



## State of the eNation Reports July 2005 – Telecoms

### State of the eNation Reports – a summary

The AbilityNet State of the eNation Reports are a quarterly review of a number of websites in a particular sector.

This report concerns the accessibility and usability of the websites of 10 of the UK's telecoms companies.

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 visitors who have a disability, dyslexia, or who simply can't use a mouse very well expect when visiting these sites?

### Web Accessibility – why it's important

Today many services are only available, or offered at a discounted rate, on the Internet. Other sites provide vital information. If a website doesn't meet a base level of accessibility then it will be impossible for a large number 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 and information 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, 1.5 million with cognitive difficulties, a further 3.4 million people who are otherwise IT disabled and 6 million that have dyslexia. The total spending power of this group is now estimated at £120 billion a year.

### A Commitment to Accessibility

All the parties reviewed were contacted several weeks before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date the following have done this (please see Appendix C for the text of these statements):

- Vodafone
- Kingston Communications
- Onetel
- Telewest
- O<sub>2</sub>

## Telecoms Websites – in summary

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

10 sites were reviewed: 2 sites had a \*\*\*\* ranking  
1 site had a \*\*\* ranking  
6 sites had a \*\* ranking  
1 site had a \* ranking

For information on how we decide a site's ranking please see Appendix B.

## Website Audit – The findings

All sites were audited for accessibility and usability with the aid of Watchfire's accessibility testing solution 'Bobby WorldWide' and a wide range of manual checks.

### British Telecom - [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com)

Ranking: \*\*\*

**BT's website meets a base level of accessibility according to our reckoning. Nevertheless it still has issues that will hinder some visitors from being able to gain effective access:**

With the notable exception of the site map page the pages on bt.com are uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

Whilst the Text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen, numerous images of text have, however, been used (including main navigation links) meaning that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour. Also on the contact us page images of text for the login were italicised and their design and colour will make them impossible to read for many in these groups.

Often a text label appears when you put the mouse over an image. Blind and dyslexic visitors rely on the presence of text labels as a spoken description of the image.

Without them the image is meaningless. All the images on this website, with very few exceptions, have been labelled well.

Occasional links open 'pop-up' windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

The site uses "in-line frames" (a way of sectioning the page – usually to make inserting adverts easier). In-line frames cause problems for text-only browsers and speaking browsers used by blind visitors. Bt.com doesn't load at all in the specialist browser 'Home Page Reader'.

Many websites use mini programs called JavaScript embedded in their pages which can often cause difficulties for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. This website, however, is fully functional when JavaScript is not supported (including the online shop).

Whilst bt.com has a section of the site that is designed with accessibility in mind featuring their products for disabled users, the visitor is often lead away from it back to the main site. It is important that all areas of the site be accessible.

**NTL – [www.ntl.com](http://www.ntl.com)**

**Ranking: \*\***

**NTL's website includes several issues that will present significant difficulties for disabled visitors:**

Although pages on this site seem quite busy, page elements are sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

Whilst the Text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen, images of text have, however, been used for the main navigation meaning that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour. These images include text which is small – smaller than normal page text.

All images on the site are well labelled – so vital for blind visitors, someone using a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output. There are, however, several moving advert images which will be distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

Users of screen reading software pull all links on a page into a list - to more quickly access the link they want. Many links on the site do not make sense when read out of context in this way, such as 'More', 'Read more' and 'Click here'.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported several important features cease to function such as the quicklinks drop down box - the only apparent way to get to the special needs section of the site. Crucially details of the special needs helpline are only available in this section and are not included in the main contact us page.

A keyboard user will find it very difficult to see which link is active when tabbing through the main navigation links, and it is also impossible to use the quicklinks drop down from the keyboard.

**Telewest – [www.telewest.co.uk](http://www.telewest.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \*\***

**Telewest's website also has a number of issues that will make it difficult for many visitors:**

The pages on this site are uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

However, the text 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. Images of text have also been used instead of actual text. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

Furthermore, many of these images of text, and some images that are also links, are unlabelled or poorly labelled making it very difficult for a blind person, someone with dyslexia relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software to access the link – an advertising image on the home page featuring an offer including 6 months free digital TV is simply labelled "banner" depriving these groups from taking advantage of this offer. Some of these advert images also include movement which will be distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

Many links on the site do not make sense when read out of context by screen reader users, such as 'Click here' and 'here'.

Occasional links open 'pop-up' windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are still able to add items to your shopping cart but are then unable to proceed to the check-out – effectively excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

**Onetel – [www.onetel.co.uk](http://www.onetel.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \*\*\*\***

**It is evident that accessibility and usability have been considered in the design and implementation of Onetel’s website leading to a very unusual \*\*\*\* ranking:**

The pages on this website are uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

The site uses stylesheets – a way of separating the content of a website from how it is presented. Such an approach makes it possible for the site to be viewed differently depending upon which technology you use to access it. When styles are unsupported the page layout is ‘linearised’, or decolumnised, with helpful links provided to skip to sections of the page.

Whilst the Text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen, there are a very few instances of text that does not.

All images on the site are well labelled – so vital for blind visitors, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output.

Very occasional links open ‘pop-up’ windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

Those mini programs called JavaScript are used very sparingly on this site – and all features including the online shop still function when they are unsupported.

Very unusually the HTML code of this website validates to recognised standards – making a variety of access technologies and browsers work more successfully.

## **Kingston Communications – [www.kcom.com](http://www.kcom.com)**

**Ranking: \*\*\*\***

**Kingston Communication's website gets a very unusual \*\*\*\* ranking – with only a few accessibility issues:**

The pages on this website are uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

Whilst the Text on every page can be resized by the user – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen, a number of Images of text and links have, however, been used in places meaning that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour.

All images on the site are well labelled – so vital for blind visitors, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output. There are, however, several moving advert images which will be distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

A number of links on the site do not make sense when read out of context by screen reader users, such as 'Read more'.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported an unnecessary message appears informing the user that the site still works fully - appearing on every page and filling approximately half the screen at lower screen resolutions. We concur that the site's appearance and functionality is unaffected when JavaScript is unsupported – so vital for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. It is worth noting, however, that this site does not have ecommerce functionality

Very unusually the HTML code of this website validates to recognised standards – making a variety of access technologies and browsers work more successfully.

## **Vodafone – [www.vodafone.co.uk](http://www.vodafone.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \*\***

**Vodafone's website includes a number of obstacles that will present difficulties for many visitors who have an impairment:**

Whilst the pages on this site have a lot of content, page elements are sufficiently separated with white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups)

Although the Text on every page can be resized by the user (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen), a notable exception is the site map page which is often used by these groups, as well as visitors with a cognitive impairment who often also require larger text. There are also numerous Images of text (including main navigation links) meaning that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour.

Whilst most images on the site are well labelled, some images and some images that are also links are unlabelled or poorly labelled making it very difficult for a blind person, someone with dyslexia relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software.

Text links appear in various shades of grey, with some underlined and others not, and with no distinction between those that are unvisited and those that have already been visited. These issues will cause difficulties for visitors with a vision or cognitive impairment. Also some links on the site do not make sense when read out of context by screen reader users, such as 'More' on the home page.

Occasional links open 'pop-up' windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported several functions cease to work including buttons and links and the online shop is unusable – thus excluding many visitors using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

**Orange – [www.orange.co.uk](http://www.orange.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \*\***

**Orange's website will also present difficulties for many of its visitors:**

Although pages on this site seem quite busy, page elements are sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

With the exception of the main menu text 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. When a keyboard user is tabbing through this

menu, however, items change to orange text on an orange background making them impossible to read.

A number of links on the site do not make sense when read out of context by screen reader users, such as 'Click here' on the site map page. The site map also uses an "in-line frame" which will cause problems for text-only browsers and speaking browsers used by blind visitors.

The vast majority of images on this site have appropriate text labels, assisting blind visitors and those with dyslexia who rely on speech output.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported several functions cease to work including the online shop – thus excluding many visitors using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

O<sub>2</sub> – [www.o2.co.uk](http://www.o2.co.uk)

**Ranking: \*\***

**This website also contains several barriers to accessibility that will impede effective access for a number of groups:**

The pages on this site are quite busy, but with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) but small under normal viewing conditions. The log in box on the home page is very narrow and the text when entered is very small. This will cause problems for visitors with vision or dexterity difficulties.

Moreover the text 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. Numerous images of text (including main navigation) have also been used instead of actual text. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

Most of the images on this site have appropriate text labels, assisting blind visitors and those with dyslexia who rely on speech output. However, numerous invisible spacer images on every page have also been labelled which add much 'auditory clutter' for blind users and there are a number of moving advert images which will be distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

The home page also includes a changing advert featuring various discount offers (including a free phone) in 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 take advantage of these offers, and its movement may distract those with a cognitive impairment.

The site still works fully when those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported (including the online shop), - an essential feature for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. With JavaScript unsupported, however, the page requires horizontal scrolling at a standard screen resolution.

The user is informed when links open 'pop-up' windows – avoiding confusion for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

## **T-Mobile – [www.t-mobile.co.uk](http://www.t-mobile.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \*\***

### **T-Mobile's site fell short of \*\*\* for reasons including:**

Pages are clear and uncluttered (especially on the business section) with good use of white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. The text is a decent size under normal viewing conditions (again assisting these groups) but a mixture of serif and sans serif which will cause difficulties for many visitors.

Whilst some of the text on the site resizes with the user's preference, much of the text 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. Images of text have also been used instead of actual text. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

There is no distinction between unvisited text links on the site and those that have already been visited. These issues will cause difficulties for visitors with a memory impairment. Also some links on the site do not make sense when read out of context by screen reader users, such as 'Find out more' in the business section.

Many of the images on this site have not been labelled, with many others very poorly labelled, making effective access very difficult for blind visitors and those with dyslexia who rely on speech output. There is also a moving image on the home page and at the top of every page which will be distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

Occasional links open 'pop-up' windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported all functionality still works including the online shop. A drop down list ceases to function – however the top

level links still work and menu links are visible on subsequent pages and hence this is not an issue.

**The T-Mobile website has a 'Text only' alternative which has less content and functionality and often takes the visitor back to the main site. Moreover text and links are often formatted poorly. Overall such an addition is much less preferable to a single, accessible, site.**

### **3 – [www.three.co.uk](http://www.three.co.uk)**

**Ranking: \***

**This website includes a number of serious issues that will present difficulties for many visitors who have an impairment:**

All pages are clear and uncluttered with sans serif text - which makes reading much easier for many groups. The text, however, is small under normal viewing conditions which may cause difficulties for some visitors with a vision impairment, dyslexia or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

Moreover the text 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 dyslexia. Images of text have also been used instead of actual text including, importantly, main navigation. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

Most images on the site are well labelled – so vital for blind visitors, someone using a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output. There are, however, a number of unlabelled spacer images on this site which will cause difficulties for a blind person relying on speech output software.

Occasional links open 'pop-up' windows without informing the user that this will happen. This could be confusing for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

Every page on the site has the same title of "Welcome to 3" – this is unhelpful to blind visitors who use page titles as an aid to navigation and will cause difficulties when bookmarking a page.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported much of the site's functionality ceases to work fully – including many links and the search function. This will cause difficulties for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

## Appendix A - Further Sources of Advice and Support

- [www.abilitynet.org.uk](http://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 accessibility audits, disabled end user testing, training, support, accessible web design and a Key Info Pack to get you started.

For further details please call Robin on 01926 312847 or email [accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk)

Other sources of help and information include:

- [www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT](http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT)

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](http://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.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp)

The UK E-government Unit 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](http://www.drc.org.uk)

Organisations are legally obliged to provide websites that are accessible to disabled people. This site includes information on the DDA, its accompanying code of practice and their recently published report outlining the findings of research into the accessibility and usability of 1000 websites.

## **Appendix B – How We Decide the Ranking**

The world standards in web accessibility (W3C WCAG) have prioritised their checkpoints into 3 priority levels. Compliance of your sites with these levels are phrased as - level 1 (highest) = “must”, level 2 = “should” and level 3 = “ought”.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has meant that it has been law in the UK to have an accessible website since 1999. A site can only meet its legal requirement under the DDA if it is, at the very least, compliant with all level 1 checkpoints.

As it is only level 2 compliance which does not hinder some groups’ access (as defined by the W3C) it is our opinion that the true DDA requirement lies somewhere between levels 1 and 2 compliance.

### **\*\*\* Ranking**

We have chosen our \*\*\* (“Meets a base level of accessibility”) ranking as compliance with priority level 1 checkpoints as a prerequisite.

Further than that we look for significant (in our opinion based upon broad experience of working with disabled users) priority level 2 issues - such as the scalability of text, the avoidance of frames and any positive steps a site has taken to benefit visitors with an impairment (such as accessibility info or offering a choice of colour/text size schemes).

Note - It is our opinion that the addition of a Text only parallel site to the exclusion of addressing the accessibility/usability issues of the main site is neither necessary or in the spirit of inclusion or the W3C WCAG standards.

### **\* and \*\* Rankings**

We award \* and \*\* to a site dependant upon how much it falls short of priority 1 compliance.

### **\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* Rankings**

We award \*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* to a site dependant upon how much it exceeds priority 1 compliance.

For any further clarification please contact [accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk)

## **Appendix C – Statements of Commitment to Accessibility**

### **Vodafone**

“Vodafone is committed to improving the range and accessibility of its services to all disabled and elderly customers. It’s part of our commitment to be a responsible business. We want to use our resources so that we make a positive contribution to the world around us. Vodafone has made every effort to make the special needs area of the [www.vodafone.co.uk](http://www.vodafone.co.uk) site accessible to the largest possible audience. As this site is constructed dynamically, it is not always possible to check the accessibility standards compliance of every page. In general, however, the pages conform to the following: HiSoftware Cynthia Says, the W3C Markup Validation, WebXACT, W3C CSS.”

Ally Stevens, Senior PR Officer

### **Kingston Communications**

“At Kingston Communications we aim to make our website standards compliant and accessible for all users, including people with disabilities. We aim to conform to the current World Wide Web Consortiums (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for Priority A. Our corporate website [Kcom.com](http://Kcom.com) conforms to these guidelines and validates as HTML 4.01 loose. Although we continue to improve our web sites accessibility, there may be some legacy pages and microsities that are not fully compliant with our standards. Additionally we have adopted the following extra accessibility features in order to make our web site accessible to the largest number of people possible. We have labelled all images, tables and form elements in order to help with assistive technology, such as screenreaders. We have also added shortcut access keys to areas such as the homepage, search box and main content area as well as using semantic markup for all pages within our web site. We are currently developing a web guidelines policy which outlines the checks which need to be complied with in order for new areas of the site and future microsities to be published. All new sites will be checked by our online services department for compliance in accessibility and validity and any sites failing to comply with these rules will not be published until all checks are satisfied. When all areas of [kcom.com](http://kcom.com) and our microsities are compliant with accessibility guidelines we intend to publish an accessibility statement on the website. Although we strive to make our web site accessible, some people may still experience problems. We encourage any users that experience problems using our site to contact us and we will work to solve any issues as a priority.”

Duncan Woodward, Group Online Services Manager

## **Onetel**

"Onetel provides a range of great value communications services to suit the needs of our customers. In reflection of this, it is vital that our websites are as accessible as possible and compatible with the types of adaptive technology used by people with disabilities. Our corporate website and Virtual Customer Service Centre, where customers manage their account online, have been developed to comply with the strict web accessibility guidelines developed by our parent company, Centrica. These are based on W3C WAI guidelines and are being used as the standard across the Centrica group. Centrica has worked with a number of expert organisations to take advice in this area, including AbilityNet and the Employers Forum on Disability. The guidelines are compliant with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) code of practice and with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The Onetel web development team meets on a quarterly basis to review compliance, and always welcomes feedback and suggestions to further improve accessibility. Our new website to be launched this summer will demonstrate our continued commitment to this."

Charlotte Hammond, Onetel Press Office

## **Telewest**

"Telewest Broadband is committed to the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act and this has become an integral part of our online policy. We also fully support the Disability Rights Commission's aim of achieving a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens.

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our websites in relation to their accessibility to disabled people and, by the end of the year, aim to make our sites available to the broadest possible audience while adhering to various accessibility requirements. We shall also seek to comply with internationally recognised guidelines for accessible web design as part of our long-term strategy.

At Telewest Broadband we strive to continually improve our services and welcome feedback from consumers".

Philip Snalune, director of product management and marketing.

## **O<sub>2</sub>**

"At O2 we want everyone to enjoy the benefits of good clear communication. We are committed to helping improve accessibility by doing everything we can to make our services easier to use. We have partnered with Segala M Test to provide a web accessibility accreditation scheme as we seek to improve accessibility for the disabled, the elderly and mobile workers. Segala is responsible for validating O2's web based supplier products against the WAI\* 'AA' guidelines by providing a branded logo which acts as a seal of approval for O2. Segala is also providing ongoing advice to O2 on

mobile device accessibility and is currently working with O2 on the re-development of its consumer portal [www.o2.co.uk](http://www.o2.co.uk) and corporate website [www.o2.com](http://www.o2.com), both due for launch in the next few months."

Dermot O'Mahony, Head of Portal Production