

Accessibility of the Online High Street

An evaluation of the accessibility of UK ecommerce retailers in 2009



www.webcredible.co.uk

Report written and researched by Webcredible © 2009
Questions or comments? E-mail info@webcredible.co.uk

Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Results	5
Executive Summary	5
1. Text is resizable and remains legible when resized	6
2. Descriptive page titles used	7
3. Information images have useful ALT text	8
4. Decorative images have null ALT text & aren't links by themselves.....	9
5. Text isn't embedded within images	10
6. Headings are correctly labelled as headings	11
7. All sections of the page have their own heading	12
8. Headings stand out from regular text	13
9. Link text makes sense out of context and is front-loaded	14
10. A focus state is provided for links.....	15
11. Links use a high contrast colour.....	16
12. Links employs the widest possible area.....	17
13. All lists labelled as lists.....	18
14. Skip to main content link provided	19
15. Decorative items not inserted through HTML code	20
16. CSS used for layout	21
17. Form label present and correctly positioned.....	22
18. Labels assigned to form items	23
19. Form items don't cause auto-refresh	24
20. Forms effectively designed.....	25
Conclusion	26
References	26
Appendix: Full results	27
About Webcredible	29

Introduction

The market opportunity

With 650 million disabled people worldwide, the disabled population in the UK alone has an estimated combined spending power of up to £80 billion¹. In 2006, 50% of disabled people in the UK had home access to the Internet², a number which will surely have grown since then.

In addition to this undoubted widespread Internet usage by disabled people, the Disability Discrimination Act identifies websites as a service that must be accessible to disabled people³.

This is no surprise really though as accessibility on the web has climbed higher up the agenda for many companies since this report was first published in 2007. It's a fact that the basics of accessibility go hand-in-hand with usability and search engine optimisation. This means that an accessible website can help boost your online presence and sales with all user groups, not just disabled people.

About this report

In October 2007, Webcredible investigated the accessibility of the websites of 20 of the UK's leading high street shops. With an average score of under 57%, they generally weren't doing enough to make their website easily accessible to all. This year Webcredible has decided to re-investigate against the same accessibility criteria.

Increasing the accessibility of any ecommerce website will lead to a more commercially successful site – it's as simple as that. Improved accessibility can lead to a massive increase in reach to potential customers, improved search engine optimisation and faster download speeds.

Evaluations of the 19 websites featured in this study were conducted throughout January 2009.

Who is this report for?

This report is aimed at anyone involved with a website trying to sell products or services, including marketing managers, Internet managers and web developers. Although our analysis was of the ecommerce websites for high street retailers, the guidelines are highly transferable to other websites. The report assumes no prior accessibility or technical knowledge.

Methodology

Webcredible analysed the websites of 19 of the UK's leading UK high street retailers in January 2009. We focused on a typical user journey through the homepage, search results, browse, product, basket and registration pages.

Each website was evaluated against 20 best practice guidelines and assigned a score of 0 to 5 for each guideline, with 5 being the maximum. With 20 guidelines in total, websites were assigned a total Web Accessibility Index rating out of 100. The guidelines represent a cross-section of important accessibility criteria across all user groups with disabilities.

The guidelines against which we benchmarked the 19 ecommerce sites were:

General

1. Text is resizable and remains legible when resized
2. Descriptive page titles used

Images

3. Information images have useful ALT text
4. Decorative images have null ALT text & aren't links by themselves
5. Text isn't embedded within images

Headings

6. Headings are correctly labelled as headings
7. All sections of the page have their own heading
8. Headings stand out from regular text

Links

9. Link text makes sense out of context and is front-loaded
10. A focus state is provided for links
11. Links use a high contrast colour
12. Links employ the widest possible area

HTML code

13. All lists labelled as lists
14. Skip to main content link provided
15. Decorative items not inserted through HTML code
16. CSS used for layout

Forms

17. Form label present and correctly positioned
18. Labels assigned to form items
19. Form items don't cause auto-refresh
20. Forms effectively designed

Results

Executive Summary

The 19 ecommerce websites received the following scores in total, out of 100:

2009 rank	2007 rank	Website	2009 score	2007 score
1	4	John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	74	73
2	17=	Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	72	37
3	5	Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	71	72
4=	2	HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	70	75
4=	7=	Game (www.game.co.uk)	70	64
6=	3	B&Q (www.diy.com)	68	74
6=	9	Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	68	63
8	1	H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	65	76
9	10	Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	64	62
10	11	Accessorize (www.accessorize.co.uk)	63	61
11	16	WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	61	41
12=	7=	Topshop (www.topshop.co.uk)	58	64
12=	12	Marks & Spencer (www.mands.com)	58	57
12=	17=	Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	58	37
15	6	Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	56	66
16	19	Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	54	36
17	13	Body Shop (www.thebodyshop.co.uk)	53	55
18	14	Next (www.next.co.uk)	51	47
19	20	Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	37	34
		Average score	61.6	56.8

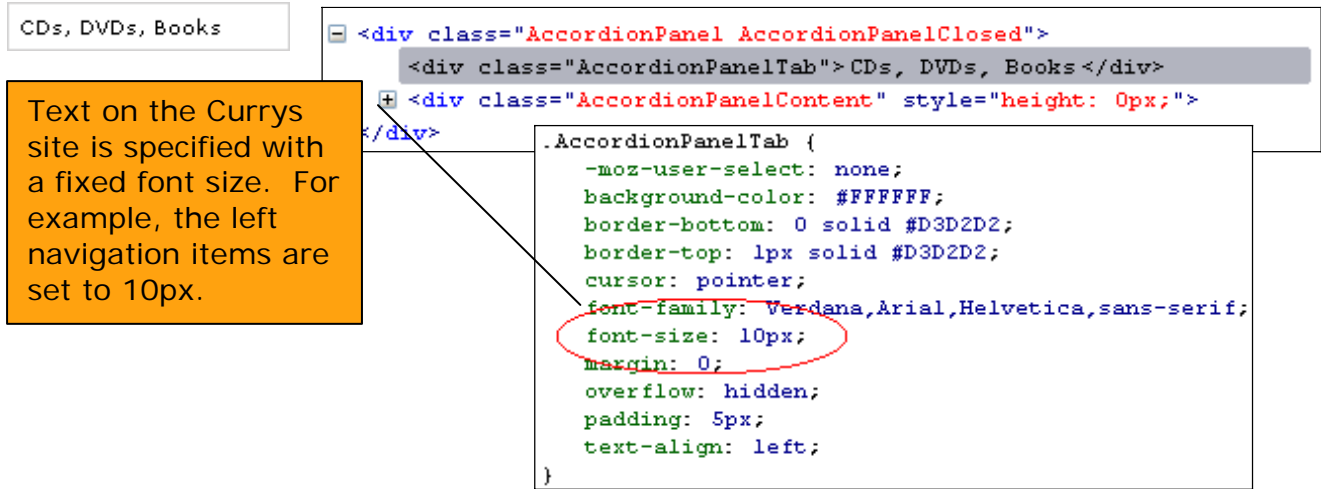
Please consult the Appendix on p27 for a full breakdown of scores.

Category: General

1. Text is resizable and remains legible when resized

Average score: 3.3 (out of 5) [Last year 3.1]

Users with limited vision may need to increase the size of text through the browser. This can simply be achieved by going to View > Text Size > Largest (in Internet Explorer). As such, it's crucial that text is specified with a relative (not fixed) font size.

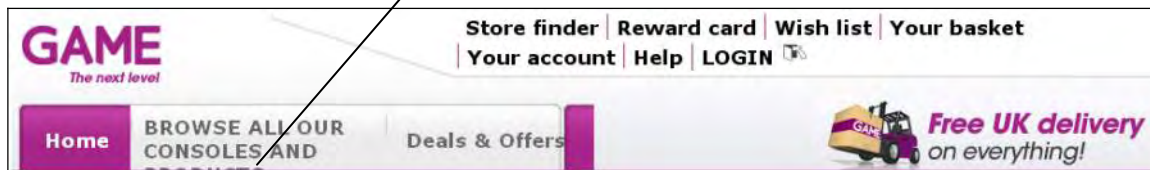


CDs, DVDs, Books

Text on the Currys site is specified with a fixed font size. For example, the left navigation items are set to 10px.

```
<div class="AccordionPanel AccordionPanelClosed">
  <div class="AccordionPanelTab">CDs, DVDs, Books</div>
  <div class="AccordionPanelContent" style="height: 0px;">
</div>
.AccordionPanelTab {
  -moz-user-select: none;
  background-color: #FFFFFF;
  border-bottom: 0 solid #D3D2D2;
  border-top: 1px solid #D3D2D2;
  cursor: pointer;
  font-family: Verdana,Arial,Helvetica,sans-serif;
  font-size: 10px;
  margin: 0;
  overflow: hidden;
  padding: 5px;
  text-align: left;
}
```

Game performed reasonably well with text resizing but some key content disappeared.



GAME
The next level

Home | BROWSE ALL OUR CONSOLES AND | Deals & Offers

Store finder | Reward card | Wish list | Your basket
Your account | Help | LOGIN

Free UK delivery on everything!

2009's study sees a slight improvement in this guideline with the average score increasing from 3.1 to 3.3 out of 5. 9 of the 19 sites resized text very well, scoring 4 or 5. However, 4 of the sites are failing in this guideline, scoring 0 or 1 out of 5 as text either fails to resize or becomes very difficult to read when it does.

Category: General

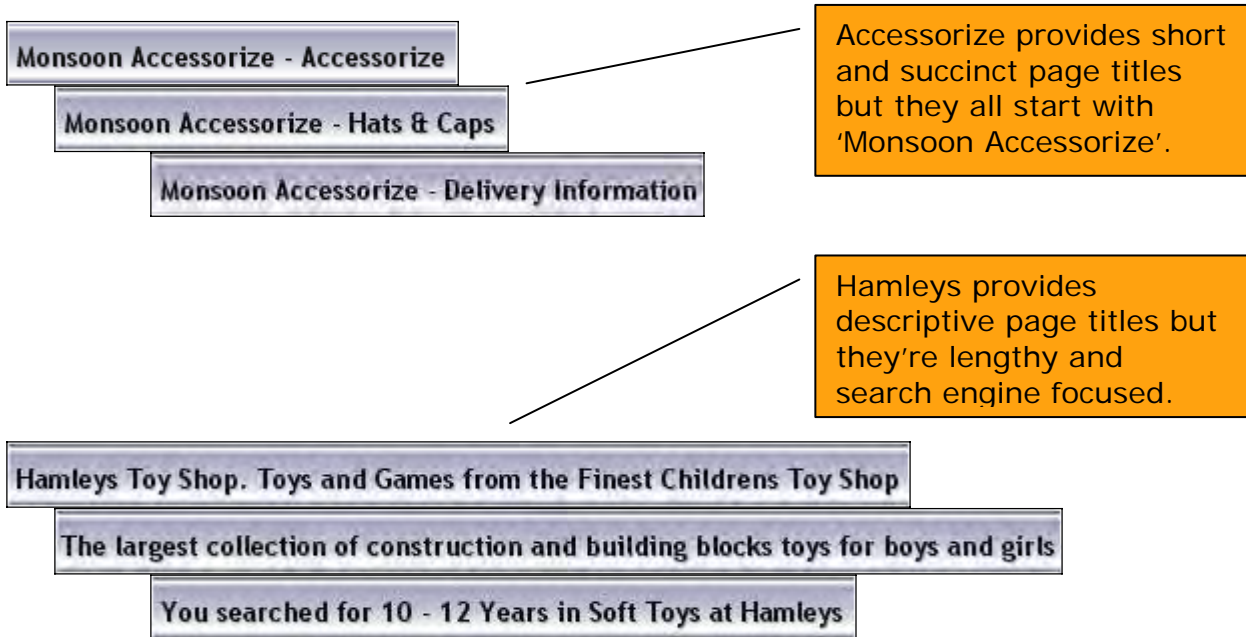
2. Descriptive page titles used

Average score: 3.4 (out of 5) [Last year 3.2]

The page title is the very first thing that gets read out by screen readers. It's crucial that the title is descriptive so screen reader users can instantly gain an understanding of the page's content.

All page titles must be descriptive of the page. As a general rule page titles should be:

- ▣ Unique – No two page titles should be the same across the website
- ▣ Short, succinct and straight-to-the-point
- ▣ Front loaded – The most important content should be placed at the start



Over half of the sites scored 4 or 5 for this guidelines leading to a 0.2 increase in the overall average. The other sites seem to have made some effort with the page titles but they typically scored 2 or 3 out of 5 because the page titles are not descriptive enough, not front loaded enough, and/or always begin with the same phrase (usually the company name).

Category: Images

3. Information images have useful ALT text

Average score: 3.4 (out of 5) [Last year 3.8]

Screen readers can't understand images; instead they read aloud the ALT, or alternative, text. In the absence of ALT text screen readers typically read aloud the filename, something that's of course nonsensical. ALT text for any information image should convey the same exact same information conveyed by the image itself.

ALT text should:

- Be short, succinct and straight-to-the-point
- Contain no more and no less information than what's in the image



WHSmith and Argos provide good ALT text for informative images but they aren't always 100% accurate.



Assigning ALT text to images is perhaps one of the most well known accessibility guidelines, so it's surprising that only 9 of the 19 sites score 4 or 5 out of 5, and the average score for this guideline has actually decreased since the last report.

There seems to have been an increase this year in ALT text being either inaccurate or not conveying enough information, and these are the main reasons for lost points. ALT text is key for blind web users to get the full benefit of images on the website.

Category: Images

4. Decorative images have null ALT text & aren't links by themselves

Average score: 2.3 (out of 5) [Last year 1.8]

Screen readers ignore images with null ALT, or alternative, text assigned to them (`alt=""`). The following kinds of images are decorative:

- Product images adjacent to their product name
- Invisible 'spacer' images
- Icons that merely support text

Assigning descriptive ALT text to a decorative image makes it harder for screen reader users to work through the page. This is because unnecessary content is being read aloud to them.

In particular, assigning ALT text of the product name to a product image is unnecessary if the product name is displayed in text immediately before/after the image. Doing so means the product name is essentially read aloud twice.

The solution is to assign null ALT text (`alt=""`) to the image and contain it in the same link as its adjacent text. A decorative image should never be a link by itself as if it contains null ALT text, it's essentially a link that goes nowhere for screen reader users.



Last year, Debenhams was the only site in the study that combined the image and its adjacent text in one link, as well as assigning the image null ALT text.

This year, the site doesn't perform so well as the product images are links by themselves and the ALT text repeats the product description.

Despite the average score improving from 1.8 to 2.3 out of 5, this was still 1 of the worst performing guidelines. With the exception of the Debenhams and Next sites, every website scored 3 or less on this guideline, typically assigning descriptive and wordy ALT text to decorative images rather than assigning the images null ALT text.

As with last year, this means that on product listing pages screen readers will announce each product name twice (the ALT text of the image plus the text).

Category: Images

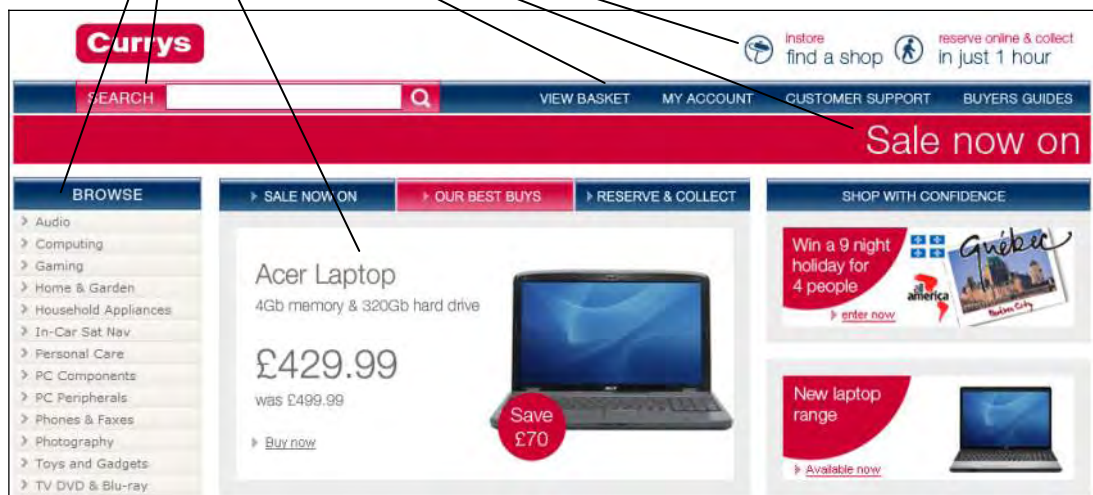
5. Text isn't embedded within images

Average score: 2.3 (out of 5) [Last year 3.3]

Text that's embedded within images can't be resized and can become blurry and pixelated when blown up with a screen magnifier.

Websites should ensure that all text is real text and not text embedded within images. Advanced visual effects can be created with background images and real text so usually there's no need to embed text within images. (The only reason to embed text within images is when using unique fonts or advanced text effects.)

Almost all key information is text embedded within images on the Currys site.



This is one accessibility guideline that ecommerce sites seem to have really let slip with only 2 of the 19 sites scoring 4 or more out of 5 as opposed to half the sites in 2007.

The majority of sites regularly used text embedded in images when they could have just as easily used real text, and all the sites used embedded text at some point. This accounts for the drop in average score from 3.3 to 2.3 out of 5.

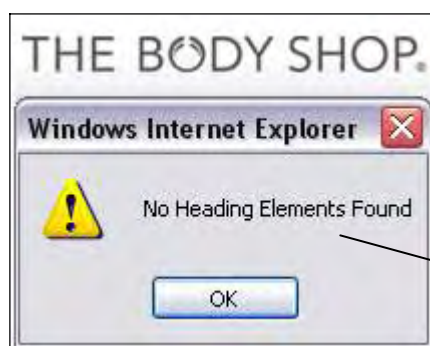
Category: Headings

6. Headings are correctly labelled as headings

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5) [Last year 2.7]

Screen reader users can call up a list of headings and quickly jump to any heading on the page. This means they won't have to listen to the entire page to find what they're looking for.

All items that describe the content contained beneath them need to be labelled as headings in the HTML code (using `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>` etc.), otherwise screen reader users won't know that these are actually headings. There should also be one (and only one) heading level one on each page, to succinctly describe what the page is about.



The Body Shop doesn't have any headings within the HTML code.

Waterstones labelled almost all headings as headings within the code (headings are indicated by `<h1>`, `<h2>` etc.).

The average score here has increased by 0.2 from the 2007 report, but this is still not good enough. Headings are the key orientation point for screen reader users and 8 of the 19 sites are still scoring 2 out of 5 or less, typically using inconsistent and/or incorrectly nested heading. In the case of some sites, headings aren't used at all.

Category: Headings

7. All sections of the page have their own heading

Average score: 2.8 (out of 5) [Last year 2.1]

By placing a heading at the start of each section, screen reader users can instantly gain an understanding of what each section is about, prior to listening to it. As such, there should be a heading immediately before every single section on every page.

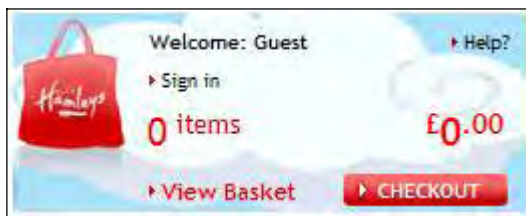
The headings must be labelled as headings in the HTML code (using <h1>, <h2>, <h3> etc.) for this to work.

Sections of the page that usually don't have a heading, but require one, include the navigation, search and footer, for example. If necessary, headings can be made invisible.

<H2>Navigation</H2>

SALE Arts & Crafts Action Toys Build It Dolls Games Outdoor Preschool Soft Toys Vehicles

<H2>Your bag contains...</H2>



Hamleys is one of few sites using hidden headings for sections of the page such as its main navigation and its shopping basket.

This guideline saw a marked improvement since 2007 with the average score increasing from 2.1 to 2.7. Hamleys led the charge as the only website to score maximum points with 6 other websites scoring 4 out of 5. However, the majority of sites are still not using headings for each page section in the correct way.

Category: Headings

8. Headings stand out from regular text

Average score: 4.1 (out of 5) [Last year 4.0]

Users with reading difficulties rely on items such as headings to find information. It's crucial that headings sufficiently stand out on the page. To ensure this, heading should:

- Be at least two point sizes larger than regular text
- Have plenty of white space both above and below them
- Ideally use a different colour to regular text (background or text colour)



Through the use of large fonts, bold text and background colours, Accessorize's headings stand out from regular text.

As in 2007, this is one of the highest scoring guidelines with 7 of the 19 websites scoring maximum points and only 3 performing poorly. Again, it's no surprise this is such a high scoring guideline as it's a key facet of both usability and accessibility.

Category: Links

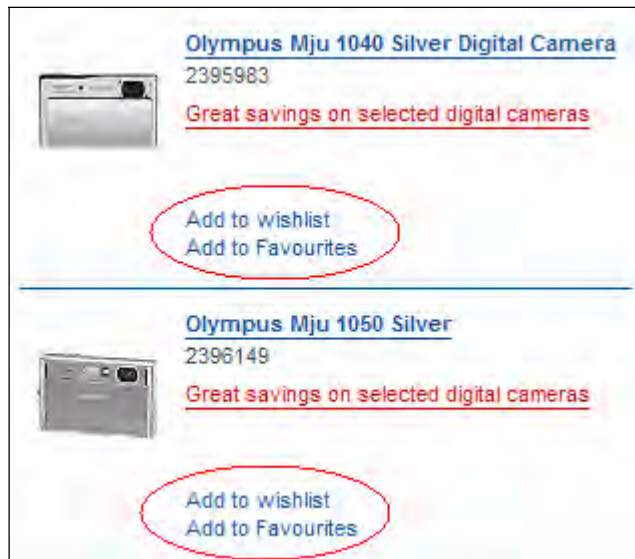
9. Link text makes sense out of context and is front-loaded

Average score: 3.5 (out of 5) [Last year 3.4]

Screen reader users can call up a list of links as a way of browsing through a page so it's essential that link text is usable in this format. Often when listening to links on a page, screen reader users will listen to just the first 1 to 3 words before moving on to the next link. As such, words towards the end of the link text will often go unheard.

Link text should therefore be precisely descriptive of its destination and the text should adequately describe the page it's pointing to. As a very general rule, the link text should be roughly the same as the heading and page title on the page it's pointing to.

If necessary, invisible text can be used to expand on the meaning of the link destination, with the most important words placed towards the front of the link text. Non-descriptive link text such as 'Click here' or 'More' should be avoided at all costs.



'Add to wishlist' and 'Add to Favourites' links next to every product cost Boots points in this accessibility guideline.

There's not much difference in the average score for this guideline since 2007, with a clear split in the websites. 8 of the sites scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 with the other 11 sites scoring 2 or 3.

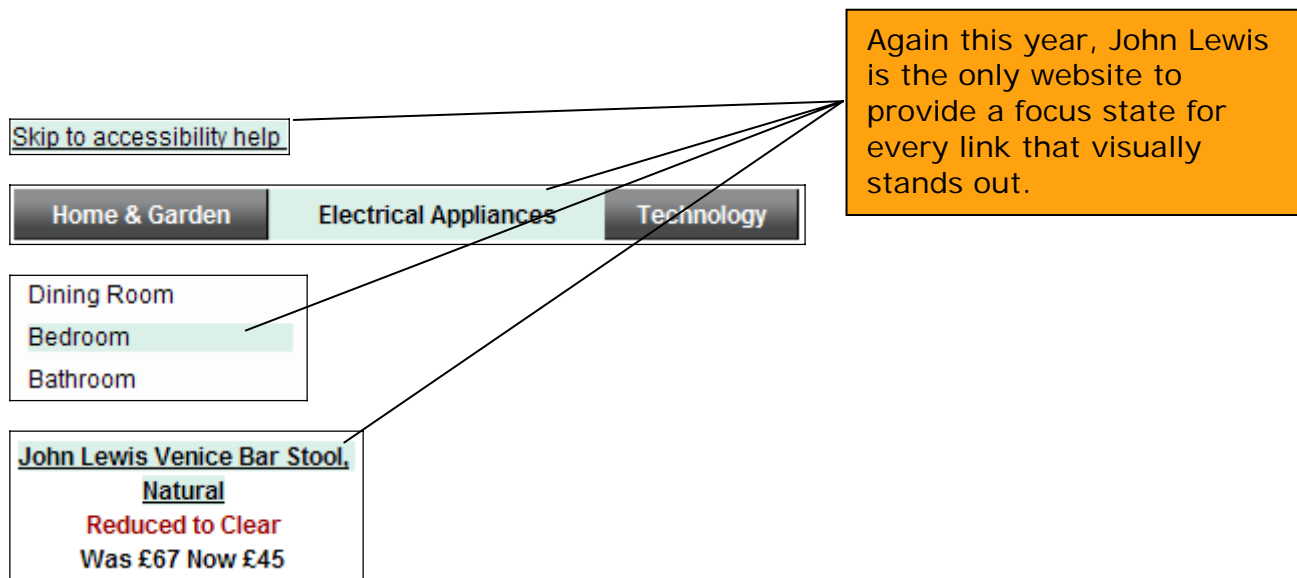
Given that this guideline is key to both usability and search engine optimisation, as well as accessibility, it's surprising that many sites have failed to improve here since the last report, still using link text such as 'click here'.

Category: Links

10. A focus state is provided for links

Average score: 0.5 (out of 5) [Last year 0.3]

Keyboard-only users can better orientate themselves when tabbing through pages if links become highlighted when focused upon. To achieve this, each link needs to utilise a background colour when focused on.



Although the average score for this guideline has improved slightly since the last report, at 0.5 it's still the lowest scoring guideline. John Lewis again led the way with maximum points and although 3 other sites score points where they didn't last year, the remaining 15 sites are not making any attempt at providing a focus state for links.

The needs of keyboard-only users are clearly still being overlooked by the major UK retailers and although this guideline was not so well known in 2007, things should have moved forward further with a guideline that is so crucial to keyboard-only users.

Category: Links

11. Links use a high contrast colour

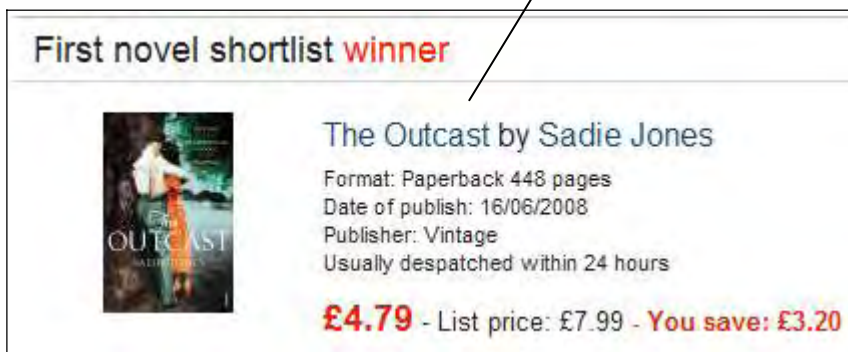
Average score: 2.5 (out of 5) [Last year 2.9]

Screen magnifier users and web users with reading difficulties can find it difficult to impossible to read text when scanning through a page. It's crucial that important items such as links stand out from regular text.

To ensure this, links should utilise a different, high contrast colour to non-link text. For example, if regular non-link text is black link text shouldn't also be black.



While Marks & Spencer's black links are hard to distinguish from non-link text, Waterstones' consistent contrasting blue links are easier to spot.



The average score here actually decreased by 0.4 in this years report with 9 websites scoring 2 or less by simply not using high contrast colours to make links stand out sufficiently. As in 2007, there was a diverse spread with 6 sites scoring 4 or 5 and the remaining 4 websites scoring 3 out of 5.

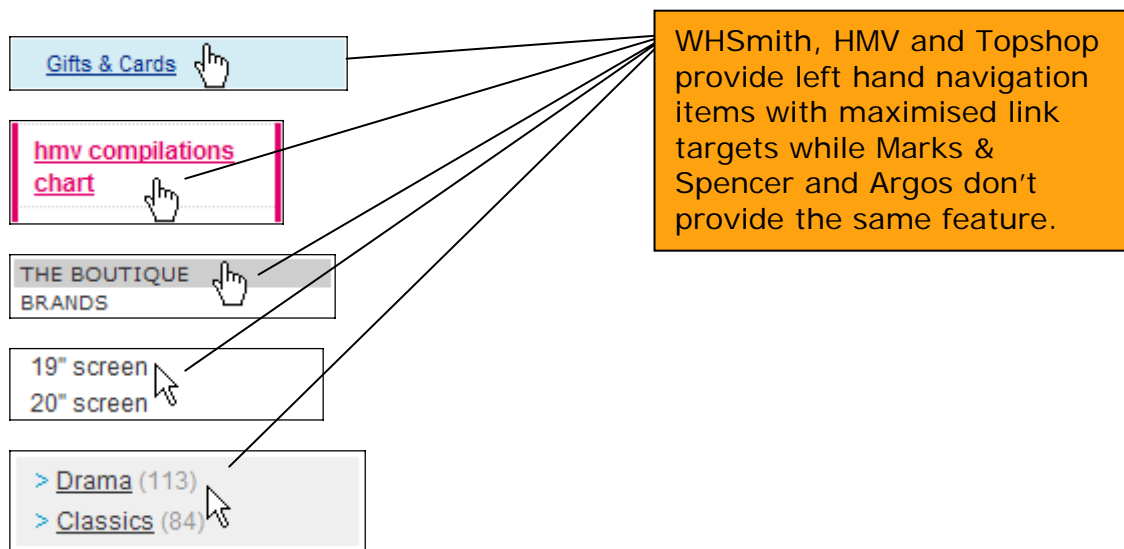
Category: Links

12. Links employs the widest possible area

Average score: 3.6 (out of 5) [Last year 3.7]

Users with motor impairments that use a mouse will do so with limited mobility. By increasing the size of link targets it becomes much easier for this group of users to activate links. Two key ways of achieving this include:

- Ensuring the clickable area for navigation links spans the maximum possible width (e.g. the full width of the column for links in a vertical list)
- Including images (e.g. product images) in the link, as well as adjacent text



This guideline saw a very slight decrease in average score, but not much change with 11 of the 19 websites scoring 4 or 5 out of 5. The other 8 sites are still failing to maximise link areas properly.

Category: HTML code

13. All lists labelled as lists

Average score: 3.3 (out of 5) [Last year 3.1]

Using lists in the HTML code is crucial for screen reader users as the screen reader alerts them to the number of items in the list. Screen readers announce the number of items in a list, before going on to read out the list items. As such, all lists must be labelled as lists in the HTML code (especially navigation).

As a general rule, if on-page text isn't a paragraph or heading, it's likely to be a list.



No lists were found on the Currys site while they're generally used on all other sites.

As the only website to score maximum points here, Topshop leads the improvement in this guideline. Since 2007 there are many more sites achieving middle-of-the-road scores, with 9 sites scoring 3 out of 5.

There's a marked general improvement with only 1 site scoring 0 or 1 this year (as opposed to 7 sites in 2007). However, some sites have also slipped a bit with only 8 sites scoring 4 or 5 (as opposed to 12 in 2007).

Category: HTML code

14. Skip to main content link provided

Average score: 2.1 (out of 5) [Last year 1.4]

A skip link allows screen reader and keyboard only users to jump over the navigation on each page and get straight to the main content. The skip link can be invisible and then made to appear when focused on.

Ideally the link should use a strong background colour and large font size so it's highly visible when it appears.

H.Samuel has an excellent skip to main content link that appears when tabbed on to (they were however deducted 1 point for providing too many skip links).

Argos also provides skip links (viewable with styles disabled) but they don't appear when tabbed on to and are made invisible in such a way that screen readers ignore them.



Jump to Content [Accesskey 'c']

- [Jump to main content](#)
- [Jump to primary navigation](#)
- [Jump to secondary navigation](#)



With an average score of 2.1 out of 5, a big improvement is needed with regards to this guideline. As in the last report, the majority of sites do provide skip links with only 5 websites failing to do so this year. However, they often make them impossible to access for keyboard-only users, inaccessible to screen reader users and/or provide too many.

Category: HTML code

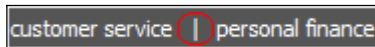
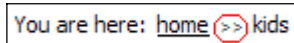
15. Decorative items not inserted through HTML code

Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year 3.1]

Each and every item in the HTML code gets announced to screen reader users. This includes decorative items such as:

- Vertical bar (|) – Announced as ‘vertical bar’ to screen reader users, it should instead be inserted as a left (or right) border through the CSS
- Greater than sign (>) – Announced as ‘greater than sign’ to screen reader users, it should be inserted as a background image through the CSS

Decorative items are of course useless to screen reader users so should be removed from the HTML file.

A screenshot of a navigation bar with the text "customer service" and "personal finance" separated by a vertical bar (|).A screenshot of a breadcrumb trail with the text "You are here: home" and "kids" separated by a greater than sign (>).

Both the greater than sign (>) and the vertical bar (|) are still placed directly into the HTML code of the Debenhams' site.

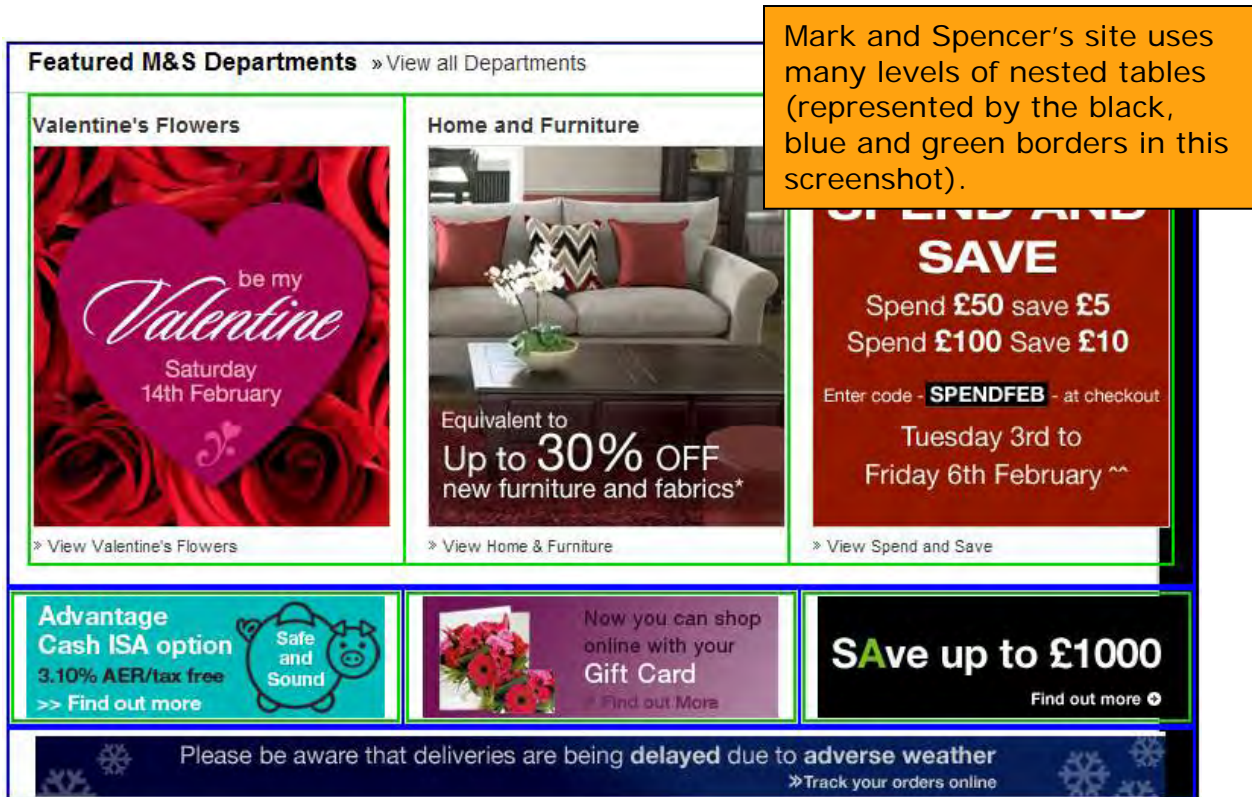
As the 4th highest scoring guideline in this year's report, there has been a significant improvement in this area. Last year, 9 websites scored between 0 and 3, but this year 14 of the 19 sites scored either 4 or 5, meaning the top retailer sites are eliminating difficulty for screen reader users in this area.

Category: HTML code

16. CSS used for layout

Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year 3.2]

Screen readers (especially older versions) announce table information (number of rows and columns) each time they get to a table. This useless information can be a nuisance to screen reader users. Tables should be completely avoided (except for data tables) and CSS used to layout all the web pages.



The screenshot shows a grid of promotional banners on the Mark and Spencer website. The banners are arranged in a grid with nested borders: a black border for the top row, a blue border for the middle row, and a green border for the bottom row. The banners include:

- Featured M&S Departments** with a link to "View all Departments".
- Valentine's Flowers** banner with a heart graphic and text: "be my Valentine Saturday 14th February".
- Home and Furniture** banner with a sofa image and text: "Equivalent to Up to 30% OFF new furniture and fabrics*".
- SPEND AND SAVE** banner with text: "Spend £50 save £5 Spend £100 Save £10 Enter code - SPENDFEB - at checkout Tuesday 3rd to Friday 6th February ^^".
- Advantage Cash ISA option** banner with text: "3.10% AER/tax free >> Find out more".
- Gift Card** banner with text: "Now you can shop online with your Gift Card Find out More".
- Save up to £1000** banner with text: "Find out more".
- A footer banner with text: "Please be aware that deliveries are being delayed due to adverse weather >>Track your orders online".

Mark and Spencer's site uses many levels of nested tables (represented by the black, blue and green borders in this screenshot).

Last year we talked about the benefits of CSS not just to accessibility, but to SEO and download speeds, so are surprised that scores weren't higher here. Since 2007 there has been significant improvement in scores for this guideline, with the average score increasing to 3.9 out of 5, making it the 3rd highest scoring guideline.

11 of the 19 websites scored the maximum here and only 4 sites scored 2 out of 5 or less.

Category: Forms

17. Form label present and correctly positioned

Average score: 3.2 (out of 5) [Last year 3.8]

Screen reader users won't know for what a form field is if there's no label. Additionally, if the label is incorrectly positioned then screen readers may associate the incorrect text with the form field, rendering the form unusable.

Form labels should always be present and come before their associated form fields, except with radio buttons and checkboxes when they should come after.



A search form consisting of a text input field with the placeholder text "search" and a green arrow button to its right. There is no explicit label for the input field.



The Body Shop scored poorly on this guideline by omitting form labels on the main search function (perhaps the most important form item on the site), the registration form and the product pages.



With an average score of 3.2 this guideline has slipped from being the 2nd highest scoring in the last report. Only 3 sites scored maximum points and 10 websites scored between 0 and 3 out of 5, typically leaving out some or even all form labels.

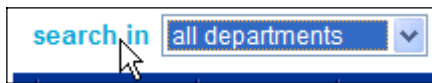
Category: Forms

18. Labels assigned to form items

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5) [Last year 2.4]

Modern screen readers will correctly associate form labels with their form fields if assigned to each other in the HTML code. All form labels should be assigned to their associated form fields by matching the `label for` and `id` attributes in the HTML.

An easy way to check for this is to click on any form label and the form field next to it should become selected (for input and text fields a flashing cursor will appear in the box).



Clicking on the 'search in' label on the Mothercare site focuses the cursor on the select box – a sign that the label is indeed assigned to the form field.



Clicking on the 'Search' label on the John Lewis site doesn't focus the cursor on the input field – a sign that the label hasn't been assigned to the form field correctly.

With average of 3.0, there's been a marked improvement in this guideline since the last report. 4 websites scored 5 out of 5 this year, but 4 sites are still failing to use labels in the HTML code. The majority of the remaining sites used them intermittently and inconsistently, often forgetting to use them on certain pages.

Category: Forms

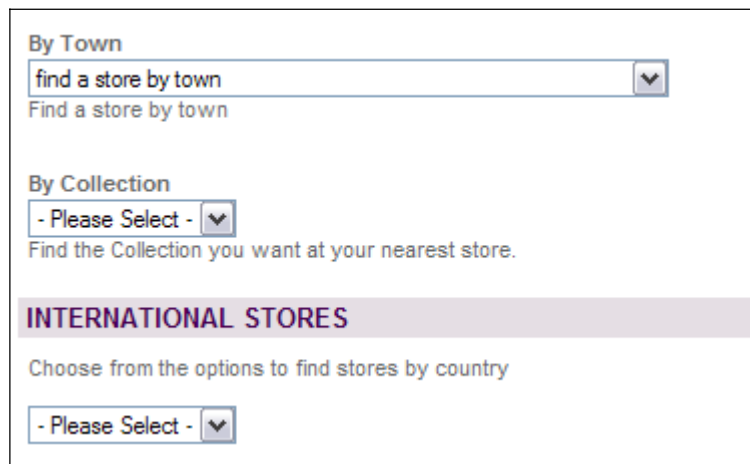
19. Form items don't cause auto-refresh

Average score: 4.2 (out of 5) [Last year 3.3]

Auto-refreshes unexpectedly send screen reader and screen magnifier users back to the top of the page. In some instances this means these users will be unable to use a particular form item as it keeps causing a refresh.

In particular, dropdown menus that auto-refresh can be impossible to use for screen reader and keyboard only users – the moment they attempt to work through the list the first item becomes selected and the page will automatically refresh.

Submit buttons should be used to submit a form, in order to avoid the auto-refresh.

A screenshot of a web form for finding stores. It contains three sections: "By Town" with a search box containing "find a store by town" and a dropdown arrow; "By Collection" with a dropdown menu showing "- Please Select -" and a subtext "Find the Collection you want at your nearest store."; and "INTERNATIONAL STORES" with a subtext "Choose from the options to find stores by country" and another dropdown menu showing "- Please Select -".

The dropdown menus on the store locator page of the Accessorize site cause the page to auto-refresh. If the page needs to reload then a 'Go' button should be provided.

With an average score of 4.2 out of 5, this crucial guideline is the highest scoring in the report. 14 of the 19 websites scored maximum points here and those that failed to typically contained dropdown menus that caused an auto-refresh.

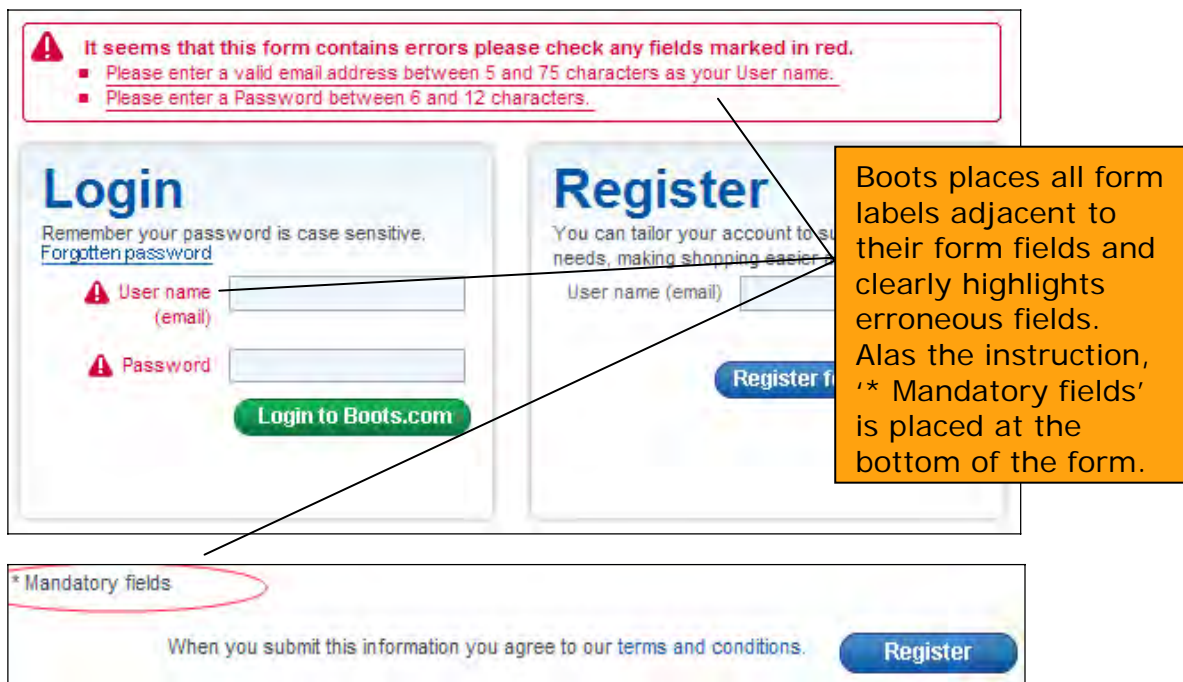
Category: Forms

20. Forms effectively designed

Average score: 3.5 (out of 5) [Last year 2.8]

In addition to the other form guidelines, the following should also be adhered to in order for a form to be effectively designed for accessibility:

- Form labels and their associated form fields should be located next to each other – if items are too far away from each other then screen magnifier users, who can only see one part of the screen at a time, may match the wrong field to a label
- Server side validation should be used and display an error summary at the top of the page as well as an error message next to each erroneous item – the former is crucial for screen reader and magnifier users to explain why they're still on the same page; the latter informs users with special needs, within context, what error needs fixing
- Instructions should be placed before the form fields to which they refer (e.g. '* indicates required fields' should come at the top of the form) – Screen reader and magnifier users need to know about instructions before they arrive at the item to which the instructions refer



It seems that this form contains errors please check any fields marked in red.

- Please enter a valid email address between 5 and 75 characters as your User name.
- Please enter a Password between 6 and 12 characters.

Login
Remember your password is case sensitive.
[Forgotten password](#)

User name (email)

Password

Login to Boots.com

Register
You can tailor your account to suit your needs, making shopping easier.

User name (email)

Register

* Mandatory fields

When you submit this information you agree to our [terms and conditions](#).

Register

Boots places all form labels adjacent to their form fields and clearly highlights erroneous fields. Alas the instruction, '* Mandatory fields' is placed at the bottom of the form.

This guideline has also seen significant improvement in this year's report with the average score increasing from 2.8 to 3.5. 13 of the 19 websites scored 4 or 5 out of 5, but the main reason for lost points is the lack of either an error summary or individual error messages when validation is provided.

Conclusion

With an average score of just under 62%, many retailers have made progress in the accessibility of their websites. Although the top mark has slipped by 2%, there are again 5 retailers scoring over 70 and doing very well. The main improvement in this report is at the lower end, with only 1 retailer now scoring lower than 50% compared to 7 back in 2007. Special mention must go to Boots which increased its score by a massive 35% to 72%.

The vast majority of websites now offer average to good accessibility on many of the guidelines, but sloppiness and inconsistency is still inherent when it comes to the implementation of accessibility – perhaps more so than in 2007, with some retailers letting their scores slip. Again, guidelines are often adhered to on some pages but not on others.

Generally sites are improving though and there are far fewer now that are risking a vast amount of lost revenue and legal action due to inaccessible websites. However, these retailers as a whole still need to improve. There were 5 guidelines where the average score came in at less than 2.5 out of 5, including embedding text within images, and providing focus states for links and skip links.

The accessibility guidelines presented in this report represent just the start to achieving excellent accessibility. There are additional lower priority and/or complex guidelines not covered by this study. Also, guidelines can only go so far in evaluating crucial accessibility requirements as 'real world' accessibility can often extend beyond guidelines.

References

1. Employers' Forum on Disability (www.efd.org.uk/disability/disability-facts)
2. Ofcom
(www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/disabled/)
3. RNIB
(www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_legalcase.hcsp)

Appendix: Full results

The full list of websites audited, and the score they achieved for each guideline is as follows:

Website	Guideline number																				TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	3	5	5	3	4	4	3	4	5	5	2	3	4	5	4	1	3	2	5	4	74
Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	5	5	3	2	2	4	3	5	2	0	3	4	4	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	72
Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	4	3	4	3	3	2	2	4	3	0	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	71
HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	5	5	2	3	2	4	4	5	5	0	4	4	4	0	4	5	5	3	3	3	70
Game (www.game.co.uk)	4	3	3	2	1	4	4	5	2	0	5	5	4	3	4	5	4	5	5	2	70
B&Q (www.diy.com)	5	2	4	3	4	2	3	5	3	0	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	3	5	4	68
Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	4	4	2	2	3	5	5	5	4	0	1	1	4	3	4	5	3	3	5	5	68
H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	1	4	3	1	2	3	2	4	5	1	3	3	4	4	5	4	3	3	5	5	65
Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	3	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	0	1	3	3	0	3	4	5	5	5	4	64
Accessorize (www.accessorize.co.uk)	5	3	5	2	2	2	2	5	3	0	3	5	3	1	4	5	4	4	2	3	63
WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	3	3	3	1	2	4	4	4	3	0	2	4	3	2	5	5	5	3	1	4	61
Topshop (www.topshop.co.uk)	3	4	3	4	2	3	4	4	5	2	1	4	3	2	2	1	1	1	5	4	58



User experience research & design

Website	Guideline number																				TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
Marks & Spencer (www.mands.com)	3	4	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	1	0	2	3	4	3	0	4	4	5	4	58
Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	3	4	4	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	1	5	5	2	5	5	3	3	5	4	58
Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	4	0	4	2	2	4	4	5	3	0	4	3	3	2	4	5	4	1	1	1	56
Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	1	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	5	0	4	5	3	0	4	5	1	1	3	3	54
The Body Shop (www.thebodyshop.co.uk)	5	3	1	3	1	2	1	4	3	0	3	3	3	1	3	4	1	3	5	4	53
Next (www.next.co.uk)	0	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	4	0	0	3	3	3	4	5	3	3	5	0	51
Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	1	3	3	1	1	0	1	4	3	0	2	4	0	0	3	2	0	0	5	4	37
TOTAL	62	65	64	43	43	55	54	77	67	9	47	69	62	40	74	75	61	57	80	67	
Average score	3.3	3.4	3.4	2.3	2.3	2.9	2.8	4.1	3.5	0.5	2.5	3.6	3.3	2.1	3.9	3.9	3.2	3.0	4.2	3.5	61.6



User experience research & design

About Webcredible

Webcredible is a user experience consultancy, offering a range of usability, accessibility & design services based around your specific requirements:

User-centered design

- Information architecture
- Interaction design

Web development & audits

- Accessible CSS web design
- Accessible content management system
- Accessibility audits

User research

- Usability testing
- Interviews & focus groups
- Persona creation

Training & mentoring

- Usability, IA & web writing
- Accessibility & CSS
- Ongoing support & mentoring

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected user experience consultancies in the UK. Our 150+ research articles have been re-published on 100s of websites and we receive 150,000+ visitors to our website each month.

We are:

- Focused on client needs** – Our aims are to ensure public sector organisations most effectively disseminate information and increase conversion rates for companies.
- Passionate** – The team here at Webcredible loves what they do and we only recruit staff passionate about usability and accessibility.
- Approachable** – We're friendly and jargon-free. Consultants, despite being highly educated and experienced, only communicate in a user-friendly manner.

Clients include Airmiles, BBC, eBay, EDF Energy, Lloyds TSB, Norwich Union, Sony, T-Mobile, Thomson and World Health Organization.

For more information please:

- Telephone 0870 242 6095
- E-mail info@webcredible.co.uk
- Visit www.webcredible.co.uk