consider making permanent physical adjustments to their premises and is not related to the Internet in any way.

Section III of the DDA, which refers to accessible websites, came into force on 1st October 1999 and the Code of Practice for this section of the DDA was published on 27th May 2002. This means that the majority of websites are already in breach of the law.

#### Can you be sued?

Well, probably. The RNIB claim that they've considered taking up a number of legal cases against organisations with regard to their websites. When they raised the accessibility issues of the website under the DDA, companies have typically made the necessary changes, rather than facing the prospect of legal action.

The DRC launched a formal investigation into 1000 websites, of which over 80% were next to impossible for disabled people to use. They warned firms that they face legal

action under the DDA and the threat of unlimited compensation payments if they fail to make websites accessible for people with disabilities.

#### How do you comply with the DDA?

It's widely believed that if, or perhaps more appropriately when, a case makes it to court that the W3C accessibility guidelines will be used to assess a website's accessibility and ultimately decide the outcome of the case. The W3C is the Internet governing body and its web accessibility guidelines can be found on its website.

To further complicate matters, the W3C offers three different levels of compliance. Priority 1 guidelines, (which must be satisfied according to the W3C) will almost certainly have to be adhered to. Priority 2 guidelines (which should be satisfied and are the EU recommended level of compliance), or some part of, will probably need to be adhered to too.

The courts will also no doubt take guidance from the outcome of an Australian case in 2000, when a blind man successfully sued the Sydney Olympics organising committee over their inaccessible website.



For further details about Trenton's work, log onto [www.webcredible.co.uk](http://www.webcredible.co.uk)