Basic guidelines for 508 compliance & accessibilty

Essentials of 508 compliance and accessibilty

What is 508 compliance?

508 compliance is an updated section to The Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The revisions to the law standardize that federal government websites are designed to be safe and accessible for all users including those with disabilities.

What is accessibilty?

Accessibility is a best practice when designing web products. While 508 compliance sets the minimal standards to be AA design ready, accessibility focuses on going above and designing products for anyone who is experiencing any permanent, temporary or situational disabilities. Regardless of abilities, it ensures that we all can use the same websites through various means necessary and have an enjoyable experience.

Common barriers preventing accessibility of websites for users

auditory   cognitive   mobility   speech   visual

Action items for design accessibilty & compliance

Content & Structure

- Users should be able to easily navigate layout & understand content on page - it should be clear & meaningful

- Responsive web design is applied from initial design stages to ensure data & functionality remains intact on all devices

- There should be multiple ways to locate indiviudual pages within a website - aiding those with visual or cognitive limitations

- Design details & layout should be consistent so users feel comfortable navigating & can find relevant information easily

Color Standards

- Text & images should have a color contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 against its background

- The contrast of icons & graphical objects should be at least 3:1 against adjacent colors

- Large-scale text should have a contrast ratio of at least 3:1

- Color allocation should be used along with labels or icons to further clarify info

Typography Standards

- Line height - at least 1.5x the font size

- Paragraphs spacing - at least 2x the font size

- Letter spacing - at least 0.12x the font size

- Word spacing to at least 0.16x the font size

- Font sizes should not be smaller than 14 points

- Line length 8-10 words: it's easier for visual & cognitive impaired users

Audio and Visual Alternatives

- Closed captions or text transcripts

- Alternate text for images

- Screen reader capabilities

- Logical keyboard tabs, navigation & shortcuts

- Videos need prerecorded audio track or synchronized captions

- Voice interaction

- Enable zoom on all devices

Interactions

- Hover use designs have an alternative way user can understand content

- For device motion or other gestures provide an alternative way to disable

- Screen orientation designs are versatile

Links & Buttons

- Download links are clear for specified media

- Calls to action stand out & are designed with focus link indicators

- Provide a prompt for opening external links in new windows

- Include option to skip main content navigation links

Error States

- Error states should designed as a color, graphics & informative text combo - highlighting what the errors are & how to fix them

- Add help text & information on how to prevent errors

- Users should be able to review, confirm & fix any errors

Timing

- Users are given enough time to read & interact with media content: with options to pause, play, mute, repeat, restart etc.

Animation

- Use animation, video & audio content in ways that don't distract or harm users by paying attention to color contrast & flashes

- Animation is to have no more than 3 flashes per second, low contrast and limits use of red

Developer handoff

- Designers can be familiar with using coded headers and help developers utilize semantic HTML

- Form fields have labels programmatically associated with their output

- Touch type targets should occupy 9mm x 9mm of physical screen real estate - regardless of device resolution or pixel density

- ARIA roles utilized for screen readers

Accessibility is essential

508 & accessibility standards can take time to learn but they are very important to implement into designs . These guidelines are paving the way for a web that everyone can use, understand and enjoy. Rather than being seen as rules, accessibility is an opportunity to push design creativity to the next level. Being able to create an accessible, innovative web experience makes the web better for all for years to come.

References

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