



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 websites of the top five UK supermarkets - Tesco, Sainsburys, Morrisons, Asda and Somerfield. The next report will review the websites of the ten football clubs that recently finished at the top of the Premier League.

Note: The Tesco website has an alternative website designed (by the RNIB) to be accessible. This site was reviewed separately and hence six sites in total were reviewed.

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 vast majority of disabled visitors to use it. Many others with some sort of limiting condition will also have great difficulty.

It is illegal to bar disabled visitors from on-line services offered to the general public. No organisation would purposefully do this but many are either not aware of the problem, or don't know what to do to address it. In the UK there are estimated to be 1.6 million registered blind people, 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 supermarkets reviewed were contacted a month before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date the following supermarkets have done this:

- **Tesco**
- **Sainsburys**
- **Morrisons**
- **Asda**

Please see Appendix B for the text of these statements.

Online Supermarkets – in summary

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

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

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.

Tesco Access Site - www.tesco.com/access

Ranking: ****

Note: AbilityNet subscribes to the opinion that an organisation's website can and should be accessible and usable to the broadest audience possible. Where the issues of an existing website mean that achieving accessibility is infeasible, however, the introduction of a second, accessible, site is appropriate. This is what Tesco have done.

In general the Tesco Access site, designed for blind and vision impaired visitors, is very accessible but for some minor points:

Whilst the navigational scheme is very simple and straightforward there is no clear indication of where you have been in the site. Keyboard shortcuts (or access keys) would also benefit keyboard users.

The tables laying out the products do not use the proper code to identify the row and column headings, or to associate text fields with their labels – both necessary for some blind screen reader users.

Besides these minor issues the site is very accessible and Tesco need to be commended for their efforts.

Tesco - www.tesco.com

Ranking: **

www.tesco.com has several significant accessibility issues:

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

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. A number of the images on this site are unlabelled and others poorly labelled.

Some pictures of text have been used instead of actual text – most importantly the main navigational links. This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour.

Every page is sub-divided into '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.

Pop-up windows are also an added complication for blind visitors who may not appreciate they are not still looking at the main website.

The shopping basket is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to use the site.

Sainsbury's - www.sainsburys.co.uk

Ranking: *

www.sainsburys.co.uk includes many of the most significant barriers to accessibility:

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

A number of the images on the site, and more importantly images that are also links, have no text label associated with them. This makes it very difficult for a blind person to find their way around a website – imagine trying to complete a journey where signposts at every roundabout have been left blank!

Other images have inappropriate text labels – making it difficult for a voice recognition user to click that image.

Again on this site every page is sub-divided into ‘frames’ which 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 entire site is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript (without them not even the home page will load) meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to use the site.

The site also embeds important content in an interactive presentation called 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 access this content.

Morrisons - www.morereasons.co.uk

Ranking: *

This site also includes a number of major obstacles to accessibility:

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

A number of the images on the site, and more importantly images that are also links, have no text label associated with them. This makes it very difficult for a blind person to find their way around the website.

Again on this site every page is sub-divided into ‘frames’ which 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.

Also, pages reload every 30 seconds. The speech output software used by blind visitors starts speaking from the top of the page again when a page reloads. This makes life very difficult indeed for this group.

Important functionality is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to use the site effectively.

ASDA - www.asda.co.uk

Ranking: *

You can also find a number of the most serious accessibility issues in www.asda.co.uk

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

The majority of images, and images that are also links, have a text label associated with them. However, these labels do not describe the image or match the text in the image. This makes it very difficult for a blind person to understand what pictures represent or, more importantly, find their way around the website.

There are also a large number of moving images which can present difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment, cognitive or learning difficulty.

Again on this site important functionality is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to use the site effectively.

Somerfield - www.somerfield.co.uk

Ranking: **

Many disabled individuals find shopping online easier than visiting the physical store and, whilst Somerfield's website is by far the most accessible of the 'mainstream' supermarket websites, it is not an ecommerce site and hence does not offer this facility to its disabled shoppers:

The font chosen is clear and colour contrast is good. Whilst most of the text can be easily resized by the user there are some images of text that have been used instead of actual text (most notably for the main menu items). This means that the user cannot resize it or change its colour – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

Most images on this site have appropriate text labels that assist blind visitors or those using voice recognition software. There are, however, numerous invisible images used to govern page layout that are given a text label of ‘*’ which can be annoying to blind visitors using speech output software.

This site makes use of drop-down menus. However, unlike many websites which require the use of a mouse, these menus can also be used from the keyboard. Link text could be underlined and use more contrasting colours when the mouse is moved over it.

This site is not reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript, and the site is also easily navigated in a hand-held device such as a PDA.

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 enquiries@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

Sainsburys

"We have a strong commitment to supporting customers and colleagues with disabilities and this extends to all of our services where viable." - Jan Shawe, Director of Corporate Relations

Morrisons

"...we are currently reviewing both the Morrisons and the Safeway websites with the intention of launching a new integrated site in the near future. I can assure you that it is intended that the new site will be compliant with the DDA." - Michael Bates, Marketing Director

Asda

"ASDA is a company committed to making its services and products available to all. In recognising the importance of accessibility, ASDA has recently made considerable investment into improving both store facilities and our Home Shopping service website at www.asda.com for all customers. By November 2004 ASDA will have invested £30m in improving accessibility and the shopping experience for all our customers ... Our investment clearly shows we are aware of the importance of ensuring our services, including Home Shopping, are easy to use and accessible to all. With that in mind we are also currently redeveloping our ASDA Home Shopping website to ensure that customers with disabilities find it more accessible. We expect this work to be complete before the next DDA deadline in October 2004." - Brian Fletcher, Marketing Coordinator, ASDA eCommerce