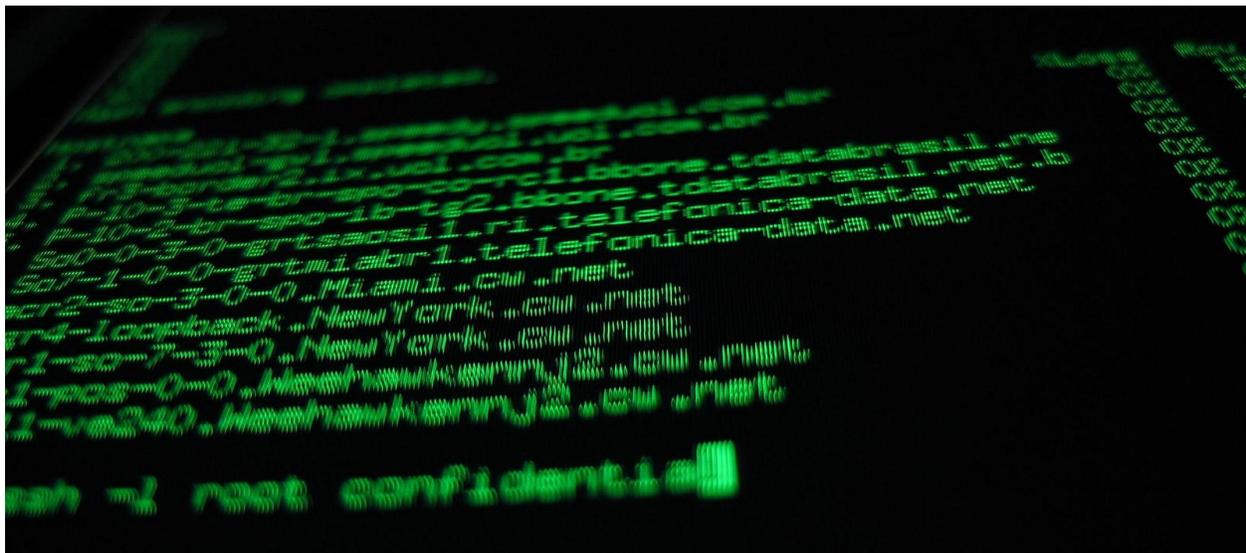


What To Know About Web Accessibility

You likely already know that certain standards of accessibility for people with various disabilities are required in most physical buildings. This is why ramps are available as alternatives to staircases for people in wheelchairs, why there is reserved accessible parking in most parking lots, and why specific standards are put in place to ensure that wheelchair-accessible restrooms are, in fact, accessible. However, there are similar accessibility standards that apply to the internet, that can be just as helpful for people with disabilities. While they are incredible useful, they are not as universal as physical accessibility standards.



How to Make a Website Accessible

General accessibility standards for websites exist in the form of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). WCAG was designed as a collaborative project with people from around the world as a resource for individuals, businesses, and governments alike. Many of these standards are geared toward people with visual or auditory disabilities, such as requirements that text on a webpage be compatible with screen reader software used by individuals with visual disabilities. Many of these standards, however, are designed to make

online spaces accessible for people with motor disabilities, such as what might happen in the wake of a spinal cord injury.

For instance, if you need to use one hand at all times to operate a wheelchair, the WCAG has standards for websites to be functional and navigable with only a mouse. Alternatively, if you prefer using only a keyboard, the WCAG has standard set in place to not only make sure that websites are accessible with only the use of a keyboard, but also that any time limit imposed by the website is generous enough to enable someone using only a keyboard with a single hand to not be hindered by it. These standards include, among other things, a way around one-letter keyboard shortcuts so that the letter itself is usable, and a requirement that anything that can be focused on with only a keyboard can also be focused off of with only a keyboard.

The WCAG also has navigation guidelines. These guidelines are designed to make navigating a website accessible no matter how it is done. They include things like giving all links a purpose that can be easily determined from the link text itself and its context and having multiple ways to access a web page within a website. Between all of these guidelines and more, websites following the WCAG have all the tools they need to become accessible for anyone in the disability community.



Enforcement of WCAG and Other Web Accessibility Standards

These standards were not originally made by the federal government, but they were incorporated into the Rehabilitation Act. The Rehabilitation Act prevents the federal government, all federal agencies, and almost any company receiving federal contracting money from discriminating against people with disabilities, and requires them to make all of their services accessible to people with disabilities, including their websites. The standards for an agency or company to comply with the Rehabilitation Act are mostly identical to the WCAG standards. This may seem like a small reach, but the federal government issues millions of contracts every year to large and small companies alike. If you wish to file suit against a

company for not providing web accessibility, a good first step would be for you and your attorney to check to see whether the company behind the website has contracted with the federal government; if they have, they have an obligation under the Rehabilitation Act to provide web accessibility.

Even if a website is run by a company not receiving federal government contracts, however, it still might be legally required to be accessible. Under Title III of the Americans With Disabilities Act, (ADA) any place of public accommodation must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. Not all courts agree on whether “places of public accommodation” includes the internet, but if you and your attorney can establish venue in jurisdiction that does, many of the same standards set forth by the WCAG still apply.

Let Us Help You!

Contact us if you have any questions or concerns regarding web accessibility.