

State of the eNation Reports – a summary

The AbilityNet State of the eNation Reports are a quarterly review of the top ten or so (by search engine ranking) websites in a particular industry sector.

This report concerns those airlines flying from UK airports. The next report will review on-line newspapers.

The idea of this report isn't to 'name and shame', but rather to highlight the current state of play – what level of access can the many millions of potential visitors who have a disability, dyslexia, or who simply can't use a mouse very well expect when visiting a website?

Web Accessibility – why it's important

Today many services are only available, or offered at a discounted rate, on the Internet. If a website doesn't meet a base level of accessibility then it will be impossible for the vast majority of disabled visitors to use it. Many others with some sort of limiting condition will also have great difficulty.

It is illegal to bar disabled visitors from on-line services offered to the general public. No organisation would purposefully do this but many are either not aware of the problem, or don't know what to do to address it. In the UK there are estimated to be 1.6 million registered blind people and a further 3.4 million people who are IT disabled. The total spending power of this group is now estimated at £50 - £60 billion a year

A Commitment to Accessibility

All the airline companies reviewed were contacted a month before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date none have done this. We would welcome any future commitments the airlines concerned might choose to make.

UK Airline websites – in summary

A 5 star scale was used: * = Very inaccessible
*** = Satisfies a base level of accessibility
***** = Very accessible.

9 sites were reviewed: 4 sites had a ** ranking
5 sites had a * rating
No sites met a base level of accessibility

Website Audit – The findings

All sites were audited for accessibility and usability with the aid of Watchfire's Bobby (v5) accessibility checking tool and a range of manual checks. The full Bobby report is available on request.



EasyJet - www.easyjet.co.uk

Ranking: **

www.easyjet.co.uk is the most accessible of those sites tested. However, it still doesn't meet a base level of accessibility for reasons including:

Often a "tooltip" appears when you put the mouse over a picture. Blind visitors rely on the presence of tooltips as a spoken description of the picture. Without them the picture is meaningless. Some of the pictures on this site, and more importantly pictures that are also links, have no tool tip associated with them. This makes it very difficult for a blind person to find their way around a website – imagine trying to complete a journey where signposts at every roundabout have been left blank!

The site also has a map displaying the EasyJet routes, which is an interactive presentation known as a "Flash movie". Despite recent improvements in the accessibility of such page items, the vast majority of visitors who cannot use a mouse, are vision-impaired, or use speech output or voice recognition software will not be able to use this feature at all.

This site is also reliant on mini programs built into the page called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Many older browsers, and some special browsers used by those with vision impairment, do not support JavaScript. Also many organisations disable Javascript for security reasons.

Some of the text links on the site say “click here for details” or “more info”. A blind visitor using speech output software can extract all available links on a page to quickly find the desired link. Thus it’s very important that a link makes sense out of context.

British Airways - www.ba.com

Ranking: **

www.ba.com also does not meet a base level of accessibility for reasons including:

Some pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users. The site also includes numerous invisible images used to govern page layout that are annoying to some blind visitors.

Advertising pictures flash at a rate too fast to be read by someone who is a slow reader.

This site is even more heavily reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript and, if your browser doesn’t support them, you’ll find that you are not allowed any further than the welcome screen!

Ryanair - www.ryanair.co.uk

Ranking: *

This site includes several of the most significant obstacles to accessibility including:

The text size on every page has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen (a laptop, for example).

Again some pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users.

There are also flashing images and very small scrolling text that may present difficulties for some visitors with a vision-impairment.

This site is also reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Again a large number of disabled and non-disabled visitors alike will not be able to use this site as a result.

Every page is sub-divided into “frames” (sections of the page that scroll independently one from another). Frames are not handled well by some speaking and text-only browsers, as well as creating difficulties when the visitor wants to print or bookmark the page.

BMI - www.flybmi.co.uk

Ranking: *

As with the last website, www.flybmi.co.uk has significant issues including:

The text size on every page has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

The majority of pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users.

This site is also heavily reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Again a large number of disabled and non-disabled visitors alike will not be able to use this site as a result.

British European (flybe) - www.flybe.com

Ranking: *

www.flybe.com also includes many of the most significant obstacles to accessibility including:

The text size on every page has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. It is possible to force larger text using a little-known option but, when this is done, some text is lost and some menu items become unreadable.

The site also uses many pictures of words. This causes difficulties for many people with a vision impairment as pictures of words can never be enlarged or have their colours changed.

Again the majority of pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users.

This site is also heavily reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Again a large number of disabled and non-disabled visitors alike will not be able to use this site as a result.

Monarch Airlines - www.flymonarch.com

Ranking: **

www.flymonarch.com also includes several significant obstacles to accessibility including:

Some text is white on a light grey or yellow background, which does not afford good contrast for a vision-impaired visitor (this does change when the mouse is moved over the text).

Some text links say “click here” or “more info” and hence make no sense out of context for blind visitors using speech output software.

Again the majority of pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users.

Unlike every other site tested the essential ticket booking process is not reliant on those mini programs embedded in the page called JavaScript - making it accessible for many more users. Other features of the site, however, do use JavaScript in a way that means they are not accessible.

Virgin Atlantic - www.virgin-atlantic.com

Ranking: *

This website has the most serious issues of accessibility of all those tested. These include:

Much of the website’s content and critical functionality is embedded in interactive presentations known as “Flash movies”. Visitors, who cannot use a mouse, are vision-impaired, or use speech output or voice recognition software will not be able to use this site at all.

The size of text is also “hard-coded” so that a user cannot easily make it larger, and some hyperlinks also say “click here” or “more info” and hence make no sense out of context for a blind visitor.

This site is also totally reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript being supported by your browser. If they are not you will not be able to progress past the welcome screen where you are required to select your country to continue.

My Travellite - www.mytravellite.com

Ranking: *

www.mytravellite.com also includes several significant obstacles to accessibility including:

The text size on every page has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

The navigational scheme is confusing and inconsistent and every menu item opens a new window. A visitor who is new to the web or who has a mild cognitive impairment will find this site very difficult to use.

All pictures, and more importantly pictures that are also links, do not have tooltips thus excluding blind and text browser users. In particular, the flight route information is contained in a picture with no tooltip or text equivalent.

This site is also heavily reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Again a large number of disabled and non-disabled visitors alike will not be able to use this site as a result.

Air 2000 - www.air2000.com

Ranking: **

www.air2000.com also includes some significant issues of accessibility:

Some of the text used on this site is a very low-contrast light teal on a white page. The text in the menus on every page disappear altogether when the visitor chooses preferred colours of white text on a black background.

Whilst the majority of pictures on the website have appropriate tooltips, an advertising picture on the home page includes text that flashes too quickly and a tooltip that does not provide equivalent information.

This site is again heavily reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript to perform the essential task of booking a ticket. Again a large number of disabled and non-disabled visitors alike will not be able to use this site as a result.

Website Audit - how the websites reviewed were chosen

The websites were chosen using Google and the following search terms:

- Airlines UK
- Cheap flights UK
- Cheap airlines UK
- Internet Airlines UK

Further sources of Advice and Support

- www.abilitynet.org.uk

AbilityNet is able to offer information, advice and a range of services to help make a website accessible and usable for everyone – including accessible web templates, a Key Info Pack, web audits and consultancy.

For further details please call Robin on 01926 312847 or mail enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk

Other sources of help and information include:

- www.w3.org/TR/WAIWEBCONTENT

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is the body at the forefront of the development of standards in good design on the world wide web (including accessibility). The W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) form the basis of all other standards.

- www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric

This link will take you to a subsite of the W3C website which tries to explain in plainer terms, with examples of good and bad code, the W3C guidelines checkpoint by checkpoint.

- [www.e-envoy.gov.uk/oeo/oeo.nsf/sections/guidelines-top/\\$file/guidelines_index.htm](http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/oeo/oeo.nsf/sections/guidelines-top/$file/guidelines_index.htm)

The UK government Office of the e-Envoy has guidelines on web accessibility (based upon the W3C guidelines). These can be viewed on-line or downloaded as an illustrated Word document.

- www.drc.org.uk/drc/InformationAndLegislation/Page331a.asp

Organisations are legally obliged to provide websites that are accessible to disabled people. This site includes information on the DDA and the new code of practice.