DCIF Project – Communication Tool 5: Improving Online Accessibility

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Tags

Who is this tool for?

High Level Priority:
- Direct managers
- Corporate cross-departmental managers

Practical Information:
- HR Professionals
- Marketing Specialists

Useful to know:
- Executive and Senior management

What guidance does this tool provide?

- Actionable methods to check and improve accessibility over multi-channel experiences (i.e., social media, applications, websites)

Take home messages

- Please review all checklists when creating accessible social media posts, websites, optimizing applications
- Federally regulated entities are legally required to follow and meet the requirements of level AA conformance set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, published by the World Wide Web Consortium https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2021/2021-215.htm
- For additional information on how to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2 requirements, please follow the link How to Meet WCAG (Quickref Reference) (w3.org)

Social Media

Striving for inclusion paves the way for us to be innovative and create products, services, and experiences that are accessible to all people including those with disabilities and those with other life experiences. For instance, consider people who speak English as their first language and those who are learning English as a second language, or newcomers to Canada and people who were born in the country, or even the differences in understanding that arise between generations. All these intersectional life experiences, and more, impact a person's understanding and consumption of content on social media.

Inclusive design approaches to social media increases accessibility. Without accessibility, you miss connecting with your full potential audience, and the valuable opportunities and insights that come with it.

These guidelines are intended to help you create social media content that is accessible to all people. Remember, these recommendations provide an excellent starting point, but social media platforms and their unique features change frequently. It's best to check official product and software documentation regularly!

Checklist

Here are some best practices for how to make you social media accessibility friendly:

- ✓ **Make text accessible.** Write in plain language, avoid jargon/slang/technical terms. Use inclusive language and avoid ableist language. Other tips and tricks include:
    - o Do no overuse caps
    - o Avoid saying "click here," write what they're accessing by clicking the link
    - o Limit emoji use and avoid special characters
    - o Use an adequate font size
    - o Limit line length
- ✓ **Provide alternate descriptions for images (Alt Text).** Writing a good image description is like writing set or stage directions. Keep in mind, when writing a description what would be important for the person looking at the image to notice. To help convey content, mention colour, actions, and picture details, such as people or environment descriptions. Be sure to share humour, provide emotional/scientific/political context. Skip saying, "image of/photograph of" and transcribe the text.
- ✓ **Captioning of videos.** For video content, you should provide captions of audio. Captions can either be closed captions (i.e., text can be turned on/off) or open captions (i.e., text is embedded).
- ✓ **Emojis and emoticons.** Be considerate of users on screen readers by using emojis in small amount and place spaces between them. Braille readers' software are not regularly updated to reflect emojis, so refrain from relying on emojis to convey the entire meaning of the post.
- ✓ **Grammar guidelines.** Write plainly and Keep sentences short. If the writing is too complicated, readers will not be able to use it. Plain language documented improves accessibility. One best practice is to choose words with 1-2 syllables more. This will help to choose simpler words and reduce ambiguity.
- ✓ **CamelCase Hashtags.** When writing hashtags that are made up of multiple words, use initial capitalization, also known as CamelCase.
    - o Eg. WriteYourHashtagsLikeThis instead of #WRITEYOURHASHTAGSLIKETHIS → this helps eliminate accidental inappropriate word scrambling.

- ✓ **Representation.** Represent people with all kinds of levels of ability, including temporary disabilities like injury or limitations. This applies to all kinds of content — photos, videos, written, shared.

"Over 1/10 Canadians with disabilities (11.7%) used a cellphone, smartphone, or smartwatch with specialized software or adaptation because of their condition" – Choi, 2021

Good vs. Bad Social Media Posts[1]

Designing and Using Accessible Websites[2]

What is web accessibility? Web accessibility means that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. More specifically, **all** people can:
- Perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web
- Contribute to the Web

The Web is fundamentally designed to work for all people, whatever their hardware, software, language, location, or ability. When the Web meets this goal, it is accessible to people with a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive ability.

Thus, the impact of disability is radically changed on the Web because the Web removes barriers to communication and interaction that many people face in the physical world. However, when websites, applications, technologies, or tools are poorly designed, they can create barriers that exclude people from using the Web. Accessibility is essential for developers and organizations that want to create high-quality websites and web tools, and not exclude people from using their products and services.

Both Daniel Daffoe and Matt Queen work with RBC's designers and developers, helping to establish core inclusive design principles internally — including by taking into account accessibility. Using a product design software system called RIG (RBC Interface Guidelines), they ensure designers and software developers are equipped with accessible components that integrate seamlessly into the bank's digital products. In essence, they help ensure RBC's digital banking products can be used by people of all abilities.

"It really brings together those of us who have become accessibility champions for the bank. For those who join in, it's an opportunity to gain some knowledge of accessibility and bring it back to their respective teams. We share best practices on inclusive design and it's sparked a genuine passion for digital accessibility and design across the bank." – Daniel Dafoe, Senior Design Technologist

Accessible design improves overall user experience and satisfaction in a variety of situations, across different devices, across ability and for older users. Accessibility can enhance your brand, drive innovation, and extend your market reach.

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Among persons with disabilities, 2.6% need a type of specialized software or other adaptation to access the Internet. Note, of those who required these accessibility features, 70% reported that they did not have all the specialized software or adaptations they needed. – Choi, 2021

Optimizing the Accessibility of Applications

It doesn't matter how superior the accessibility features on a mobile device are; if they aren't utilized properly by the Web or other applications, they are not accessible to users.[3] Making your app accessible means you must consider the range of challenges a customer may face, ensuring that as many people as possible can use it with as little or no barriers. This includes those with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive or learning difficulties, as well as deafness or hearing ability.[4]

Designing an accessible app means much more than simply making the design clearer. You must design an app that is adaptable to those throughout the spectrum and support those who need the app's extra, accessible functions.

For more in-depth guidance on how to make your app more accessible:[4]
- **Create a simple, clear layout**. The initial step is to ensure you have a simple layout. A cluttered design may overwhelm a user who then might give up on your app before they have begun to explore it.
  - Elements must be visible to those who may need to magnify the screen, your design must be responsive and adapt to various screen sizes. Text and call-to-action buttons must also appear at an appropriate size, with the option to enlarge.
- **Design a consistent navigation**. You must design an easy-to-follow app with clear indicators. Navigation should have short task flows and be easy to find, as well as consistent throughout the different stages of using the app.
  - Navigation pointers –menu bars and search boxes – should also be consistently positioned in a similar format throughout your app. This will enable users to explore your app quickly and easily in a logical order with no confusion.
- **Consider your text formatting.** Uneven spacing, long sentences or paragraphs, italic fonts and the colour of text are just some design features you need to consider. Over-formatted text can be difficult for dyslexic users to read, as well as those with impaired vision, so make sure you keep your formatting simple and consistent throughout your design.
- **Make audio and video accessible.** When incorporating these elements, users should be able to pause or stop, adjust volume, and turn captions on and off. You may also need to consider

adding audio description for users with visual impairments and subtitles and sign language for those who may be deaf.

- **Consider colour**. Colour palettes are a top priority when designing any app, as most businesses associate certain colours with their branding. To make your app accessible to colour-blind users, it's important to not solely rely on colour to communicate messaging. Also, ensuring proper contrast when using colours will provide proper visibility.
- **Don't forget to test.** There are many methods to approach the testing phase, for instance engaging with real users at random and asking them to test elements of your app or using digital tools that can offer detailed assistance on screen reading, similar to a beta test.

For further guidance, organizations can connect with Fable Engage to utilize people with disabilities for user research and accessibility training. Fable Engage uses the tools and services to easily conduct research and test your product with people with disabilities. Fable Engage enables you to collect video recordings, conduct user research, review prototypes, meet with experts, and test compatibility across assistive technology configurations. Please visit https://makeitfable.com/ for more information.

Become Champions of Accessibility[5]

The guidance provided here will help you to start assessing the accessibility of your web page. With simple steps, you can get an idea whether accessibility is addressed, in even the most basic way.

Checks	What to do:	What to check for:
Page Title	• Look at the page's title (or listen) • Look at the titles of other pages within the website	• Check that there is a title that adequately and briefly describes the content of the page • Check that the title is different from other pages on the website, and adequately distinguished the page from other web pages
Image Text Alternatives	• Every image has *alt* with appropriate alternative text	• In the toolbar check *alt* text by selecting "images", then "show images". If there are images missing *alt*, a dialog box appears with the number of images missing. • To check if *alt* text is appropriate, see if the text adequately conveys the information in the image

Text: Headings	• The page has a heading - in almost all pages there should be at least one heading
	• All text that looks like a heading is marked as a heading
	• All text that is marked as a heading is a conceptual section heading
	• The heading hierarchy is meaningful
		• In the toolbar, select "Information", then "View Document Outline"
		• For non-visual checks:
		  o are headings listed? If there are no headings marked up, it will say "0 headings".
		  o Does the outline start with [H1] and follow a meaningful hierarchy?
		• For visual checks:
		  o Compare the Document Outline to the visual rendering of the page.
		  o Are the things that look like headings on the page listed in the Document Outline?
		  o Are there things in the Document Outline that aren't really headings?

		• Anything that is a functional heading should have a heading icon before it.
Text: Contrast ration	• Web pages should have a minimum contrast by default: a contrast ratio of at least 4:5:1 for normal size text	• Table with contrast ratio - The tool displays a table with all the possible contrast ratios in the web page. With some tools, you can click in the table, and it will show where that color combination is in the web page. • Eyedropper to select colors - The tool lets you select a text color and a background color, then it shows you the contrast ratio. • Turn off color. The tool shows the page in grayscale.
Text: Sizing	• Increase the text size	• All text gets larger. (A common problem is that text is not provided as actual text format but instead the text is in an image. Text in images does not get larger when users increase text size.) • Text doesn't disappear or get cut off. • Text, images, and other content do not overlap. • All buttons, form fields, and other controls are visible and usable. • Horizontal scrolling is not required to read sentences or "blocks of text". It is best practice that when text size is increased, all the text in a sentence is visible. It is acceptable to have to scroll horizontally to get to different sections of a page.
Interaction: Keyboard access and visual focus	• In a browser that supports keyboard navigation with the Tab key • Click in the address bar, then put your mouse aside and do not use it • Press the Tab key to move through the elements on the page. You can press Shift Tab to go backward	• Tab to all: Check that you can tab to all the elements, including links, form fields, buttons, and media player controls • Tab away: Check that you can tab away from all elements that you can tab into • Tab order: Check that the tab order follows the logical reading order • Visual focus: Check that the focus is clearly visible as you tab through the elements, that is, you can tell which element has focus, e.g., links have a gray outline around them or are highlighted. • All functionality by keyboard: Check that you can do everything with the keyboard; that is, you don't need the mouse to activate actions, options, visible changes, and other functionality • Drop-down lists: Check that after you tab into a drop-down list, you can use the arrow keys to move through all the options without triggering an action • Image links: Check that when images are links, they have clear visual focus and can be activated using the keyboard

Interaction: Forms, Labels, and Errors	• Find any forms on the page • A form could be a single text box, or complex form (text fields, radio buttons, checkboxes, drop down lists and buttons)	• Check that all form controls are keyboard accessible by following the keyboard access, including that you can get to all items in any drop-down lists • Check that every form control has a label associated with it using "label, for, and id" • Check that labels are positioned correctly • Check that any fields that are required/mandatory are clearly indicated – does it rely on colour and if asterisks are included • Check that any instructions form completed the form are available • Some simple forms might not have any errors, but if you get error messages, check if they are easily findable and if the fields are still populated with the data
Flashing or Blinking Content	• Understanding moving information – some employees read and process information slowly • Distraction from moving content – moving content can take away focus • Flashing or blinking content can cause seizures	• Check if there is any moving, blinking, or scrolling information that starts automatically and lasts more than five seconds. If there is, check that there is a way for the user to pause, stop, or hide the movement. • Check if there is any auto-updated information (such as stock price). If there is, check that there is a way for the user to pause, stop, or hide the updated information, or for the user to control the frequency of the update. • Check that no content flashes or blinks more than three times in one second.
Multimedia	• Follow the steps for keyboard access • Auto-start control – it is best if audio does not start automatically when web pages open • Provide closed captioning • Providing transcripts • Provide audio description	• For auto start control that begins automatically, if it does – stop after 3 seconds, include pause/stop, include volume controls • For closed captioning, check if it is in sync with the spoken content, the people are identified when speaking and other sounds than dialogue are included • Check that transcripts include all audio and visual information

These checks cover just a few accessibility issues and are designed to be quick and easy, rather than definitive. A web page could seem to pass these checks, yet still have some accessibility barriers. More robust assessment is needed to evaluate accessibility comprehensively.

References

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