

508 Compliance

What is it? Why is web accessibility important? How do I do it?



508 Compliance refers to “Section 508” of the Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and mandates that electronic and information technology purchased by the Federal Government is accessible by people with disabilities. An accessible web site is one that can be understood by everyone, regardless of what browser or adaptive equipment he or she may be using. It’s likely you are not a federal government owned agency, so why does accessibility concern you?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the overall disability rate in 2005 was 18.7%, 12% of which have a severe disability. The reported disabilities do vary, but think about how many of these people are visually or hearing impaired, or something as simple as color blindness or persons with epilepsy. Consider the number of persons who have a mobility impairment that inhibits them from using a computer. These could be potential clients of your company. If they cannot use your website, you may have lost a client.

Aside from the ability to reach disabled clients, many techniques required by Section 508 increase your SEO (search engine optimization). For example, Section 508 dictates that you implement practices and techniques such as:

1. Alt text for images and graphics
2. HTML Text alternatives for every significant non-text element
3. Descriptive text in hyperlinks/anchor-text
4. Avoid blinking text/graphics/animations / Avoid causing the screen to flicker at certain frequencies
5. Using a font family that is made for use on the computer (Arial or Verdana, for example)
6. Strong color contrasts (Good: White on dark gray; Bad: Yellow on Orange)

For further information, we recommend you check out the [Quick Accessibility Checklist](#), provided by Penn State or you may get it straight from the source at www.section508.gov.

Some of these samples can boost your SERPs (search engine return pages) while others enhance usability.

You can find online testing to check some of your website’s accessibility. Usability is the goal and usability by the (disabled) user is the ultimate test and the most accurate way to test your site’s accessibility effectiveness. Here are some free tests you can use online, no downloads necessary:

- Test the OVERALL Accessibility of your web page, HTML code or document file with the [WAVE \(Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool\)](#)
- Test the contrast of your text color vs. background color with the [WebAIM Color Contrast Checker](#)
- If you are a web developer, Adobe Dreamweaver includes an accessibility report tool: **Site » Reports**

A simple website can easily be made to fit Section 508 standards, and it’s likely that your site is currently following many of their guidelines. If it is not, you are certainly missing out on searches that will not only bring you clients from the disabled community, but the abled as well.

Happy Browsing!

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