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Articles

Greatly Improve Your Website's Success By Being Accessible

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The original Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), and its revisions in October 2004, require a business to make "reasonable adjustments" to its services to avoid discrimination against disabled people.

Many businesses simply interpret this to mean that access to buildings and amenities should be altered to ensure wheelchair users are able to move around with greater ease. However, the implications of the DDA are more wide reaching and, in particular, they apply to businesses' websites.

As a business owner, your website is regarded as a "service" and so both access to, and use of, your website are governed by the DDA.

How Does The DDA Affect My Website?

This seems like a conundrum: your website is a visual medium and disabled users include those with impaired or no vision. How can you ensure your website can be used by someone who may not be able to see it?

A visually impaired person may use software on their computer that reads aloud the content of a web page. Similarly, some visitors may choose to enlarge the content of a page so they find it easier to see. Other disabled visitors may use their keyboard to navigate around your website instead of using a mouse.

Therefore, the accessibility of your website for disabled users is largely determined by its structure and flexibility: when content is read aloud by screen-reading software, does it flow in a natural order and make sense? Is it possible to enlarge the text on your web page or is it fixed at a certain size? Can visitors move from one page to another without needing to use a mouse?

Updating your website to meet accessibility guidelines is a legal requirement. and, if your website does not meet such requirements, a good web development company will be able to make the necessary changes.

However, there are numerous "spin-off" advantages to improving accessibility and these will make your website more successful.

Success #1: More Market Share

An accessible website, which can be used by disabled and non-disabled people alike, is open to a far wider audience than one that is less accessible. When you realise that...

- 10 million people in the UK are disabled (source [DRC](#));
- 9% of the UK population are colour blind (source: [IEE](#));
- 2 million in the UK have a sight problem (source: [RNIB](#));
- 12 million people in the UK are aged 60 or over (source: [UK Government](#));

...it is clear that a large proportion of the UK population may need your website to be accessible in order for them to make full use of it.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines will encourage visits from more people, which increases your number of potential customers.

Success #2: Better Search Engine Ranking

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo and MSN determine how relevant your website is to certain “keywords” by reading the content on your web pages.

Search engines find it easier to interpret content on an accessible website and so they are more inclined to rank a website highly for relevant keywords.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines will help you achieve a higher search engine ranking, which will generate more visitors to your website.

Success #3: More Versatile Website

Increasingly, people don't just access the Internet by using a PC. Visitors may view your website on their mobile phone, on their handheld computer or on their television.

An inaccessible website designed with little flexibility is unlikely to function well on these alternative browsing devices. People viewing your website in such a way will be dissatisfied and will quickly try your competitors' websites instead.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines means you will not alienate important visitors, which will help you retain visitors rather than encourage them to go to your competitors' sites instead.

Success #4: Faster Website

A common misconception amongst website owners is that “accessibility” is something that can be bolted on to an existing website. Accessibility is intrinsic to the way the website is structured and is not an add-on.

Therefore, improving the accessibility of your website does not mean increasing the site's overall size; rather, it is likely that improving the website's accessibility will reduce its size as the improved website will be constructed in a lean, efficient way.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines means you will reduce the size of your website, which will ensure your pages download faster. Visitors will not be put off by slow-loading pages, which will help you retain visitors rather than encourage them to go to your competitors' sites instead.

Success #5: Lower Hosting Costs

Similarly, because improvements to your site's accessibility are likely to reduce its overall

size, you may find your new website is less demanding from a hosting point of view.

Your new, slim-line website will require less web space on the server, for instance. Also, as your web pages download more quickly, you are less likely to incur extra charges for using bandwidth beyond your usual allocation.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines means you minimise your hosting requirements, which will save you money.

Success #6: Lower Maintenance Costs

Accessible websites are written to well-defined guidelines, which provide standards by which professional website development companies abide.

In particular, because good practice encourages developers to separate a website's content (the text and images) from its layout (the colour of the text; the position of the images), website maintenance is a less time-consuming, and therefore less-costly, operation.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines means you minimise your on-going maintenance costs, which will save you money.

Success #7: More Portable Website

The standards developed through the need for better accessibility mean that good website developers now have a common format to work to.

A well-constructed website built with programming code that meets such standards is easier to maintain than one riddled with "spaghetti" code (copious lines of code that are hard to unravel).

Therefore, an accessible website is not intrinsically linked to the person who first developed it. Other website developers will find it relatively easy to understand a site's construction and be able to take on its maintenance.

Ensuring your website meets accessibility guidelines means you reduce the likelihood of being tied in to one website developer, which provides your business with more options when choosing a supplier.

Iceberg Internet works to industry standards for accessibility. Contact us on (01332) 331332 or at www.iceberginternet.co.uk to request a free accessibility audit of your website or to discuss how we can make your website more successful.

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