



State of the eNation Reports

February 2007 –Dating Websites

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 online dating websites (both mainstream and disability-related). The sites reviewed are:

- Loopy Love
- Girls Date For Free
- Dating Direct
- Match
- Friends Reunited Dating
- Whispers4U
- Disabled Friends
- Disabled Date
- Cupid Calls
- Disabled United

What level of access do these sites offer for the many millions of potential visitors who have a disability, dyslexia, literacy difficulty, or who simply find it a little difficult using a mouse?

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):

- Loopy Love
- Girls Date For Free
- Dating Direct

The Results in Summary

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

10 sites were reviewed: 1 site had a *** ranking
9 sites had a ** ranking

Site Ranking

- Disabled Friends ***
- Loopy Love **
- Girls Date For Free **
- Dating Direct **
- Match **
- Friends Reunited Dating **
- Whispers4U **
- Disabled Date **
- Cupid Calls **
- Disabled United **

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

The Results in Full

All sites were audited in January 2007 for accessibility and usability using a wide range of in-depth manual checks. The testing process was assisted by the Bobby accessibility testing tool, the AIS toolbar and colour checking tools.

Disabled Friends - www.disabledfriends.com

Ranking: ***

This website is reasonably accessible and we give it our only * ranking - but nevertheless still includes some issues that will cause difficulties for some of its visitors:**

Pages on this site are uncluttered and clear with elements sufficiently separated by white space with the exception of the chat room area which is quite busy. However the site has different viewing options which will overcome this.

Text on the site is clear and large enough under normal viewing conditions. The site uses sans serif text which will assist visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

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 some relatively insignificant instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

There are several instances of text and background colour combinations that do not afford sufficient contrast – making reading difficult for people with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

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. On this site almost every image, including most importantly images that are also links are properly labelled. Without these labels getting around the site would be very difficult - imagine trying to make a journey where signposts at every roundabout are left blank!

Many people are not able to use a mouse. The Disabled Friends website is able to be used with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link when moving through menu items and links.

There were no 'pop-up' windows that did not first inform the user - thus avoiding potential confusion for blind visitors, or those with a cognitive impairment or learning disability.

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 seems to operate normally when JavaScript is not supported with the exception of the site tour facility.

Girls Date For Free – www.girlsdateforfree.com

Ranking: **

This website includes a number of significant issues with accessibility:

The pages on this site are clear and uncluttered – assisting visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The majority of text is of a decent size under normal viewing conditions. However, there are instances of text that is too small to read without difficulty for these groups. There are also numerous instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

Moreover the Text on every page has been ‘hard coded’ meaning it cannot easily be resized by many users – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

Some colours on the site do not afford good contrast to help people with a vision or colour impairment – these include main menu items when the mouse is hovered over them.

Many images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled (such as pictures of different people being given the same description) making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly ‘in the dark’.

When moving through the links on this site using the keyboard it is very difficult to see which is the active link.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the ability to search for a partner ceases to function. This will mean that a large number of users will effectively not be able to use the site for it’s main purpose.

Dating Direct - www.datingdirect.com

Ranking: **

The Dating Direct website is relatively accessible but still contains a number of issues:

The pages on this site are clean and uncluttered – assisting visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The majority of text is of a decent size under normal viewing conditions. However, there are instances of text that is too small to read without difficulty for these groups. There are also numerous instances of images of text meaning that these cannot be resized or have their colours changed.

Moreover the majority of Text on every page has been ‘hard coded’ meaning it cannot easily be resized by many users – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

The vast majority of images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled – making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly ‘in the dark’.

This site is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link at all times.

The links to further search results pages are very close together which may cause difficulties for visitors with a problem controlling the mouse.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the site seems to continue to function normally – so critical for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Match – www.match.com

Ranking: **

The Match website is similarly relatively accessible, yet will still present difficulties to many visitors for the following reasons:

Pages on this site are clean and uncluttered and page elements are sufficiently separated with white space. However text is small under normal viewing conditions and there are instances of very small text – causing difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Moreover the text on the site 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. Also pictures of text have been used instead of actual text – this means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

There are instances of text and background colour combinations, such as links and main menu items, that do not afford sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

There are also numerous images (and images that are also links) that are unlabelled or poorly labelled – making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'. Also some images include movement which can be distracting for those with a vision or cognitive impairment.

This site is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone and it is easy to see which is the active link at all times.

A number of 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 it is not possible to change certain elements of the search facility, and photos of people cease to appear – affecting those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Friends Reunited Dating – www.friendsreuniteddating.co.uk

Ranking: **

The dating spin off of the popular Friends Reunited website also does not meet a base level of accessibility and will cause difficulties for many visitors:

The pages on this site are clear and uncluttered with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Whilst most text is of a decent size under normal viewing conditions there are instances of small text – causing difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Whilst the text on the site can easily be resized (so vital for many visitors with a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen) the presentation of the page is affected when at its largest setting. Also pictures of text (including the main site tabs) have been used instead of actual text – this means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

There are some text and background colour combinations across the site that do not offer sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

The vast majority of images (and images that are also links) on this site are well labelled – assisting blind visitors and those with dyslexia relying on speech output, and someone using voice recognition software. However some images include movement which can be distracting for those with a vision or cognitive impairment.

This site is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone and it is fairly easy to see which is the active link at all times.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported much of the site still works fully with the important exception of photos of new members not being displayed– affecting those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Whispers4U www.whispers4u.com

Ranking: **

The Wispers4U website also contains a number of accessibility issues:

All pages on this site are uncluttered with good use of white space to separate page elements – assisting those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Whilst the pages are consistently laid out there are issues with navigation – it appears that there is no navigation to return you to the home page and the navigation on the homepage is not present on subpages.

The text on the site is relatively small under normal viewing conditions. Moreover 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.

The vast majority of images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled– making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'.

This website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone with the active link being relatively easy to see at all times.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the crucial ability to register as a member with the site ceases to function – excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. .

Disabled Date - www.disableddate.co.uk

Ranking: **

This site will also present difficulties which will impede effective access for a number of groups:

The pages on this site are clear and uncluttered with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The text is a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

Some of the text on this site has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – again causing difficulties for these groups. Also a number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

There are instances of text and background colour combinations which do not offer sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

Many images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled (such as pictures of different people being given the same description) making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'.

This site uses 'frames' (a way of sectioning the page) which can cause problems for some specialist browsers used by blind visitors and other browsers on set top boxes or mobile phones.

This website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone with the active link being easy to see at all times.

A number of 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 the whole site fails to load - excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons. .

Cupid Calls - www.cupidcalls.co.uk

Ranking: **

This site is relatively accessible but nevertheless includes a number of issues that will present difficulties for many visitors with an impairment:

The pages on this site are clear and uncluttered with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The text is a decent size under normal viewing conditions although there are instances of small text.

Most of the text on this site has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger –causing difficulties for these groups. There are also a small number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

There are a number of colour combinations used on the site which do not offer sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

The majority of images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'.

This website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone with the active link being relatively easy to see at all times.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the site continues to work as normal – so vital for those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Disabled United - www.disabledunited.com

Ranking: **

Disabled United also contains a number of issues which means it falls short of a base level of accessibility:

Whilst the pages are relatively busy page elements are sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Whilst most of the text is a decent size under normal viewing conditions there are instances of small text which may make reading difficult for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. Moreover, all text on this site has been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – again causing difficulties for these groups.

There are a number of colour combinations used on the site which do not offer sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

The majority of images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled making things difficult for dyslexic users relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software, and leaving blind users well and truly 'in the dark'. Also some images include movement which can be distracting for those with a vision or cognitive impairment.

This website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone with the active link being easy to see at all times.

A number of 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 aspects of this site continue to function normally – so vital for those visitors 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/web

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 range of useful resources.

For further details please call Robin on 01926 312847 or email accessibility@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.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

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. Arguably 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.

This said, it has been our experience that many sites that meet level 1 and even level 2 priority checkpoints can nevertheless still present significant difficulties for disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to a number of reasons. For example, over-reliance on purely visual clues to guide the user (leaving blind users without vital clues about where the designer intends the user’s ‘eye’ to be drawn), small or closely clustered links or buttons (causing those with fine motor control difficulties to miss what they intended to click on - or click on the wrong thing), lack of proper separation of page objects (meaning that users with vision or cognitive difficulties can miss important items which are not sufficiently separated from neighbouring content), the sheer bulk and complexity of links and sections on a page (making those who’s access technology or methodology is slow become frustrated or give up) or a host of other reasons.

Similarly a site that falls short of priority 1 or 2 compliance in a number of respects can nevertheless be very accessible and usable by the vast majority of disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to the fact that particular checkpoints are only contravened very rarely (still denying the site level 1 compliance but having very little impact on a disabled users overall experience of the site), or because checkpoints that are contravened more widely only impact upon a very small number of users.

Thus we have tried to reflect the overall user experience of a site when deciding its ranking.

***** Ranking**

We have chosen our *** (“satisfies a base level of accessibility”) ranking as compliance (or near compliance where the shortfall has little evident impact on users) with priority level 1 checkpoints.

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 our definition of *** ranking.

****** and ***** Rankings**

We award **** and ***** to a site dependant upon how much it exceeds our definition of *** ranking.

For any further clarification please contact accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Appendix C – Statements of Commitment to Accessibility

Dating Direct

"We work hard to ensure our site is simple to use and is fully accessible by all potential users. We always listen to users comments and change/adapt the site if and when necessary."

- Darren Richards, CEO and Co-founder, DatingDirect.com

Loopy Love and Girls Date For Free

"I am happy to state that, to the best of our knowledge, we provide a good level of accessibility to disabled users. We would, however, naturally welcome any comments and suggestions you might have regarding any areas in which we could improve our accessibility and level of service offered to such users."

- Jake Evans, www.loopylove.com and www.girlsdateforfree.com