



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 industry sector.

This report concerns the accessibility and usability of 10 online retail websites such as people doing their Christmas shopping might use. Wherever possible we have chosen sites where there is no national highstreet presence.

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 these sites?

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 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 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 companies reviewed were contacted three months before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date the following have done this:

- Fortnum and Mason
- Hotel Chocolat
- IWantOneOfThose.com
- NeedAPresent.com

Please see Appendix B for the text of these statements.

Retail Websites – in summary

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

10 sites were reviewed: 3 sites had a ** ranking
7 sites had a * ranking

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

Website Audit – The findings

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

Amazon – www.amazon.co.uk

Ranking: **

Amazon is a very usable site. However it unfortunately includes several barriers to accessibility which will cause difficulties for many disabled shoppers:

The home page has a lot of content but page elements are sufficiently separated with white space and text is clear and of a decent size. Other pages are less busy and also well spaced out, but with the occasional use of italicised or serif text which may be difficult for some visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia to read.

Some links such as 'More info' or 'Read more' are quite small, and also will not make sense out of context (blind screen reader users often pull all links in a page into a list from which they can easily find the one they want).

Text on every page can be easily 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 instead of actual text for the 'tabs' at the top of the page which take you to the main shopping areas. This means that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour.

Often a text label appears when you put the mouse over an image. Blind visitors rely on the presence of text labels as a spoken description of the image. Without them the image is meaningless. These important tabs mentioned above do not have text labels. In fact many of the images, images that are also links, and buttons on this site are unlabelled making it very difficult for a blind person, someone with dyslexia relying on speech output, or someone using voice recognition software to find their way around the website – imagine trying to complete a journey where signposts at every roundabout have been left blank! The check-out process is also very difficult indeed for these groups because of these unlabelled images and buttons.

The colours used on the site always afford good contrast between text and background.

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. Amazon, however, is fully functional when JavaScript is not supported.

There is also a text only version of the site which is clear and easy to use and which affords access to those unlabelled tabs mentioned above. However it is very poorly signposted by a link which is not highlighted in any way to make it more visible for someone with a vision impairment, for example, and is located at the very bottom of the page.

Note: AbilityNet subscribes to the opinion that an organisation's main website can and should be accessible and usable to the broadest audience possible. Only where the issues of an existing website mean that achieving accessibility is infeasible is the introduction of an additional, more accessible, site necessary or appropriate.

CD-Wow – www.cd-wow.com

Ranking: *

This site has several significant issues that will present difficulties for many visitors who have an impairment:

All pages present the visitor with a lot of information, but page elements are well separated with white space.

The text is sans serif but really quite small (approximately 8pt), and there are instances of a serif font on certain buttons which will cause difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Images of snowflakes behind the text may also make reading difficult for these groups.

The size of 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.

Many of the images, images that are also links, and buttons on this site are unlabelled making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are unable to add any items to your shopping cart – effectively excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons.

Pop up windows during the purchase process may also confuse blind users who are not aware that this has happened.

Fortnum and Mason – www.fortnumandmason.com

Ranking: *

The Fortnum and Mason website will be very difficult or impossible for many visitors to use for the following reasons:

The text used is of a decent size but is serif which would make reading difficult for those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Some links such as 'Your Online Account' and 'Your Address Book' are also quite small. The contrast between text and background colours is also often very poor.

The size of 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.

The main menu on the site comprises images of words which do not have text labels - making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process.

The main menu items also give no indication of which link is active when a keyboard user tabs through them.

A fast moving presentation called a “Flash Movie’ opens when you first visit the site. 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 access this content, and its movement may distract those with a cognitive impairment.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are still able to complete the shopping process, but page layout is severely affected – with some text appearing ‘washed out’ or sliding down the page and overlapping other text.

Gadget Shop – www.gadgetshop.com

Ranking: *

This website also contains obstacles to effective access for many of their visitors:

The home page is very busy with little white space separating page elements – although other pages are less cluttered.

Text is sans serif and generally of a decent size, but there are instances of small text such as the product descriptions and ‘Add to Basket’ button. Some text is white with only a purple or orange outline, whilst other text is on a ‘loud’ blue background - which might make reading difficult for some visitors with a vision impairment.

The size of 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 in adverts have been used instead of actual text. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

The site contains numerous images, images that are also links and buttons which do not have text labels - making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process.

Some links offer only a very faint indication they are active when a keyboard user tabs through them.

There is a moving advert in the top right corner of every page which may be distracting to those with a cognitive impairment. Any moving image should cycle a small number of times and then be stilled.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are still able to make your way around the site and successfully complete the shopping process.

Hotel Chocolat – www.hotelchocolat.co.uk

Ranking: **

Hotel Chocolat is an attractive and easy to use website, but will nevertheless present difficulties for many of its visitors:

Pages employ images well and all page elements are well spaced out facilitating reading for those with a vision or cognitive impairment.

Text is sans serif and generally of a decent size, but there are instances of seriffed text such as “corporate chocolate gifts”.

Unfortunately, however, the size of 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. Also images of text have been used instead of actual text for many of the main links. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

The site contains numerous images, images that are also links and buttons which do not have text labels - making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process. All product images are, however, appropriately labelled.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are still able to put things in your shopping cart and check out – but you can't log in (a requirement for shopping) – effectively excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript. Also the drop down menus ceases to function.

IWantOneOfThose.com – www.iwantoneofthose.com

Ranking: *

This site will also cause difficulty for many shoppers with a range of impairments:

The home page has well spaced out central content, but to the left and right text is more closely packed which may cause difficulties for visitors with a vision or cognitive impairment. Text is sans serif and a decent size, although there are instances of small, very small and italicised text (including scrolling text), which will also prove extremely difficult for these groups to access.

Some of the text can be easily resized (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen), however the links on the left have been ‘hard-coded’ so that they do not automatically reflect the user’s preference,

and images of text have been used instead of actual text which means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

The site contains numerous images, images that are also links and buttons (including the 'Add to Cart' button) which do not have text labels - making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process. All product images are initially appropriately labelled but on product details pages have unhelpful labels such as "<%=parentProductID%>".

Other images move and, although these are not too intrusive, may still cause difficulties for those with a cognitive impairment.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the site still seems to function fully - you are still able to put things in your shopping cart and complete the check out process.

LastMinute.com – www.lastminute.com

Ranking: *

The LastMinute.com website also presents problems for disabled shoppers – these include:

The home page is very busy with little white space separating page elements – although other pages are slightly less cluttered but still have a lot of moving images with scrolling text that will cause difficulties for many with a vision or cognitive impairment.

Although text is sans serif it gets progressively smaller the further down the page you go – with instances of extremely small text that will be very difficult to read for those with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Also instances of pink text on white and yellow backgrounds do not offer sufficient contrast for these groups.

Most of the text can be easily resized (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen), however there is then an issue with some text overlapping. Images of text have also been used instead of actual text which means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

Many images have appropriate text labels, but some images, images that are also links and buttons do not (such as "en_GB/tab_Inav") - making it very difficult for a blind person, someone using voice recognition software or a text only browser, or someone with dyslexia relying on speech output to find their way around the website or complete the shopping process.

Occasional pop up adverts may also confuse blind users who are not aware that this has happened.

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.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported you are still able to make your way around the site and successfully complete the shopping process. The only effect is to remove all adverts on all pages and in pop up windows – with a potential improvement to accessibility.

NeedAPresent.com – www.needapresent.com

Ranking: **

This site has relatively few issues for disabled visitors:

This site is simple to use and presents information in a way that is not overwhelming. All page elements are well spaced out facilitating reading for those with a vision or cognitive impairment and, an initial flurry of snow falling behind the text soon abates meaning that legibility is not seriously impaired. There are a few instances of red italicised text on a blue background which will be difficult to read for some shoppers with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Text and links on all pages are sans serif and of a decent size under normal viewing conditions. Unfortunately, however, the size of 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.

Also there are a few instances of images of text that have been used instead of actual text - this means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour. However, the vast majority of the images on this site are well labelled – with only the very occasional button without a text label.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the site seems to function fully.

Toy Centre – www.toycentre.com

Ranking: *

The Toy Centre website will also present significant difficulties for many shoppers this Christmas.

The layout of this website is refreshingly simple, with all products easily viewable in drop-down menus on the left. The way this dynamic menu has been implemented, however, makes it impossible for visitors unable to use a mouse, or who are using some specialist or text only browsers from seeing lists of the products on the site.

Text is sans serif and of a decent size - the only exception where text is slightly too small being the menu at the top right ('View Cart', 'Log In' etc). There is an instance of slowly scrolling text on the home page which may be distracting for some with a cognitive impairment.

Whilst most of the text on every page automatically resizes with a user's preference, text at the top and in the menu on the left 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 have appropriate text labels, with the exceptions of unlabelled spacer images and buttons such as 'Add to Cart'. The images of products are also a little small but can be enlarged by clicking on them – a fact not advertised.

When high contrast colours (white text on a black background) are used the menu on the left becomes difficult to see as the boxes around each item disappear.

When those mini programs called JavaScript are not supported the main menu disappears and you are not able to add anything to your shopping cart - effectively excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript.

Wine Online – www.wineonline.co.uk

Ranking: *

This site had several usability as well as accessibility issues:

Although the home page was quite plain the content seemed to lack coherence and had a disjointed feel and may be distracting for some visitors with a vision or cognitive impairment.

Text and links were of a decent size, although a serif font was used which would hinder legibility for visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia. Certain colour combinations such as pink on beige would also present difficulties for these groups. Several links were also broken at the time of testing.

Text on every page can be easily 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, however, some instances of images of text that have been used instead of actual text for the 'tabs' at the top of the page which take you to the main shopping areas. This means that the user cannot resize this text, or change its colour.

The page is sub-divided into a number of '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 the shopping section ceases to function - effectively excluding those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript.

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.e-envoy.gov.uk/Resources

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

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 – Statements of Commitment to Accessibility

Fortnum & Mason

"Fortnum & Mason is currently in the process of redeveloping and redesigning our on-line e-commerce offer. As part of this project we will be considering strongly all accessibility and usability guidelines to enable our site to conform, as much as possible, to current standards and regulations." - Jane Muller, Internet & Direct Marketing Manager, Fortnum & Mason

Hotel Chocolat

"It has come to our attention that our website does not adhere to the regulations advised by W3C. We take this very seriously, and while we are certain that we are not alone in failing on this point, we are nevertheless taking immediate steps to rectify the situation. We feel that the lack of awareness of the issue of accessibility for disabled people to websites is a significant issue and one we now take seriously. We are a small company without sizable resources, but having learnt of our shortcomings, we are to take immediate action. Hotel Chocolate is shortly to appoint a specialist agency, whose first task will be to ensure that we adopt best practice in this important area." – Richard Kent, Hotel Chocolat

IWantOneOfThose.com

"We take accessibility and usability very seriously, but we've realised that there are a number of changes that need to be made to the site. We've always taken details such as alt tags and title tags very seriously (as you'll see from our home page, for example), but we notice how many websites miss these out altogether. We've spoken to the RNIB to assist with some of these changes, and they've pointed out the most obvious areas to focus on. We acknowledge that our website is a constantly-changing beast, changes brought about mostly by suggestions made by customers in order to improve the accessibility, speed and clarity of our web shop. Some of these changes have already been made, some will be made in the coming weeks, and we hope to have a much more accessible site in the early New Year, once our Christmas rush is over. In general, though, we appreciate that website accessibility and usability should not be seen as a "nice-to-have" but should be rated as highly as any other factors at the outset of a website architecture design, as well as throughout the lifetime and redesigns of a website. Without some fairly easy-to-implement features such as the afore-mentioned alt tags, the needs of a good 2 million people in the UK alone are not being addressed." - Mike Morrison, IwantOneOfThose.com

NeedAPresent.com

"Needapresent.com is currently working on making its site as usable to as many people as possible. With help from AbilityNet we feel confident our site will build on this and become more accessible in the future." - Martin Gerhard, Director, Needapresent.com

Appendix C – 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 2 compliance.

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