

## Document accessibility still has a way to go

Many blind and partially sighted customers have struggled to carry out transactions and view information online, thanks to recent redesigns to banking websites that didn't consider their needs. This comes as no revelation to Jeff Mills, a board member of the UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF), an industry association promoting accessible information best practice



Changes made to some banking websites this year have made it difficult or impossible for the blind and visually impaired to access full services and accompanying documents online, literally locking them out of their bank accounts.

These all-singing-all-dancing new websites come with elaborate banners and lots of extra text. With so much information now on the screen essential words such as 'transfer money', were getting lost. This has confused screen reading access software, which could not cope with the complex changes. One bank, for example, introduced three password boxes requiring a single character from the complete password to be entered to access documents, instead of the usual single box. With no alert to announce this, the screen reader did not recognise this big change - users

thus found themselves being repeatedly rejected from the site.

Banks have been forced to apologise, accepting that the website updates were not fully tested for full accessibility which left screen readers unable to interpret text. Unfortunately this is not the first time, and won't be the last time we will see this happen.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is a set of international guidelines that that has been put together to make Web content more accessible, regardless of device. The guidelines are intended for all web content and authoring tools developers. It was first published back in 1998. WCAG 2.1 update is expected to be published this year. Unfortunately however, not all websites are developed to follow these compliance recommendations.

With technological innovation accelerating, it is also difficult for organisations to keep up when it comes to accessibility. This means that organisations need to continually keep testing their websites for accessibility to stay ahead. If organisations want to be seen as thoughtful and inclusive re information and documents online, it is something they have to allow time and budget for.

### THE PDF ISSUE

This isn't the only issue. PDFs like other online content need to be accessible. Yet PDF documents are another problem for the blind and partially sighted community. This much-used format for documents still in many

cases does not conform to the PDF/UA definition of requirements for universal access to PDF documents.

It does not need to be this way. Many organisations probably don't realise that it requires very little investment to comply with PDF/UA. Microsoft Office, for example, includes accessibility features for documents. Apple is also actively working on accessibility. Inexpensive add-ons and apps can be easily found for Google G Suite.

The last thing any organisation wants to do is stop people accessing documents and information simply because they are visually impaired. Over two million people in the UK live with sight loss, according to the Royal National Institute for the Blind. To put that in perspective it is around one person in every thirty. Of these approximately 360,000 people are registered with their local authority as blind or partially sighted. As our world is becoming more connected it is imperative we do not leave these people excluded from key digital resources.

Online advertising is expected to outspend TV advertising by \$40 billion this year, according to advertising metrics company Zenith Online. Your organisation may well be included in this figure. Shutting out a significant percentage of your audience simply due to accessibility issues does not make sense. Now is the time to make sure your website (and all your documentation) is truly useable by everyone.

**More info:** [www.ukaaf.org](http://www.ukaaf.org)