ACCESSIBILITY IN DIGITAL LIBRARIES

SPARK 5

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INTRODUCTION

Accessibility has been a major issue within brick and mortar libraries for a while now, but as the scale of digital libraries and content grows, so too does the necessity for having accessibility protocols in place in a digital environment. According to the Web Accessibility Initiative, web accessibility means, “that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web, and that they can contribute to the Web.” (WAI, 2005) This is something that the American Library Association is trying to combat through providing libraries and librarians with toolkits as well as instruction in the proper ways of accommodation. (ALA, 2016) Web accessibility is about making the internet and in this case, libraries, accessible to the masses in a way that provides equal access and equal opportunity to people with disabilities.

KEY POINTS IN HISTORY

In 1999, the World Wide Web Consortium created a set of guidelines known as WCAG 1.0. This set of 14 guidelines were created as suggestions for web designers to use in order to create a website that is fairly accessible. As part of the Rehabilitation Act created in 1973 which, “prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by Federal agencies.” (US D.O.J., 2009) This act was amended in 1998 when they added Section 508 which expanded the reach of the Rehabilitation Act to include “requirements for electronic and information technology developed, maintained, procured, or used by the Federal government.” as well as insisting that “Federal electronic and information technology to be accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public.” (US D.O.J., 2009) What was so striking about adding this new section was that the previous Rehabilitation Act didn’t give any priority to an online presence and this put in place a new culture that includes web accessibility. On an international level, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was put into place in 2008. This convention was put in place to protect the rights of persons with disabilities to ensure that they had equal access and rights as a person without a disability. There was a specific section written pertaining to accessibility about how barriers associated with “Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.” (UN, 2006)

In 2008, as a part of the Web Accessibility Initiative created by W3C, the original WCAG guidelines were updated to become the WCAG 2.0. This updated version lays out guidelines in a more concise and easier manner than the first version. (W3C, 2008) When looking up some details about libraries and websites that hold up to these accessibility standards, an article written by two authors both with the last name Tatomir came up. This article from 2012 states, “Of the twelve companies studied, only four—ABC-CLIO, Elsevier, JSTOR, and ProQuest—stated that their products met all of the accessibility guidelines established under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the WCAG standards.” (Tatomir & Tatomir, 2012) For me, this was somewhat shocking considering the implementation of both national and international laws
about accessibility being put in place. With that said, many of these websites aren’t federally funded and so these standards are really only suggestions.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

When it comes to accessibility in digital library spaces we must look to our current approaches and do even more to ensure that ALL people are accommodated for to make sure that library services are truly representative of every group within reach. On the World Wide Web Consortium’s website, they have a whole section on guidelines and techniques to creating an online environment that is accessible to all.

**TOOLKITS**

There are various websites that provide different types of toolkits for web designers and other libraries to make their websites fully accessible. Below are a couple examples of these types of toolkits.

**ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES**

The toolkit which was created by a committee from the Association of Research Libraries has three main purposes:

1. Promote the principles of accessibility, universal design, and digital inclusion.
2. Help research libraries achieve digital accessibility.
3. Connect research libraries with tools, people, and examples they need to provide accessible digital content. (ARL, 2014)

As you can see, this toolkit provides information on: Standards & Best Practices, How to Foster and Inclusive Institution, A Community of Practice, Resources, and a Blog. From this screenshot you are also able to see some of the accessibility measures they took for their own site by including the option to make the font bigger and create high contrast on the page. One of the best features from this toolkit is their comprehensive list of universities that have working accessibility measures put in place, as well as the contact information for the managing person. This would be a great resource for people who are just starting their accessibility journey.

The CTD is a branch of the American Institutes for Research which is funded by the Department of Education. Because of its funding, much of this toolkit is about how educators and their leaders can help create a digital environment that is fully accessible to everyone. The toolkit talks about what accessibility is, how educators can get accessible technology, the benefits behind being digitally accessible, as well as the legal ramifications behind why they should be fully accessible in a digital environment. (CTD, 2016)
On the ASCLA website they have two separate pages that are devoted to accessibility in library services. The first page gives 15 different tip sheets to help librarians create both physical and digital spaces that are accessible for all.

Tipsheets

* each will open in a new window

- Assistive Technology
- Autism & Spectrum Disorders
- Children with Disabilities (English), Children with Disabilities (Chinese. Word .doc, click to download)
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Developmental Disabilities
- Learning Differences
- Management
- Mental Illness
- Multiple Disabilities
- Physical Disabilities
- Service Animals
- Staff
- Vision
- Volunteers with Disabilities
- What Trustees Need to Know

There is also another section that is a resource list which includes tips, websites, and resources on how to make libraries accessible to all. These resources vary between targeting specific groups of people and specific topics within libraries. For this particular assignment we will focus more on the web accessibility side of things. The ASCLA site lists six different websites for this particular section, most of which are website with tips for web accessibility but then a couple are tools to use when thinking about accessibility. The two sites that provide something deeper than tips are: Fangs, which is a Mozilla Firefox plug-in that renders the website into a text version to help developers find accessibility issues early on and WAVE, which is a web accessibility evaluation tool where users can type in a website and find out how accessible a website truly is. All of these resources will help a web developer and others try to create a more accessible website.
As time progresses and the world becomes more and more digital, having policies and practices in place to accommodate patrons with disabilities. Often times it’s easier to forget about people with disabilities, especially in an online space because you don’t see them and because of a website being online, you automatically assume that everyone has equal access. Because of this automatic assumption, a large portion of the future of web accessibility has to do with changing that mindset. “As technology developers create, enhance, and license their offerings, the invisibility of people with disabilities in our educational, social, and business life supports their exclusion from the definition of who “we” are and who constitutes the market.” (Lazar, 2015) In forgetting about “everyone”, web developers and organizations are actively leaving out a population of people without even realizing it. “Changing the cultural meaning of disability is critical to making inclusion the default in technology.” (Lazar, 2015) This culture shift of seeing those people with disabilities will be one of the biggest changes in the future of web accessibility.

Another thing that has already started and will continue to evolve is website checkers as well as tools/programs for websites. There are a few websites that you are able to type in the website and it will give a list of spots within the coding that is not full accessible. There are also many different types of assistive technologies available, which are continuously growing to meet the needs of a population that is starting to be realized.

As we look towards the future, I wanted to highlight a few different libraries that are trying their best to adhere to the WCAG 2.0 guidelines, as well as Section 508 guidelines. These libraries also offer some sort of other resources/assistive technologies for their patrons. Below I highlight: the Colorado State University Library, Yale University Libraries, and the Library of Congress.
Colorado State University Libraries strives to make its website accessible in accordance with WCAG 2.0, ADA, Section 508, and other accessibility standards and guidelines.

Contacts
We welcome your feedback about website accessibility by phone, email, or in person.
- Contact Frank Aragon at (970) 491-3661 for help with assistive technology.
- Contact Greg Vog at (970) 491-4304 about accessibility issues with specific Libraries web pages.

Website Accessibility Resources
These resources are for CSU Libraries and ACES staff content contributors and web designers.

CSU Resources
- Accessibility Resources for Web Developers
- CSU Accessibility Guidelines
- Web Accessibility - Making Accessible Websites
- CSU Academic Computing and Networking Services
- Accessibility and Content Audit Template (Microsoft Excel)

Software Tools
- NVDA
- WebAIM online accessibility checker

http://lib.colostate.edu/about/website-accessibility

Yale University Library

Accessbility
At Yale University and the library we strive to follow the AA standards of the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. Making your web site accessible means your online resource is usable by the widest variety of people possible, including those who use screen readers, cannot use a mouse, or who may be on a slow wireless connection. The User Experience group recommends library web site and subject guide creators review the guidelines listed here so that you understand the major components of web accessibility. Following basic accessibility guidelines will ensure that your web site is coded accurately for meaning and that it will be rendered well in a variety of formats.

When you create an individual web site or subject guide you use tools (Yale's Drupal service and Littiguides), which when used correctly will produce highly accessible pages. Simply using the color schemes defined in the library's Yelites and Littiguides implementation, and following the system prompts when creating pages and forms will ensure a high-level of accessibility. You can use the simple checklist provided here to ensure that you have not introduced any inaccessible elements.

What follows is a brief guide to help with some of the most important accessibility rules. If you are creating a more complex web resource you should contact the UX Group for a more in-depth review.

http://web.library.yale.edu/site-resources-help/accessibility
CONCLUSION

As you can see, creating a digital space for libraries is not the easiest of tasks to do. There are many factors, many scenarios, and many setbacks that have occurred and will occur in the future. However, with policies and guidelines that can be put in place and the current evolution of understanding accessibility, a future towards complete availability will soon come. It is up to web developers, patrons, and librarians to really dig in and try to make their digital space one that is welcoming to all.
RESOURCES


