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The Business Case for Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility refers to the practice of ensuring digital content, services, and technologies are usable by everyone, including people with disabilities. **Did you know that over one billion of the world's population has a legally recognizable disability?** (World Bank Disability Inclusion Overview)

In a world increasingly reliant on digital platforms and technologies, ensuring accessibility is not just a matter of compliance but also a fundamental aspect of inclusivity and equity. Yet less than 3% of the world's websites are considered fully accessible by Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 standard. (The WebAIM Million)

The Essence of Accessibility

Accessibility is not just about compliance with standards and regulations or fancy features; it's about creating digital experiences that are truly inclusive and equitable for all users. While embracing accessibility design is a commitment every organization should embrace, the practice has abundant business use cases and benefits.

Empowerment

Accessible digital technologies empower people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enabling them to access information, communicate, and engage with others on an equal basis. It empowers people of all abilities to fulfill their purpose, achieve their goals, provide for themselves, and support their independence.

Universal design

Accessibility benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities. For example, captions benefit not only deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals but also those in noisy environments or non-native speakers. There are both individual and organizational benefits to embracing accessibility.

Legal and moral imperative

While legal requirements and regulations vary by country, promoting digital accessibility is not just a legal obligation but also a moral imperative. Ensuring equal access to digital resources is essential for upholding human rights and fostering social inclusion. Some municipalities have even mandated and regulated digital accessibility, establishing minimum standards that organizations need to meet to be in compliance. Inaction in terms of digital accessibility can be very damaging to an organization's reputation and costly to the bottom line with lost revenue, legal fees, and more.

Business advantages

Embracing accessibility can also be a strategic business decision. By making products and services more accessible, organizations can expand their customer base, improve customer satisfaction, and enhance their brand reputation. Some of the benefits include:

1 **Enhanced brand:** Websites and online products are by far the most important organizational digital assets. An accessible web application will reach beyond the people who depend on that accessibility and give everyone who encounters it the sense that your organization strives to be inclusive. In Microsoft's case, after taking a strategic approach to accessibility design, the improvements in products, the online consumer experience, and engagement with stakeholders strengthened its brand image overall.

2 **Cost advantages:** The myth that accessible websites cost more money to develop is just that – a myth. Designing and developing a truly accessible website does require the expertise of accessibility specialists and testing, but organizations who make the upfront investment usually see immediate financial returns. "Some aspects of accessibility, such as the use of style sheets, can actually reduce the costs of maintaining or updating sites, and this benefit should increase over time," according to The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). Designing accessible websites up front also cost exponentially less money than trying to retrofit a website after launch. Digitally accessible web applications are easy to use and usually have higher traffic, resulting a noticeable growth in revenue. Accessibility strategies also reduce server load, which lowers the amount of server capacity and costs.

3 **Relevancy:** People prefer to interact with accessibility features because they are easy to use and easy to understand. Accessibility ensures that a wide range of people can effectively use websites and apps, helping brands' reach and relevance in the marketplace.

4 **Improved search engine results:** Search engines utilize search engine spiders to crawl, index, and rank pages within websites. Designing with accessibility in mind makes websites more compatible with these automated tools, resulting in better organic rankings and results. In NPR's case, its "The American Life" broadcast, which reaches 2.1 million listeners weekly, increased its search traffic by nearly 7% simply by incorporating transcripts on their pages.

5 **Increased market share:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 16% of the world's population has a disability, of which 31% require digitally accessible products and experiences. For organizations that embrace digital accessibility, this equates to a substantial untapped audience, especially considering consumers who abandon websites due to accessibility challenges have an estimated spending power of $15.38B USD.

6 **Competitive advantage:** Accessible websites reduce risk, improve time to market, and create a well-defined competitive edge over competitors. Gartner – an international research and data analysis consultancy – indicates that being accessible can improve your Total Available Market (TAM) from 15% - 46%. Furthermore, having non-accessible websites subject organizations to litigation, which averages $100,000 per claim. In 2020 alone, Accessibility.com reported there were 2,058 website accessibility lawsuits filed and 265,000 demand letters sent.

7 **Brand differentiation:** Consumers of varying abilities intentionally seek organizations who practice accessibility – online and offline. In fact, they will intentionally engage with more accessible website alternatives. In the Nucleus Research study in 2019, it found "U.S. retailers may be losing up to $6.9B annually to their competitors with more accessible websites."

Why is Digital Accessibility Important?

Digital accessibility is not just a matter of compliance; it's about creating inclusive and equitable digital experiences that benefit everyone. In this section, we'll explore why digital accessibility is crucial, focusing on two key aspects: Enhancing User Experience and Government and Regulatory Mandates.

Enhancing User Experience

Inclusivity

Digital accessibility ensures that all users, regardless of their abilities, can access and interact with digital content and services. By removing barriers to access, organizations can reach a broader audience and foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging.

Improved Usability

Accessible design principles, such as clear navigation, consistent layout, and alternative text for images enhance the usability of digital products and services for all users. By making interfaces intuitive and easy to use, organizations can improve user satisfaction and retention.

Accessibility Features Benefit Everyone

Many accessibility features, such as captions, transcripts, and keyboard navigation, benefit not only users with disabilities but also users in diverse situations. For example, captions are helpful in noisy environments or for non-native speakers, while keyboard navigation is essential for users with motor impairments and power users who prefer shortcuts.

Government and Regulatory Mandates

Legal Obligations

Governments around the world have enacted laws and regulations requiring digital accessibility to ensure equal access to information and services for people with disabilities. For example, in the United States, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates that federal agencies make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and applies to digital services provided by places of public accommodation.
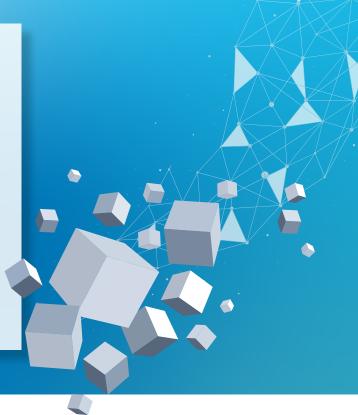
International Standards

International standards, such as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](#) developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), provide guidance on making web content more accessible. While compliance with WCAG is not legally mandated in all countries, it is widely recognized as the de facto standard for web accessibility and is often referenced in legal settlements and regulatory requirements.

Risk of Litigation

Non-compliance with accessibility standards can expose organizations to legal risks, including lawsuits, fines, and reputational damage. As awareness of digital accessibility grows, stakeholders, including advocacy groups and individuals with disabilities, are increasingly scrutinizing organizations' digital properties for accessibility compliance.

Digital accessibility is important for enhancing user experience, reaching a broader audience, and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. By prioritizing accessibility, organizations can create more inclusive digital experiences and mitigate legal risks associated with non-compliance.

Ultimately, digital accessibility is about recognizing the diversity of human abilities and experiences and designing digital experiences that are inclusive, equitable, and empowering for all users. By embracing inclusive design principles and understanding the essence of accessibility, a more accessible and inclusive digital world can be created for everyone.

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