Accessibility: Working Together for Inclusive Services During Rapid Change in Technologies

Rick Ells, Senior Webmaster
UW Technology
University of Washington
rells@u.washington.edu

abstract
Disabilities should not exclude a qualified, prepared person from higher education. IT accessibility design guidelines are changing, new technologies keep coming, and assistive technologies keep improving. How can we build an interactive community of site and application developers to support continuous improvement of guidelines, methods, and technologies supporting accessibility?

Why Be Inclusive?

- **Compliance with the law**
  - ADA - Are you a public accommodation?
  - Section 508
  - W3C WAI WCAG 1&2
  - State regulations
  - Institutional policy
- **Keeping talent**
  - Competent people develop impairments
  - Poorly considered design changes can make your site or service unusable
- **Serving your clientele**
  - Many institutions by definition serve an audience that includes people with disabilities
- **A waiting market**
  - 12% of people between 16 and 24 have some form of disability (21 million people)
  - The elderly, many with disabilities that can be helped by assistive technology, are a growing part of our population
- **Because you care**
  - Inclusiveness has a positive effect on the learning environment
  - Inclusiveness reminds us of the breadth of human experience and ability
- **A sound technical approach**
  - Methods that support assistive technologies also support other access devices (iPhones, etc.)

Constant, Rapid Change!

- **Services moving online**
  - Financial, registration, records, libraries, instruction
  - Elimination of alternatives
  - Increased use of external service vendors
- **New toolsets and methods**
  - AJAX, AxsJAX
  - Development frameworks and libraries
  - APIs
  - Mashups
  - (X)HTML/CSS, including CSS control of presentation
  - Semantic markup
- **Web 2.0**
  - Wikis, blogs, forums
- **Evolving accessibility standards and guidelines**
  - WCAG 1 -> WCAG2
  - Section 508 being updated
  - Global spread of accessibility standards and guidelines to many countries
- **Standards are being re-evaluated and updated**
  - HTML5
  - XHTML2
  - EcmaScript
- **Assistive and adaptive technologies are becoming more sophisticated**
  - FireFox add-ons
  - Interpret Javascript and DOM
  - Accessible Rich Internet Application (ARIA) capable browsers and assistive technologies

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Building a Manager, Designer, Author, and Developer Community Supporting Information Technology Accessibility

The Game Plan

Build Resources

- Information Technology Accessibility Web site
  - Policies and standards
  - Web Accessibility
  - Procuring Accessible IT
  - IT Tools and Resources
  - Disability Resources
  - Featured Web Sites
  - Collaboration
- www.washington.edu/accessibility/

Build an Interactive Community

- Accessibility@U monthly lunch discussions
  - Active email list
  - www.washington.edu/ accessibility/accessibleweb/
- Accessibility in IT Special Interest Group on the UW ITSIG wiki
  - Project notes and reports
  - sig.washington.edu/ - open to UW faculty, staff, and students

Build Relationships With UW Web Managers

- Accessibility Working Group in the UW Web Forum, a university wide council of Web developers that works on common needs
- Periodic meetings with UW Technology Web site and application development managers

Build Connections With Accessibility Related Programs

- DO-IT Center at the UW
  - www.washington.edu/doit
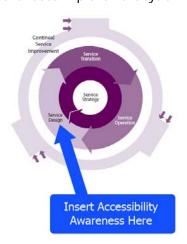- ATHEN Access Technologists Higher Education Network
  - www.athenpro.org

Offer Accessible Design Skill Development Opportunities

- Web design competition (under development)
- Trainings (under development)

Hot Topics

The following topics have been actively discussed:

- Accessibility evaluation procedures
- Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) – AJAX
- Efficient, rapid, accurate transcription of audio
- Contract language requiring accessibility for product purchases and contract services, including Web design and external service providers
- Accessible design competitions (Accessibility Internet Rally)
- Example site designs and templates with accessibility features
- Working with contract Web designers and developers
- Improvements in adaptive and assistive software
- Improving skills of Web developers in applying accessibility guidelines and standards
- The law and policy relating to accessibility of UW sites and services
- Including accessibility in the application development, maintenance, and continuous improvement cycle

ITIL Continuous Service Improvement diagram from Best-management-practice.com