Recite Me

Making PDFs Accessible

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PDFs or Portable Document Formats are a really popular file format. It's a system that allows the document owner to lock down the content and designs, protecting them from being changed or plagiarised. For many organisations a PDF is an ideal way of sharing factsheets, guides, white papers, reports, newsletters or product manuals.

PDF was originally created so that files could be transferred between computers and operating systems for printing, but as our digital habits have changed with the introduction of tablets and smartphones, we're increasingly using PDF as the end format.

What many people don't know is that PDFs can be inaccessible to disabled people, particularly those with a visual impairment or a learning disability such as dyslexia. If a PDF is not designed in the right way, someone using a screen-reading device or the voiceover command might not be able to access the content.

Did you know?

1 in 30 people in the UK is blind or visually impaired

Around 15% of the population has dyslexia

72% of screen reader users use a mobile device (http://webaim.org/projects/screenreadersurvey5/#region)

Tips for creating an accessible PDF that can be read aloud

1 PDFs are created from a source document, usually in another programme such as Word or PowerPoint. The best chance of making your end document accessible is to start with an accessible source document.

2 The original document needs to be 'tagged' when it is converted into PDF. By tagging the content you are giving the document a structure or hierarchy, which becomes the basis of a PDF tag tree – something that allows assistive technologies to navigate your content.

3 The styles, features and headings in Microsoft Word help you format your content and give the document a structure. A well-structured original document is the best starting point for creating the PDF tag tree.

4 If you are creating a list of content, use the list styles in Word and use a numbered list sequence if there is a specific order the content follows. If your document is several pages long then use the table of contents function to create a contents page.

5 Layout and formatting – use left aligned text and choose a sans serif font such as Arial, Helvetica or Calibri. The minimum font size recommended is 12pt. If you need smaller text in footnotes or endnotes increase the body text size to 14 pt.

6 For emphasis in a text use **bold font** (but use it sparingly) and don't use *italics*, UPPER CASE, or underlining as it makes the text harder to read.

7 Use of colour – The colour contrast between foreground and background colours needs to be strong enough and comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). Make sure you avoid using colour alone to convey meaning and include a text description or label as well.

8 If you have a lot of data included in your document use data tables with proper column headings to display it.

9 Use of images – Make sure you include a text description of all the images in your document. If the image conveys meaningful information, the text description must contain the same information.

10 Avoid using too many acronyms and abbreviations – and wherever possible, include the full version on each page the first time the acronym appears.

PDF Reader

With Recite Me on your website all PDF content will be automatically identified and speech-enabled. Users will benefit from our range of accessibility tools including Text-to-Speech, magnification an on-screen ruler, translation and more.

The Recite Me PDF reader will automatically identify all PDF links on your web page and allow the user to open them in our accessible, online PDF reader. This will allow the user to benefit from the accessibility tools which Recite offers, including but not limited to Text-to-Speech, magnification and an on-screen ruler. All of the users Recite Me settings will also be automatically applied to the PDF.

Next steps

More information on how to create an accessible PDF is available on the Adobe website. Before you publish your PDF you can check it for accessibility in Adobe. It is also a good idea to run a screen reader check using something like Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) for Windows and the Mac OS X VoiceOver.

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Accessibility is central to who we are and the software we build. Our accessibility and language toolbar will give you peace of mind that you are meeting your customers' needs.

Add Recite Me's accessibility and language toolbar to your website and allow your visitors to customise their experience according to their individual access and language preferences.

There is nothing for you to download or install. No compatibility problems, no fuss. Our solution is Cloud based and can be up and running in no time at all.

Recite Me works across all devices, whether your web visitors are in the office, at home or on the move, we've got your content covered.

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