Website accessibility for all

A consumer's guide to the British Standard
for Web Accessibility (BS 8878)

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The British Standard for Web Accessibility (BS 8878) is designed to help organizations improve their websites, making them easier to use for everyone.

For most of us, the internet has become part of everyday life. In 2012, 80% of British households had internet access, and it's estimated that 30 million people use the internet daily, with much of our banking, shopping, job-hunting, TV watching and even chatting with friends taking place online. Increasingly, some information is available only online and website customers can often benefit from lower prices and discounts. But not everyone can take full advantage of all that the internet has to offer. For the millions of people with disabilities, many websites can be hard to read, understand or navigate. Organizations which use the British Standard for web accessibility can allow more consumers to take full advantage of online information and communication.

BS 8878 – the basics
A wide range of organizations and consumers worked together to develop BS 8878. The standard is the non-technical guide to implementing the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2) which have recently been adopted as an International Standard by ISO, (ISO/IEC 40500). BS 8878 states that organizations should:

• Design accessible and usable websites for all internet users

• Designate clear responsibility with a written web accessibility policy and a member of staff responsible for its administration

• Keep accessibility in mind – organizations should emphasise accessibility in all stages of web design

• Review sites – seek feedback from website users and test sites to ensure that they stay accessible as technology develops

BS 8878 – the details

The standard is voluntary, but organizations that choose to comply with it should:

Appoint a web accessibility champion

Identify a member of staff to be responsible for web accessibility, taking an overview of all web products and developing a web accessibility policy

Consider accessibility at all stages

- Create a web accessibility policy for each web product as soon as it is first conceived
- Consider web accessibility at all stages, from initial idea through to launch

Justify decisions

Be able to 'reasonably' justify any decisions not to opt for accessible options, for example where the cost might outweigh the benefits

Carry out research and testing

- Involve real people in all stages of development and seek feedback from users
- Where possible, web products should be tested by relevant people with disabilities. For example, a site that offers careers advice to teenagers should test it with young disabled people

Publish clear information for consumers

Produce a web accessibility statement for consumers that:

- Summarizes the policy in clear, jargon-free language
- Gives advice on how older and disabled users can best use the website, including any information about how it can be customised
- Explains how to access the full web accessibility policy
- Tells users how they can give comments, suggestions and feedback

What to expect from organizations

Those that comply with the standard should:

- Think carefully about the main tasks that users carry out on their website, for example buying a book or paying a bill, and make sure that as many people as possible can use the site for that purpose
- Consider everyone who might use their website, including older and disabled users, and anticipate their needs
- Test their website on groups of older and disabled people to make sure it is as accessible as possible. It might be reasonable not to test with older people if, say, the site is aimed at young people, but it would not be reasonable to exclude any kind of disability when testing
- Give you the option to customise websites using one of two approaches:
  - Non-individualised, where websites are compatible with a wide range of assistive technologies to make them accessible
  - User-personalised, where people can choose the font, colour and design that suit them best to make viewing and navigation easier
- Develop websites that are compatible with as many browsers (such as Internet Explorer and Firefox), operating systems (such as Mac OS and Windows), and technologies (such as laptops, phones, games consoles and televisions) as possible
- Offer websites that are compatible with a wide range of assistive technologies (software or hardware) that people might use at home – such as screen readers, magnification software, speech recognition software and touchscreen monitors

Don't forget: If you want to know anything about the organization's web accessibility policy, you can ask for a copy of its web accessibility statement

Frequently asked questions

Q. What is BSI?

A. BSI is the UK National Standards Body which has been developing standards for more than 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organizations to follow. BSI is the UK member of ISO, the International Organization for Standardization.

Q. If an organization doesn't follow the standard is it breaking the law?

A. It is not a legal requirement to follow the standard. But, if an organization claims to comply with the standard, then doesn't, it is a misrepresentation and can be reported to Trading Standards. Even if it does not claim compliance, in the event of a serious complaint or incident, the standard could be used in a court of law to provide a benchmark of best practice.

Q. Can I see an organization's web accessibility policy?

A. All organizations that comply with the standard should have a web accessibility statement that summarises the full web accessibility policy. Just contact the organization to request a copy. This statement should explain how to obtain a copy of the full policy, and should also include details of how to provide feedback about the organization's website.

Q. Where can I get a copy of BS 8878?

A. Your local public library may be able to help you access a reference copy, or you can buy a copy from BSI at shop.bsigroup.com

Useful information

British Standards (BSI)
020 8996 9001
www.bsigroup.com

Abilitynet
(a charity helping disabled people to use the internet)
0800 269 545
www.abilitynet.org.uk

AgeUK
0800 169 6565
www.ageuk.org.uk

British Computer Association of the Blind
0845 643 9811
www.bcab.org.uk

ISO
(International Organization for Standardization)
www.iso.org

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