LEADERSHIP

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Is Your Website Accessible and ADA Compliant?

BY KIM KELLEY, FRBMA
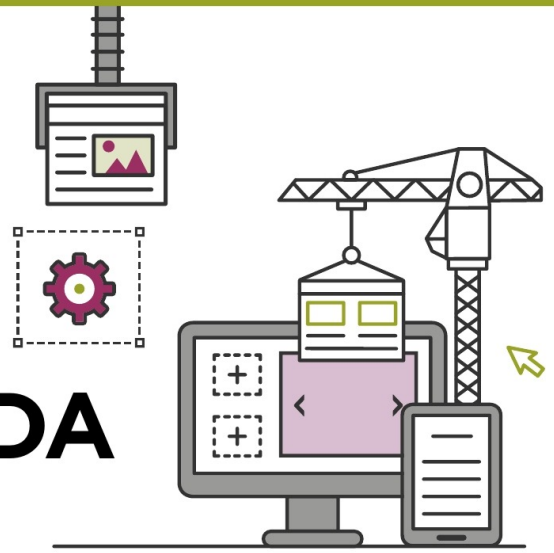
When you embark on a newly designed and developed website for your radiology group, you'll no doubt consider color, imagery, and visual hierarchy. You'll pay close attention to how well the website quickly enables a patient or referring clinician to learn about your services, schedule an appointment, find your location, and access patient records. You'll write and keyword optimize new content and ensure search engines know best how to index the website so it is easily findable. You've checked all the boxes. Except one.

What are the chances your new website could be considered discriminatory against persons with disabilities?

Accessibility vs. ADA compliance

There are two terms you need to understand about this topic: Accessibility and ADA compliance. Accessibility indicates how well a person with a disability can access your website—meaning how well disabled persons can fully enjoy, access, and navigate the content on your website. Upholding this standard is performed on the technical or development side. Compliance—or ADA—is the legal side. Essentially, your website must be in compliance with the laws of accessibility.

Wayne Baldwin, CEO, Pueblo Radiology Medical Group, states, "It's not something you naturally would think about. The ADA is far reaching. Beyond risk management, it is a good idea to make your web site more accessible, in any event. People with disabilities need access to information that is available on a website. We try to ensure that they can navigate the website and find what they need."

If you're getting a sinking feeling that your website may not measure up, what should you do?

Fix it. Now.

But don't spend thousands of dollars doing it. There is a recently released 28-point guide you can follow called the Website Accessibility Standards (WAS) Preview that outlines and gives a step-by-step checklist for adhering to the standards for website presentation, appearance, content alternatives, user control, and usability. You can find it here: accessible.org/was.

If a first look at this list feels like more than you can manage, hire a competent developer who can make these changes on your site for you. Do not hire a company who promises to scan your site for non-compliance but has no technical ability to provide a solution.

Aaron Brown, lead developer, Ali`i Marketing & Design, states, "Nearly all of the items on the list are straightforward to implement, they just take time and thoughtfulness." He gives an example of modern website design trends where links are being made to look like regular text without underlines or a contrast color. "However, these items are considered a 'focus indicator' and shouldn't be eliminated," said Brown.

Spoiler alert

The focus on website accessibility and ADA compliance is fairly new. But that's no excuse—in fact, there are no excuses for a website not being compliant. If an opportunistic attorney decides to target your company with a demand letter, it won't matter whether you weren't aware, just hired a reputable agency, or have been diligently working on it, the result will be the same.

Fortunately, there are also 'quick fixes' you can implement that satisfy the most common non-compliance complaint. That is—adding 'alt' text to every image, video, or audio file on your website. Alt text is simply a sensible, plain English description of what your image represents, making your website accessible for screen readers. Equally important is to understand that compliance is not a 'set it and forget it' exercise. Each time your website is updated or refreshed, you'll need to revisit the checklist to be sure you have dotted all the i's and crossed all of the t's.

If you need further assistance with understanding your role in ensuring website accessibility and ADA compliance, consult legal counsel, or look to a reputable ADA website compliance and accessibility consultant. Additional information about website accessibility and ADA compliance can be found in Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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