

How disabled users access the internet

In 1995 a new era of accessibility for disabled people began online. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was passed, stating:

"It's 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."

Blind users

Internet users who have no sight at all use a screen reader, which reads the HTML code off the page, back to them.

These machines sift through the HTML code and the technology deciphers which elements need to be read aloud and what should be ignored.

You can download the IBM Homepage Reader

(http://www-3.ibm.com/able/solution_offerings/hpr.html) for a free 30-day trial. Once you've downloaded it, go to your own web site, turn your monitor off, and try to navigate your way through the site.

Partial/poor sight

To take full advantage of the internet, users with partial or poor vision need to be able to enlarge the text on web pages. Check whether your web site allows them to achieve this:

- Internet Explorer: *View > Text size*
- Netscape: *Edit > Preferences > Appearance > Fonts*
- Opera: *File > Preferences > Fonts > Minimum font size (pixels)*

If your site is accessible to

this group of users then the size of the text throughout the page will increase. Users with poor vision might also use a screen magnifier.

Colour blindness

It's estimated that one in 12 men and one in 200 women have some form of colour blindness. You can check how internet users with different strains of colour blindness are viewing your web site with Vischeck (<http://www.vischeck.com/vischeck/vischeckURL.php>).

Deaf users

Deaf users are able to access the Web in much the same way as hearing people, with one important exception – audio content. If it's a key function of your site for people to be able to

hear a message, be sure to provide a written transcript. Bear in mind that, for many deaf people in the UK, English is their second language – British Sign Language is their first. Granada Media's SignPost programme at <http://www.signpostbsl.com> can help to integrate signing into your site.

Keyboard/voice-only users

Some of your site users don't have access to a mouse when browsing the internet. Try putting yourself in their position and have a go at navigating your web site using only tab, shift-tab, and the return key.

Other users

Other people who may access your web site that

have disadvantages include:

- Epileptic users, who must always be careful to avoid seeing flickering between 2Hz and 55Hz
- Web users from outside your industry who may not understand industry jargon or acronyms
- Web users whose first language is not English and who may not be able to comprehend very complicated language

To experience the problems these web users face, try out the DRC's inaccessible web site demonstration at <http://www.drc-gb.org/open4all/newsroom/website6.asp>

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