Tech Ease for All

Benefits of Web Accessibility

Web accessibility is important because the Web now plays such an important role in our daily lives. We use the web to get our news, to get information about government services (or even use the services themselves), to get advice from peers on topics such as health, and even to take courses through distance learning.

The way we use the Web is also changing. We rely on the Web to stay in touch with family and friends, and to facilitate connection with others through websites such as Twitter (www.twitter.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com). Unfortunately, sites such as Facebook and Twitter are not always accessible to people with disabilities, but the web design community has risen to the challenge of providing accessible alternatives. One example is Accessible Twitter (www.accessibletwitter.com), a web interface for the Twitter service that incorporates web accessibility principles to make the service accessible to people with disabilities.

There are two ways to think of web accessibility:
1. As a legal requirement that is implemented out of fear of lawsuits. In the U.S., the relevant laws that

apply to web accessibility include **Section 508** and some sections of the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. Section 508 applies to all federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain or use electronic information technology, including websites. For more information about Section 508, visit http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm.

2. As a practice that **makes business sense** and **improves the image** of your business or organization. WebAIM estimates about 20% of Web users have some disability. Few businesses would consider it wise to turn away 20% of potential customers just because they have a disability. The implementation of web accessibility also sends a positive message about your business or organization's social responsibility toward those it serves.

Web accessibility has other benefits from a business perspective:

- Web pages designed with accessibility in mind are easier to maintain, update and redesign. This can reduce the cost of maintaining your website.
- Web accessibility often results in streamlined code that makes your web pages faster to download. This can save you money by reducing bandwidth costs.

- Web accessibility can lead to improved Search Engine Optimization (SEO). As Wendy Chisholm has stated, "Google is a deaf-blind user with millions of friends and dollars to spend."
- Web accessibility can improve device compatibility and make your websites work across a wider range of devices, such as iPhones, Blackberry phones and other smart phones.

While these business case aspects of web accessibility are important, the best reason for incorporating web accessibility is that **everyone benefits**, not just people with disabilities. Web accessibility also benefits older users, people with low literacy and those learning the English language, people on slow connections, and those who are just learning how to use a computer.

Ultimately, web accessibility is about **doing the right thing** and providing **equity** for people with disabilities on the Web by giving them the same access to information, services, and opportunities for interaction as everyone else.

For additional tutorials, please visit our website at http://etc.usf.edu/techease/4all/.