

Web Accessibility Buyer's Guide

How to find the right vendors and
solutions to address your digital
accessibility compliance requirements



Research
Powered
Content

In partnership with

FirstSpirit™

A crownpeak solution

Contents

- 3 How web accessibility impacts brands in a digital world
- 4 The accessibility buying process - an overview
- 5 Learn about legal compliance
- 6 Build the business case for investment in accessibility
- 8 Define your accessibility requirements
- 9 Evaluate the accessibility tools and solutions available
- 10 Choose the right digital accessibility partner
- 11 Work effectively with your accessibility partner
- 12 Track your efforts to demonstrate progress
- 13 Scale your accessibility efforts
- 14 Your key takeaways
- 15 About us



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Introduction

How web accessibility impacts brands in a digital world

You want your brand's digital offering to be accessible to everyone. But if there's a disparity over who can and cannot access your products and services, you may be failing to reach the people in your own backyard.

According to the World Health Organization there are approximately 1.3 billion people with disabilities in the global population,¹ while up to one in four adults in the United States describe themselves as being disabled in some way.²

Excluding just over a quarter (26%) of the population harms more than just your customer base. Access to websites and digital resources is essential for employment, education, and independent living. Without it, people with disabilities may not have equal opportunities to participate fully in society or access basic services.

Despite huge technological advances accelerated during the pandemic, a time when the world went online for just about everything, it's clear that disabled web users are still being woefully under-served.

In 2022, Utah State University's Web AIM Million Project reported that 96.8% of homepages still contained accessibility errors that left people with disabilities unable to interact with elements on the page.³

The worst-performing industry for digital accessibility? Retail, with an average of 8.35 issues likely per page.⁴ It's no wonder that an estimated \$6.9 billion a year is lost by brands with inaccessible websites to their more accessible counterparts.⁵

There are legal implications to digital inaccessibility, too. Failing to comply with accessibility laws leaves brands and business owners vulnerable to costly lawsuits and demand letters.

In the US, where application of legal compliance laws are robust, ecommerce accessibility lawsuits are at an all-time high, reaching 4,061 in 2022⁶. Although the bulk of legal action takes aim at larger organizations, these suits are increasingly setting their sights on small businesses.

Formulating an accessibility strategy

Making your digital offering more accessible is key, with clear benefits for your customers, your strategy and your bottom line. But even those who know the importance of accessibility in the digital space may struggle to formulate a best-practice digital accessibility plan. While standards and resources for implementing digital accessibility exist, they are often worded specifically for developers and may not be easy for business owners or senior managers to implement in their own organizations.

The right accessibility partner can help you formulate a digital inclusivity strategy to mitigate your legal risk, while saving you time and money. These solutions combine cost-effective and business-friendly technology with manual remediation strategies to help you bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be (as well as where the law requires you to be).

Keeping websites accessible and legally compliant is an ever-evolving challenge for companies. The right accessibility partner can put your company on the right track, and keep you there.

About this guide

Understanding the digital accessibility landscape will help you evaluate which providers are right for you. This guide to digital accessibility will take you through the buying process step by step, to help you deliver the following benefits for your organization:

- **Clear understanding** of your organization's legal responsibility with regards to the accessibility of your digital properties.
- **Strategies** to get support and investment in digital inclusivity from internal stakeholders.
- **Clear understanding** of project scope to present to potential vendors.
- **Comparison, evaluation and selection** of suitable providers, tools and solutions.
- **Ways to work effectively** with your chosen vendor to track your progress and deliver an accessibility solution at scale.

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

³ <https://webaim.org/projects/million/>

⁴ https://www.crownpeak.com/resources/ebooks/ebook_accessibility.pdf?v=20020723012023

⁵ <https://www.campaignasia.com/article/losing-billions-why-are-brands-still-not-prioritising-digital-accessibility/482172>

⁶ <https://3280432.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/3280432/Remediated%20-%202022-Year-End-Report-FINAL.pdf>

The accessibility buying process – an overview

Business owners and senior leaders who are trying to make their digital offerings legally compliant unknowingly face a minefield of solutions that cost too much money, waste time, and don't effectively mitigate risk.

Digital accessibility has existed as an industry for several decades, meaning specialists have accumulated years of expertise in the field.

Specific services and costs vary considerably from one vendor to another, making it difficult to evaluate the best partner for your own organization.

Those selecting an accessibility partner typically need to go through the following stages:

LEARN - about legal compliance

BUILD - the business case for investment in accessibility

DEFINE - the scope of your accessibility requirements

EVALUATE - the accessibility tools and solutions available

CHOOSE - the right accessibility partner for your enterprise

WORK - effectively with your accessibility partner

TRACK - your efforts to demonstrate your progress

SCALE - your accessibility efforts

Section 1

LEARN about legal compliance

Moral imperatives aside, there's another reason to ensure that accessibility is more than just an afterthought at your own organization: it's a way for your brand to mitigate legal risk.

Since 2017, there has been a 200% increase in web-related accessibility lawsuits, the majority of which are filed by people who have sight or hearing disabilities.⁷ The fallout from these cases is that valuable time is wasted, not to mention up to \$350,000 in costs.⁸ Many claims begin as demand letters to businesses that are settled before a lawsuit is ever filed.

In addition, there is no limit to the number of accessibility lawsuits a business can receive. Some industries are more affected than others. With the global surge of online shopping, it's no surprise that ecommerce businesses are at higher risk for legal action.

So what international laws and guidelines do you need to be aware of?

International accessibility laws and guidelines at a glance

ADA

In the US, web accessibility regulation falls under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This impactful Act was signed into law in 1990 to prohibit discrimination against disabled people in all areas of public life.

Key facts:

- In 2021, ADA- based digital accessibility lawsuits reached 10 per day - a 15% increase from 2020.⁹
- The vast majority of lawsuits towards businesses allege ADA Title III violations related to website accessibility.
- Title III of the ADA prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation against persons with disabilities.
- While ADA Title III lawsuits have traditionally focused on physical accessibility elements, websites are now a prime target for accessibility claims, by people who claim they are unable to use a business's website due to incompatibility with screen reader software, for example.
- The Department of Justice stepped in in early 2022 to clarify that websites are considered places of public accommodation and fall under the ADA legislation.¹⁰
- The ADA does not mandate a specific set of standards to meet accessibility requirements, which often leads to confusion.
- Best-practice strategy is to follow WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines as a minimum requirement.

EAA

The EU private sector had largely been unregulated when it came to accessibility. In June 2022 the European Accessibility Act (EAA), enforceable in 2025, aimed to change all that.

Key facts:

- The act calls for member states to enforce penalties for noncompliance in a way that is "effective, proportionate, and dissuasive".
- Unlike previous accessibility legislation which was largely focused on public-sector organizations, the EAA also covers private-sector firms.
- Companies that employ fewer than ten people and have an annual turnover of less than €2 million are exempt from this directive.
- The EAA does not provide any technical accessibility standards that businesses must comply with to ensure their website is accessible.

WCAG

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG) are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility.

Key facts:

- WCAG 2.1 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.
- Accessibility involves a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities.
- WCAG 2.1 is based on four design principles: websites must be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.
- For years, WCAG 2.1 guidelines have been the north star for all enterprises seeking to make their digital entities more accessible.
- But WCAG has no legal standing and no enforcement, meaning companies have been slow to comply.

⁷ <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/ada-title-iii-website-accessibility-7564897>

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2023/01/18/technology-vs-legislation-which-will-save-web-accessibility/>

⁹ <https://blog.usablenet.com/2021-lawsuit-report-trends-and-findings>

¹⁰ <https://www.ada.gov/resources/web-guidance/>

Section 2

BUILD the business case for investment in accessibility

To help you win the business case for investment in accessibility, you'll need the support of key internal stakeholders - who may consider remediation costly and cumbersome, with low return on investment.

We have summarized some of the benefits of digital accessibility to your brand, then looked at the unique advantages that engaging the right accessibility partner can bring. The key to success is to apply these generic

benefits to your own business objectives and processes, so you can estimate, as accurately as possible, the potential upsides in terms of decreased legal risk and improved digital experiences, along with the opportunity costs of failing to take action.

Benefits of accessibility to your business

1. Risk reduction

Many countries have laws that require digital accessibility. Ignoring web accessibility comes with significant legal risk and opportunity costs, with average ADA settlements ranging from \$20k to \$50k, reaching up to \$6M.¹¹

2. Market opportunity

The global market of people with disabilities is over 1 billion people with a spending power of more than \$13 trillion in annual disposable income.¹² Around 20% of users have some form of disability and a lot of those customers will go to a different site if their specific needs aren't met.

3. Drive innovation

Digital accessibility features often have unexpected benefits for all users. For example, contrast guidelines, first established to help those with limited vision see what's on their screen more easily, have had a trickle-down effect to everyone who wants to use their smartphone in the sun. Eye-tracking technology, text-to-speech and speech-to-text were also initially created for people with disabilities, but are now features enjoyed by everyone.

4. Up to 20% lift in SEO and marketing performance

Accessible design techniques correspond with those that support technical and on-page SEO. Best-in-kind accessibility providers say their customers regularly experience a 5-20% lift in their SEO and overall marketing performance.

5. Enhance your brand

Clearly communicated accessibility commitments will strengthen your brand image in a value and trust-oriented market. In fact, companies who don't prioritize accessibility as part of their development and testing strategies are at risk of getting left behind. In a Gartner Report, senior director analyst Brent Stewart stated that, "By 2023, digital products in full WCAG Level 2 compliance will outperform their market competitors by 50%."¹³

6. Improve your DEI efforts

Although 90% of companies claim to prioritize diversity, only 4% consider disability in those initiatives.¹⁴ With a clear, well-integrated accessibility commitment your organization's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts are accelerated.

¹¹ <https://arstechnica.com/uncategorized/2008/08/target-to-pay-6-million-to-settle-site-accessibility-suit/>

¹² <https://wfanet.org/knowledge/diversity-and-inclusion/item/2020/09/01/The-Global-Economics-of-Disability-2020>

¹³ <https://www.gartner.com/en/documents/4006539>

¹⁴ <https://time.com/6246262/businesses-must-be-inclusive/>

Unique benefits of partnering with an accessibility specialist

1. Help you demonstrate progress and commitment

When you partner with a best-of-breed accessibility vendor, their centralized platform creates a record of your accessibility progress over time. This record can be used to demonstrate your organization's continued efforts toward, commitment to, and investment in digital accessibility.

2. Access to solutions that save you time and money

The right accessibility partners offer both manual expertise and automated scanning and monitoring platforms. They can easily manage multi-site compliance and streamline work across distributed teams.

3. Full knowledge of the intricacies of the law

A digital accessibility provider will understand the ever-changing legal landscape and how it applies to your own enterprise. They will work closely with your legal team to help validate or defend any claims against you.

4. Help you avoid piecemeal solutions that can leave you exposed

Accessibility plug-ins and overlays aren't fully compliant, while manual audits may only provide a one-time fix. The best accessibility partners provide a mix of both.

5. Have a unique perspective

The right accessibility partner will have years of experience helping companies address accessibility across their digital presence. As a result, they have a unique perspective into the operational and strategic challenges organizations face.



Section 3

DEFINE your accessibility requirements

There's no point in searching for solutions until you have a better handle on your own accessibility requirements. Understanding where your digital offerings are right now will help you evaluate and plan your next steps.

You should undertake this process even if your company has never had an official complaint filed, as this is not confirmation that your site is accessible.

All of your work at this stage will feed into your accessibility vendor selection process further down the line.

Gain a thorough understanding

Many people within your organization may have limited or no previous exposure to people with disabilities and the barriers they face. By helping them understand the human element of accessibility beyond pure compliance, you can build support for your program and help motivate others to prioritize the work.

To do this, talk to your disabled users. Interviews, workshops, and surveys can all be used to elicit information about user needs. Consider creating user scenarios or stories that can surface the challenges users are facing, and also the opportunities that a more accessible website could bring.

Carry out an inventory

Carry out an inventory of the types of digital assets your organization is currently using, or plans to use, across all your touchpoints and engagement activities.

Create an accessibility baseline

For small companies, trying out a free screen reader on your website will help you see the scale of your accessibility issues.

For mid to large enterprises, the most efficient way to develop a baseline is by using an automated accessibility testing tool to identify existing errors.

Set some goals

Your baseline will also give you a strong starting point to set goals, metrics to confirm you're moving in the right direction, and a roadmap so you have a clear path to complete your initial accessibility compliance project.



Section 4

EVALUATE the accessibility tools and solutions available

Once you've secured stakeholder buy-in, it's important to understand the website accessibility landscape so you can effectively evaluate which providers are right for you.

Deciding which tools and solutions will best address your accessibility issues will also help you carry out more robust comparisons when choosing an accessibility partner.

Automated testing and monitoring

Technology used to test for, remediate, monitor, and report on the compliance of digital experiences. Automated tools run tests against WCAG criteria to identify accessibility issues on your web properties. For an enterprise solution, they should also provide granular and flexible reporting, allowing you to divide the remediation work in a way that aligns with your organizational structure.

Manual testing

Through services such as audits, training, accessibility policy development, legal expertise, and strategic consulting, manual testing is often used to supplement automated testing. You'll achieve the best ROI by working with experienced manual testing consultants who can focus on larger, more strategic accessibility issues beyond checklist compliance.

Hybrid model

Best-in-class accessibility providers use a hybrid model to test and then remediate. Even the best automation tools cannot detect more than about 30% of WCAG issues. Manual testing is needed to test against the remaining 70%.

The different types of accessibility providers on the market

Making the right choice is critical to getting the best return on your investment. There are generally three types of accessibility providers to choose from:

- Sole-proprietor operations
- Companies that solely focus on accessibility
- Companies that also do other types of testing (for example, privacy or security)

It can therefore be challenging to compare like-for-like. Smaller companies may offer a laser focus on accessibility, while larger ones offer a variety of other testing services that could help you scale your efforts in the future.

The following criteria are important when making your choice:

Deep understanding - your vendor should have a deep knowledge of accessibility on multiple levels, for example, legal, technical and by industry sector.

Stability and continuity - how many years of continuous operations does your shortlisted vendor have under their belt? Making sure your provider will be there when you need them, even years into the future, can help you avoid the costs and time implications of starting again with a new vendor.

Demonstrated experience - your vendor should have previous experience in partnering with enterprise-class organizations.

Capabilities - does your shortlisted vendor have enough full-time employees to scale with the different needs of larger accounts? You should also check whether consultants have direct professional experience in UX, web, or software development.

Section 5

CHOOSE the right accessibility partner for your enterprise

Choosing the right partner can be the difference between success and failure. But being faced with costly and reputation-harming legal action means businesses often make hasty decisions that lead to poor outcomes.

In these circumstances, vendors that promise to get your website compliant in as little as 24 hours without touching the underlying source code may seem an attractive proposition. But such quick fixes are unlikely to mitigate risk long-term.

The bottom line is that you need to stay accessible - something that can require a significant investment. Choosing a vendor is therefore a crucial decision for owners and senior managers to make.

These questions will help clarify if a shortlisted vendor is right for you.

Questions you should be asking at this stage

What is your methodology for accessibility testing?

Automation cannot detect and remediate 100% of accessibility issues and will never be able to. A hybrid model of manual and automation is always required. Vendors that tell you otherwise are not being transparent and should be avoided.

How will you help us prioritize where to start?

Prioritization is a key part of the remediation process. Make sure the vendor talks about how they'll help you create a roadmap so that you can take a phased approach.

How much experience do you have in my sector?

Although the general tenets of accessibility do not change, some industry-specific experience may be beneficial. For example, ecommerce websites are likely to contain robust search capabilities and a shopping cart, while healthcare or educational websites might be heavier in resource documents.

Do you offer an automated scanning and monitoring platform for time-saving?

The right automated scanning and monitoring platform lets you uncover issues across all of your digital assets, for fast improvements. They'll also provide you with prioritized, actionable, easy-to-understand fixes.

How will you help me demonstrate progress?

The reporting system used by your potential accessibility partner is crucial as it allows you to track and compare your level of compliance over time. Being able to show your progress in creating an accessible system goes a long way if you do get a demand letter before you've finished remediating.

Will your reports be easy to read and useful?

Reporting is a key differentiator between different accessibility providers - depth, level of detail, accuracy, and the quality of guidance delivered can all vary. Discuss how accessibility reports will be tailored to people within your organization - for example to your development teams, senior leadership or legal counsel.

Can you easily manage multi-site compliance?

Will your shortlisted vendor help you centralize the monitoring and flagging of web accessibility issues - even if they're distributed across many different countries and jurisdictions?

Can you solve larger issues with expert consulting and manual testing?

Accessibility tools only catch a percentage of errors, meaning manual testing is also needed to gauge the true accessibility health of your site. Not all companies have this type of legal and technical knowledge to keep up with evolving standards and regulations.

Can you natively integrate with my CMS?

Manually exporting, analyzing, and importing data between the accessibility tool and your CMS can lead to inefficiencies and an increase in errors. Discuss how the accessibility capabilities can be natively integrated for fast and efficient data accessibility and quality checks.

Section 6

WORK effectively with your accessibility partner

Engaging an accessibility partner can help when you need to move the needle in response to legal action. But full compliance is a lengthy process which requires on-going focus and commitment.

Working effectively with an accessibility partner can help with the following:

Creating a roadmap

The right partner will help you establish timelines for your projects. This will allow your development team to follow the tasks needed for compliance consecutively.

Delegating responsibilities

By assigning clear ownership to tasks, you can eliminate the guesswork that might arise when a particular feature or function isn't delivering on accessibility. It's helpful to ensure that whoever works on your website adopts an accessibility mindset.

Setting regular deadlines

Deadlines are useful to keep the team organized, and can help prove that legal obligations are being met.

Training and awareness

Education on how to make sure you have a more inclusive digital experience for everyone is vital for success. Make sure your accessibility partner can empower your team to implement best practices, improve processes and ensure compliance.

Using their expertise

You need support from a team of experts in accessibility, data quality and compliance combined with a dedicated team of customer success managers to help you establish best practices. Guidance throughout implementation and maintenance will ensure peace of mind, knowing that you are doing things correctly the first time around and thereby avoiding roadblocks in the future.

Tracking SEO

The right partner will help you identify what is impacting your search engine optimization to improve your online visibility, boost conversions and elevate your overall digital experience.



Section 7

TRACK your efforts to demonstrate progress

Accessibility is a journey, not a one-and-done project. While engaging and working with an accessibility partner is an important step, you now have to maintain and monitor the progress that you've made.

The reasons for this are as follows:

Mitigate your legal risk

Every organization can be the target of an accessibility complaint. Avoid lengthy and costly lawsuits by knowing exactly how accessible you are at all times.

Reports that demonstrate progress are frequently used to defend against demand letters or legal claims for non-compliance. Tracking the progress of your accessibility efforts gives you robust data that helps mitigate legal risk.

Help your development team

Monitoring for accessibility allows your development team to prioritize their workload to ensure they're making the remediation fixes that really matter.

Save time and money

Monitoring and tracking can also ensure your development team is not attempting to 'fix' non-issues - the so-called false positives found by automated accessibility software. Fixing a false positive isn't just a costly waste of time, it could even make your website less accessible.

How an accessibility partner helps you track effectively

Many companies think they're tracking progress, but they're actually doing it on an ad-hoc basis, using free-tool scanning on single pages. As such, they don't have the data to know what they've done in the past, or to measure how different digital properties are performing in the present.

Gaining global visibility across all your digital properties that allows you to see your progress and follow-through is the best assurance that reform will be successful and complete.

Best-of-breed accessibility partners use a dashboard with global and website-level views that centralize data and scans both continuously and historically.



Section 8

SCALE your accessibility efforts

For global companies that operate in multiple markets across multiple borders, the risks and costs involved in accessibility compliance rise with every new digital experience that is launched.

Finding a partner willing to work with you on a solution that scales is a crucial consideration.

Delivering accessibility at scale

Identify template-level issues

The accessibility service you choose should help you identify issues built into your templates and stylesheets. Addressing these can resolve problems across multiple pages in a short time span.

Educate on best practices

Educating your team about WCAG can ensure compliance right from the start. This is often built into your accessibility tool or can be delivered by training sessions.

Build accessibility into your pre-production process

Accessibility compliance can be integrated directly with your content management system to identify and address possible errors before they make it onto your website.

Hold third-party vendors accountable

Writing your accessibility process into agency contracts is key. It's also best practice to develop KPIs and standards that must be met for sites about to go live.



Section 9

Your key takeaways

Choosing the right accessibility partner can be critical to ensuring regulatory compliance and legal risk mitigation. Getting it wrong can be costly and time-consuming while needlessly adding to the project delivery timeline.

Make the right decision for your business by deciding which accessibility partner is right for you, using our helpful checklist for guidance.

DON'T: Make a hasty decision for a fast response on receipt of legal action or a demand letter.

DO: Think strategically. Remember that legal risk is mitigated if you can demonstrate progress in your accessibility efforts - look for a partner that can help you track this data effectively.

DON'T: Choose an automation-only solution. Vendors in this category promise a 'quick fix' solution to getting compliant with accessibility standards without touching the underlying source code.

DO: Look for a partner that offers the gold standard in accessibility - a hybrid model of automation and manual testing.

DON'T: Forget to check key differentiators when making your selection - will their reports be useful and easy to read? Can they demonstrate stability and continuity of operations?

DO: Remember that you're in this for the long haul. In addition to stability, the vendor must also have enough full-time staff to handle your organization's workload.

About us



Research
Powered
Content

London Research, set up by former Econsultancy research director Linus Gregoriadis, is focused on producing research-based content for B2B audiences. We are based in London, but our approach and outlook are very much international. We work predominantly, but not exclusively, with marketing technology vendors and agencies seeking to tell a compelling story based on robust research and insightful data points.

As part of Communitize Ltd, we work closely with our sister companies Digital Doughnut (a global community of more than 1.5 million marketers) and Demand Exchange (a lead generation platform), both to syndicate our research and generate high-quality leads.

FirstSpirit™

A **crownpeak** solution

FirstSpirit enables customers to create tailored digital experiences, to expand their brand and grow their revenue. Clients around the world including Unilever, Bosch, Nintendo, Asos and La Redoute trust FirstSpirit's cloud-native SaaS Digital Experience Platform (DXP) solutions to achieve their data-driven content goals and level up their digital experience initiatives. Founded in 2001, FirstSpirit continues to expand their product suite, providing Content Management, Digital Accessibility & Quality and Product Discovery capabilities to empower customers to build their own customized and successful DXP. Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, FirstSpirit has offices in cities across the globe, including Amsterdam, Dortmund, London, Münster, Newcastle and Paris. For more information, please visit www.crownpeak.com.

