

ESSENTIAL
ACCESSIBILITY.



Inclusive Digital Marketing

How to create accessible campaigns



Digital marketing

When it comes to digital marketing, conversion is the name of the game. In pursuit of increased traffic, lead generation, open- and click-through rates, engagement, – and of course – sales, companies invest valuable resources into optimizing marketing stacks, designing eye-catching websites, producing slick video content, and keeping up with the latest social media trends.

However, many organizations may inadvertently be undermining their conversion efforts. These businesses are unwittingly shutting out a lucrative audience of millions and exposing their brand to risk by failing to implement a fundamental yet often overlooked best practice: digital accessibility.



Accessible marketing: Three key considerations

No brand would intentionally turn away a quarter of their prospective customers. But, given that one in five U.S. adults self-identify as having a disability, and one in four families have a member who identifies as having a disability, when a brand creates inaccessible digital marketing assets, they are effectively doing just that. Accessibility barriers eliminate the potential to do business with a significant portion of the consumer market.

When building a marketing strategy, brands need to understand the bottom-line impact of accessibility. Generally speaking, there are three key areas to consider.

1. Market size and purchasing power

2. Brand enhancement

3. Risk management and legal compliance



1. Market size and purchasing power

As previously stated, in the U.S. alone, between 20 and 25 percent of adults report having a disability. According to Return on Disability, the number of people with disabilities worldwide is estimated to be 1.85 billion—a market equal to the populations of China and the European Union combined. Friends and family of people with disabilities add another 3.4 billion people to the disability community, representing 73 percent of consumers who control or contribute to purchasing decisions. Together, the disability community controls more than \$13 trillion in annual disposable income.

The sheer size of this demographic makes it an attractive segment for marketers, but surprisingly, few companies are prioritizing the needs of the disability community. When asked, people with disabilities say that between 75 percent and 80 percent of their online experiences are failures. For new and mature brands alike, the potential to engage with and delight this growing demographic should be top of mind, and it begins with implementing an accessible marketing program.

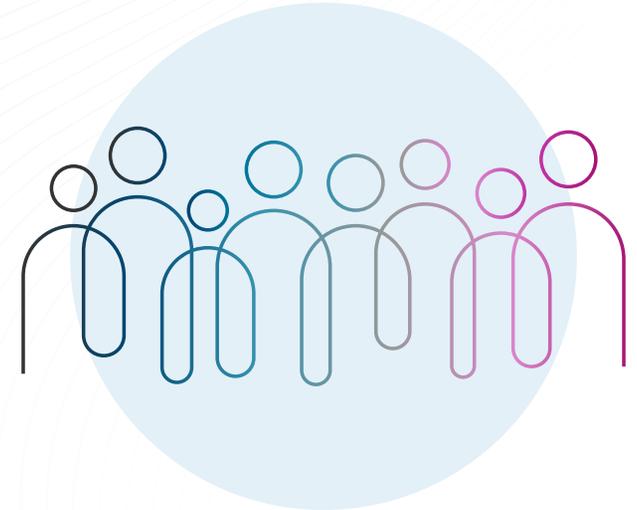


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2. Brand enhancement

As a key component of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), accessibility is an issue many consumers are passionate about. These same consumers are proving to be increasingly loyal to brands that prioritize their shared value of inclusivity, and that loyalty translates into revenue and profit for brands. Inclusive organizations receive an average of 28 percent higher revenue, 30 percent greater economic profit margins, and twice the net income of less-inclusive competitors.



3. Risk management and legal compliance

While maximizing consumer market and revenue potential are critical, there's also a legal risk when digital content isn't accessible. From 2017–2021, plaintiffs claiming discrimination filed more than 10,000 ADA web-related lawsuits in the U.S. These numbers don't include the suspected hundreds of thousands of legal demand letters served in 2020 alone. While demand letters may not result in a lawsuit, they can result in costly settlements and fines, accompanied by legal fees. With U.S. courts ruling overwhelmingly in favor of accessibility, web accessibility lawsuits present very real risks both to a brand's financial standing and to its reputation.



Redefining disability

Clearly, brands have important incentives for prioritizing accessibility in their digital marketing strategy. But, where to start? First, it's important to think beyond vision and hearing disabilities and recognize the full spectrum of disabilities. For instance, mobility disabilities are the most common disabilities in the U.S., followed by cognitive disabilities.

Understanding the range of disabilities and the respective needs of individuals of varying abilities will inform creative design and development processes. When designing barrier-free experiences, take into account:



Blindness and low vision



Speech disabilities



Deafness and hearing loss



Neurological limitations (dementia, Parkinson's, etc.)



Limited movement



Cognitive limitations (learning disabilities)

Also, keep in mind disabilities can be temporary, such as a broken arm preventing mouse or keyboard use. They can also be conditional—the glare from sunlight diminishing screen contrast, for example. And some of your customers may have multiple disabilities. It's important to consider this spectrum when creating an engaging campaign.



Creating engaging, accessible customer experiences

Almost every digital platform, channel, type of asset, and medium can benefit from incorporating accessibility best practices. In this section, we share steps, guidelines, and tips for implementing accessibility into some core digital marketing activities.



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Content readability

No matter who your audience is, writing clear and concise copy can help you get and keep readers' attention. In addition, people with cognitive or learning disabilities can find dense or complex text particularly challenging to navigate. Brevity and clarity are even more important for these readers.

To help keep your copy short, sweet, and to the point, use plain language. Best practices for readable content include:

- ✓ Keep sentences between 15-20 words on average
- ✓ Place important messaging at the beginning
- ✓ Avoid jargon
- ✓ Use bulleted lists, and pull out quotes or paragraphs to highlight take-aways
- ✓ Start with the most important information and end with the least important
- ✓ Align text to the left



Video

Multifaceted campaigns often include video elements. When producing video content, ensure it is also accessible for people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or have partial hearing loss, and people who have a cognitive disability. Accessible video content should include:

- ✓ Closed captions for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or unable to access audio due to situational or environmental conditions
- ✓ Audio descriptions (describing the on-screen visuals) for those who are blind or have low vision
- ✓ No bright flashes when possible, or adhering to the “three flashes” rule (no content that flashes more than three times in one second) to prevent inducing a seizure, or causing headaches
- ✓ Sign language interpretation
- ✓ Selecting a video player that can be controlled by audio command or without a mouse



Websites and landing pages

The accessibility of your website or landing page will impact your conversions. When users experience barriers, they may bounce off your page, rendering your marketing efforts ineffective. Consider the following when designing websites and landing pages:

- ✓ Establish a clear heading structure so that someone using assistive technology like a screen reader can logically navigate your page.
- ✓ Ensure all non-decorative images have alternative text so that a screen reader user who is unable to see featured images will be aware of their meaning (especially important on e-commerce sites).
- ✓ Be aware of your color contrast (the difference between a color in the foreground and its background). If the contrast isn't sufficient, someone with low vision or color blindness may miss the content altogether.
- ✓ Label all of your controls—meaning anything a user interacts with, such as buttons, text boxes, and checkboxes. This will ensure users understand the purpose of the controls and can successfully navigate them when using a screen reader.
- ✓ Avoid any autoplay content, which is hard to control without a mouse and disruptive while using a screen reader. If unavoidable, provide an opportunity to stop or pause the video or audio.



Emails

An effective campaign often includes multiple email touchpoints. Are your emails accessible? As with websites, consider the following when creating inclusive emails:

- ✓ Make subject lines clear and consider using a preheading that screen readers can recite easily, much like Siri announces a text message you receive on your phone.
- ✓ Avoid sending emails that include only images with no supporting text. While these may seem more aesthetically pleasing, in this instance, image alternative text would have to describe everything on the image, making it long and complex for individuals using a screen reader.
- ✓ Ensure proper color contrast.
- ✓ For longer messages, establish a proper heading structure.
- ✓ Keep messaging simple, and avoid using abbreviations wherever possible.
- ✓ Use clear fonts and pay attention to text formatting if you have multiple paragraphs.
- ✓ Make sure hyperlinks describe where they are taking a user. For example, using “click here,” or “learn more” gives no indication of the content a user will be taken to.



Accessible files

PDFs, PowerPoints, Excel spreadsheets, Word documents, and other types of files should be designed with accessibility in mind, and tested for their level of compliance before they are shared. The fundamental steps in document accessibility are the same, regardless of format:

- ✓ Use correct heading structure.
- ✓ Provide descriptive hyperlinks.
- ✓ Add accurate alternate text to images and charts.
- ✓ Ensure color contrast is sufficient.
- ✓ When exporting Word docs to PDF, take care to use the correct settings (tab, export, or save to PDF, never “print to PDF”) to retain accessible formatting.
- ✓ Utilize the accessibility checkers and guides included with Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat, and PowerPoint.



Social media

Incorporate the same accessibility considerations detailed above on social media platforms, whether creating text-only posts, graphics, or videos with supporting copy.

Some additional considerations for accessible social media include:

✓ **Animated GIFs**

For those social media platforms that allow adding alt text to GIFs, follow the same process as adding alt text for images. Keep in mind that any text embedded in a GIF may be of such a low resolution that it will be indiscernible to people with visual disabilities. You should always include sufficient additional text in the post to convey the meaning of the GIF.

✓ **Hashtags**

Hashtags that include more than one word should use initial capitalization, otherwise known as CamelCase. For example, “#DigitalAccessibility”.

✓ **Emojis and emoticons**

Use emojis and emoticons sparingly in consideration of screen reader users. When a screen reader encounters an emoji (or several emojis), it will read the description for each emoji on the screen. Similarly, screen readers will read each individual character used in creating an emoticon.

✓ **Accessibility features by platform**

For platform-specific social media accessibility guidance, refer to the links below:



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[Instagram](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



Inclusive media representation

Finally, consider if, and how, your brand includes people with disabilities in consumer-facing communications. When creating a new campaign, ask yourself: is there an opportunity to include individuals with disabilities in the narrative? Inclusive representation in marketing authentically depicts a diverse group of people, undermining the stigma that has often been associated with having a disability. To your brand's benefit, when consumers can see themselves in your campaign, they're more connected to it, which is likely to make your message "stick" more profoundly with them.



Accessible experiences are more usable experiences

A commitment to an accessible experience at every touchpoint in your marketing campaign ensures consumers can fully engage with it, maximizing your marketing spend. It also means consumers won't hit a barrier and opt for a more accessible competitor.

Further, when making the various elements of your campaign accessible for customers with disabilities, you're actually improving the experience for every user. For example, video captions don't only benefit people who are deaf or hard of hearing, they are helpful for someone in a noisy setting.

Accessible digital experiences are usable experiences. Accessible content is beautiful content. By taking a moment to go through some simple checks and balances when planning, you'll ensure maximum reach and effectiveness for your content, and contribute to a more inclusive experience.



Accessible marketing is essential

No question, an accessible digital program positively impacts your marketing strategy. However, it's important to keep in mind that accessibility is an ongoing process. As you create new content, and make changes to your existing content, you may introduce new accessibility issues. To support your accessibility journey, consider engaging an experienced and qualified accessibility partner.

As the leading Accessibility-as-a-Service solution, eSSENTIAL Accessibility equips your organization with all of the tools, resources, expertise, training, and legal support needed to provide an inclusive digital marketing experience. We support efforts to maintain legal compliance, conforming with the latest WCAG standards. Most importantly, we help you create a barrier-free user experience for all of your prospective customers, enabling them to seamlessly interact at every touch point.



Let's get started

To enhance your brand, expand your market, and reduce your risk, we'll help you make your marketing campaign elements accessible.

[Engage our team to get started today.](#)

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