

Making Web Content Accessible to People with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Demand for health information over the Internet is increasing at record annual rates worldwide, as are the resources that collect, manipulate, analyze, and disseminate this information. Web developers are using sophisticated tools to create images, tables, sounds/animations, and forms that make websites user-friendly and attractive. These features often create barriers for people with visual and other impairments. Given that 20% of the population has some form of disability (approximately 60 million people in the United States), inaccessible web content may deprive many people worldwide of the full benefits of health and other information available on the Web, as well as deter them from participating in research activities, thus skewing research results. Fortunately, solutions exist to address most of the problems, and they are especially easy to implement at the time that a website or application is being designed. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, a law that has been in effect since June 2001, requires all content disseminated on Federal Government websites to be accessible to people with disabilities. We explain the regulations for accessibility of Federal websites, describe some of the software and hardware tools available for rendering websites accessible, and provide some examples of accessible and inaccessible websites.