5 Top Tools for Web Accessibility

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Even though web accessibility can be a complex thing, there are some basic tools you can use to help ensure your web content is usable by people with disabilities.

Keyboard

Many users rely on keyboard or keyboard-like (such as eye tracking, voice control, switch device, etc.) interactions for web content. Many of the most significant accessibility issues on the web are caused by lack of keyboard support. Fortunately, keyboard testing is very easy - just put away the mouse and use the Tab and Shift + Tab keyboard keys to navigate through links and form controls. The Enter key will activate or select items. Make sure you can efficiently accomplish all functions on the page, with primary focus on forms and menus. See this WebAIM article on keyboard accessibility for more information.

Wave

WAVE is a free web accessibility evaluation tool. No tool can tell you if your site is accessible, but WAVE can help you identify accessibility issues on your site. Simply type in the web page address to view the page with injected icons and indicators that give feedback on accessibility. A Firefox toolbar is also available.

Alternative Text

Alternative text is presented to blind users in place of an image. Appropriate alternative text concisely conveys the content and function of the image. While there are many nuances to authoring appropriate and efficient alternative text (see these alternative text guidelines for more details), doing so is probably the most important accessibility technique for users with visual disabilities.

Accessibility Checklists

A checklist of web accessibility guidelines can help you provide a highly accessible web page. We recommend using the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. It is easy to overlook important aspects of web accessibility, but authoring and evaluating the page while regularly reviewing such a checklist will better ensure you are addressing vital areas of accessibility.

Common Sense

It is easy to focus on accessibility techniques and guidelines, and thus lose sight of the broader user experience. A web page or application can be made technically accessible, while still being functionally inaccessible. It's helpful to take a step back and consider the entire user experience to ensure that what you are providing is useful, efficiently navigated, clearly presented, usable, and accessible to all users.

Jared Smith is associate director of WebAIM, a nonprofit organization dedicated making websites accessible to people with disabilities everywhere. Check out the new WebAIM website for an example of good-looking, accessible web design. This post first appeared on the EEJ EdNotes blog.