

Web site accessibility

The features

Web site accessibility, in e-business terms, is about making sure that you meet your legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. In practical terms that means making the site **accessible to disabled people**, using assistive technologies, such as text readers and Braille displays. It not only means allowing access to the site itself, but optimising as much of the site's content and functionality as possible for disabled visitors.

Fortunately, if your site has been or is being optimised for search engines, that will make it inherently more accessible, because of the way that spiders and assistive technologies work. There will be more work to be done, of course, but the basics will already be in place on a properly search engine friendly site.

Because every site is different, there is no pre-defined programme of **research** and **analysis, design** and **coding** and **validation** and **testing**, although every accessibility project will always start with a phase of strategic planning and finish with training and support as required. However, a **typical accessibility project** will go something like this:

First, we assess the site in terms of its **basic accessibility**. All-Flash sites or sites with log-in or registration systems, for example, are completely impenetrable, and this needs to be addressed first.

Next, we look at the **content and functionality** of the site. Text and pages are made resizable, links are more informative than just 'click here', images and animations are given written descriptions, forms, charts and tables are made readable, and alternative content is available in case active features don't work. If required, we can **re-engineer the site code** using Cascading Style sheets, a disabled visitor-friendly format. CSS makes sites easier to maintain and search engine friendly too.

Lastly, we implement an ongoing programme of **monitoring and maintenance** to ensure that new content or on-site features are accessible and to measure the results, in terms of increased sales, reduced future development costs and, ultimately ROI.

The next step

For more information about Weboptimiser's Web site accessibility services, either email nicholine@weboptimiser.com, call us on 0207 953 7150 or visit www.weboptimiser.com

The benefits

By enabling access to the 8.6 million registered disabled people in the and 12 million over 60s in the UK, you can significantly expand your market. Secondly, accessibility can improve your search engine visibility, which can boost qualified traffic. Lastly, an accessible site is better for everyone, not just disabled visitors, and can dramatically improve conversion rates. And thirdly, because content is separate from presentation, your site is not only easier to maintain but can be more readily adaptable for future web platforms, such as mobile.