

State of the eNation Reports April 2006 – Charity 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 the accessibility and usability of websites in the voluntary sector.

We have chosen five large charities (ranked top for amount of voluntary income by the Charities Aid Foundation 2003/2004), and five small locally focussed charities chosen at random.

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.

Free Site Checks for Charities

Thanks to ICT Hub funding AbilityNet is able to provide free overview accessibility checks for 150 small to medium UK charities. If you are interested in requesting a free quick site check please contact accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk



AbilityNet is also able to offer more in-depth audits, disabled user testing and accessible website design – with discounts for charities. For further sources of advice and support please see Appendix A.

Charity Websites – in summary

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

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

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

Website Audit – The findings

The following 10 sites were audited in February and March 2006 for accessibility and usability using a wide range of in-depth manual checks. The testing process was in part assisted by Watchfire's accessibility testing tool 'Bobby WorldWide', the AIS toolbar and colour checking tools.

Please note – Some websites also offer a 'text only' alternative. We will only comment upon the 'text only' site in those cases where it offers significantly improved accessibility to the main site. (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.)

Cancer Research UK – www.cancerresearchuk.org

Ranking: ***

Cancer Research UK's website is reasonably accessible and gets our three star ranking, but still includes some issues that will impact some of its visitors:

The home page has a lot of content but page elements are sufficiently separated with white space and text is clear and just large enough under normal viewing conditions. Other pages are less busy and also well spaced out. 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, some text entry forms cannot. Also a number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

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. Critically 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. Cancer Research UK's website is able to be used with the keyboard alone. However it is quite difficult to see which is the active link when moving through the main menu items.

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, appears to be fully functional when JavaScript is not supported (including the online shop).

The National Trust – www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Ranking: **

The National Trust's website is reasonably accessible, but does include several issues:

The home page is busy but not too cluttered, with sufficient use of white space to separate page elements. Other pages are less busy and still well spaced – assisting visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Most text is sans serif except in the case of some headings which reflect the style of the National Trust logo. Moreover the text is very small under normal viewing conditions – especially the main menu text. 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, some text entry forms cannot. Also a number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

There are many 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 of the images on the site including those 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 or know what the image is. In particular numerous invisible spacing images are labelled "Clear image used for layout purposes" which add significant auditory 'clutter' for blind users.

This site is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone.

The site still works fully when those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported - 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.

Oxfam – www.oxfam.org.uk

Ranking: *

Oxfam's website contains a number of significant obstacles to accessibility:

The pages on this site are busy but relatively uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The vast majority of text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups). However, the text on this site is too small under normal viewing conditions. Moreover 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 links in the bottom right of the home page (under 'New') are quite close together – meaning that many visitors who have difficulties using a mouse may well click the wrong link.

There are many 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 (most notably the main menu items). Images of text have also been used instead of actual text for these menu items – making it impossible for the visitor to improve the colour contrast.

Many of the images (and images that are also links) on the site 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 or know what the image is.

There is also a moving image featuring scrolling text on the home page that may cause difficulties for many with a vision or cognitive impairment.

The Oxfam website is able to be used with the keyboard alone. However it is quite difficult to see which is the active link when moving through the main menu items. Another issue for keyboard users is that the quick links drop-down box found throughout the site is automatically activated when the down arrow is pressed (taking the user to the page associated with the first item regardless of whether this is the desired page or not).

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 much of the site still works fully – however the quick links drop down box ceases to function, as does the ability to shop in the Oxfam music store – excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

British Heart Foundation – www.bhf.org.uk

Ranking: *

The BHF website will not offer easy access for many visitors for the following reasons:

All pages on this site are relatively uncluttered and text is sans serif. However, text is quite small and has been "hard-coded" so that it does not automatically reflect a user's preferred text size. There is a link to significantly increase the text size on the site – whilst being a nice addition this does not cater for those who prefer only a slight increase (for example those with dyslexia).

There are instances of scrolling and changing text which, whilst remaining long enough to easily be read, may nevertheless be distracting for visitors with a cognitive disability.

Often text and background colour combinations do not offer sufficient contrast to easily be read by visitors with a vision or colour impairment. Moreover in some cases images of text have been used instead of actual text– making it impossible for the visitor to improve the colour contrast.

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, many pages feature moving images with changing text that may prove distracting for those visitors with a cognitive impairment.

This site is generally able to be used with the keyboard alone. However it is quite difficult to see which is the active link when moving through the main menu items, and the quick links drop-down box is automatically activated when the down arrow is pressed (taking the user to the page associated with the first item regardless of whether this is the desired page or not).

Blind screen reader users often bring all the links on a page into a list to more quickly jump to the one they require. A number of links on the site do not make sense when read out of context in this way - such as 'Click here'.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported much of the site still works fully – however the quick links drop down box ceases to function, as does the ability to make a donation online – excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Royal National Lifeboat Institute – www.rnli.org.uk

Ranking: *

The RNLI's website also does not meet a base level of accessibility and will cause difficulties for many visitors:

The pages on this site are busy but relatively uncluttered, with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Whilst the vast majority of text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) there are instances of text that is too small under normal viewing conditions.

Whilst the text on the RNLI site can easily be resized by the user some pictures of text have been used instead of actual text – this means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour. Also some of the text placed within fixed sized panels partially disappears when enlarged.

There are many different text and background colour combinations across the site – some of these 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.

This site is generally able to be used with the keyboard alone. However it is quite difficult to see which is the active link when moving through the main menu items, and drop-down boxes found in the online shop are automatically activated when the down arrow is pressed (taking the user to the page associated with the first item regardless of whether this is the desired page or not).

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

Age Concern Kingston – www.ageconcernkingston.org

Ranking: **

Age Concern Kingston is independent of Age Concern England and does not use the same website template. They have a website that is quite accessible with only a few relatively minor 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. The text used across the site is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions.

All of 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).

In general text and background colour combinations offer sufficient contrast - however the main menu (which is dark blue on a light blue background) may not easily be read by some visitors with a vision or colour impairment.

A number of images on the site are unlabelled which will cause difficulty for blind visitors, someone using a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output. There is also a moving image on the home page that may be distracting for many with a vision or cognitive impairment. This moving image links to the online shop which contains many such moving images. The shop would appear to be a separate site.

This website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported all aspects of this website seem to operate normally – as does the associated online shop.

Follifoot Park Disabled Riding Group – www.follifootparkdrg.org.uk

Ranking: *

Based in Harrogate, this disabled riding centre has a website that contains a number of barriers to accessibility that will impede effective access for a number of groups:

The pages on this site are quite busy with little white space separating page elements—causing difficulties for some with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Most text on the site is sans serif, but there are a number of instances of serif text which will cause difficulties for these same groups.

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. Some of the text is also fully justified (both right and left edges of the columns are aligned) and the variation in spaces between words will cause difficulties for many visitors who have dyslexia.

Many of the images on the site including those 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 or know what the image is. Also a number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

There are many 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. Moreover the choice of strong colour combinations will be distracting for many.

Although most of this site is able to be used with the keyboard alone, significantly the links across the top of the page are only accessible by clicking with the mouse, meaning that visitors who cannot use a mouse will not be able to access some areas of this site. It is also quite difficult to see which is the active link when moving through links on every page as the contrast of the highlighted item is very poor.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the site continues to function properly with the exception of those same links across the top of the page (which disappear altogether when JavaScript is unsupported) – causing great difficulty for many visitors using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Scotswood Natural Community Garden – www.sncg.org.uk

Ranking: *

The Scotswood Natural Community Garden is located near Newcastle and has a website that also includes a number of issues that will present difficulties for many visitors with an impairment:

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

However, all 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.

In general the colours on the site are well chosen, although 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. Moreover, the colours on this website have been partially 'hard-coded' so that a visitor's colour preferences are not entirely reflected – for example a user who requires white text on a black background would find that in some cases only their background colour preference was reflected (giving black text on a black background as on the 'Get Involved' page).

Many of the images on the site including those 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 or know what the image is.

SNCG's website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone.

The site uses a number of untitled 'frames' (sections of the page which may 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.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported all areas of the site continue to work fully – assisting those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Cave Rescue Organisation – www.cro.org.uk

Ranking: *

The website of Yorkshire charity The Cave Rescue Organisation also contains a number of issues which means it falls short of a base level of accessibility:

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 some text is sans serif a number of pages include serif text which may cause difficulties for these groups).

Whilst most of the text is a decent size under normal viewing conditions there are instances of text that is too small 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.

The colours on this website have also been partially 'hard-coded' so that a visitor's colour preferences are not entirely reflected – for example a user who requires white

text on a black background would find only their text colour preference was reflected in some areas (giving instances of white text on a yellow background which will be very difficult for them to read). Also a number of images of text have been used meaning that these too cannot be resized, or have their colours changed.

Many of the images on www.cro.org.uk are unlabelled or poorly labelled (in the photo album for example) 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 or know what the image is.

The site map page includes 'frames' (sections of the page which may 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.

The Cave Rescue Organisation website is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone.

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.

Off the Record – www.otrbristol.org.uk

Ranking: *

Off the Record is a counselling service based in Bristol. Their site includes a number of serious issues that will present difficulties for many visitors with an impairment:

The pages on this website are clear and uncluttered with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. The text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups) and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions with the occasional exception such as, significantly, info about the help line and drop in times at the bottom of the home page which are very small. Also some headings comprise only a shadowed red outline which will also prove difficult to read for these groups.

Whilst the majority of Text on the site 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, some of the text that can be resized is placed within fixed sized panels and partially disappears when enlarged.

All images on this site are unlabelled – causing significant difficulties for blind visitors, someone using a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output.

Moreover there is a constantly moving 'Flash' movie at the top of the home page which may prove very distracting for visitors with cognitive difficulties.

The site uses a number of untitled 'frames' (sections of the page which may 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.

This site is able to be used fully with the keyboard alone.

The site still appears to work fully when those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported - 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.

Appendix A - 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 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

Other sources of help and information include:

- 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

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