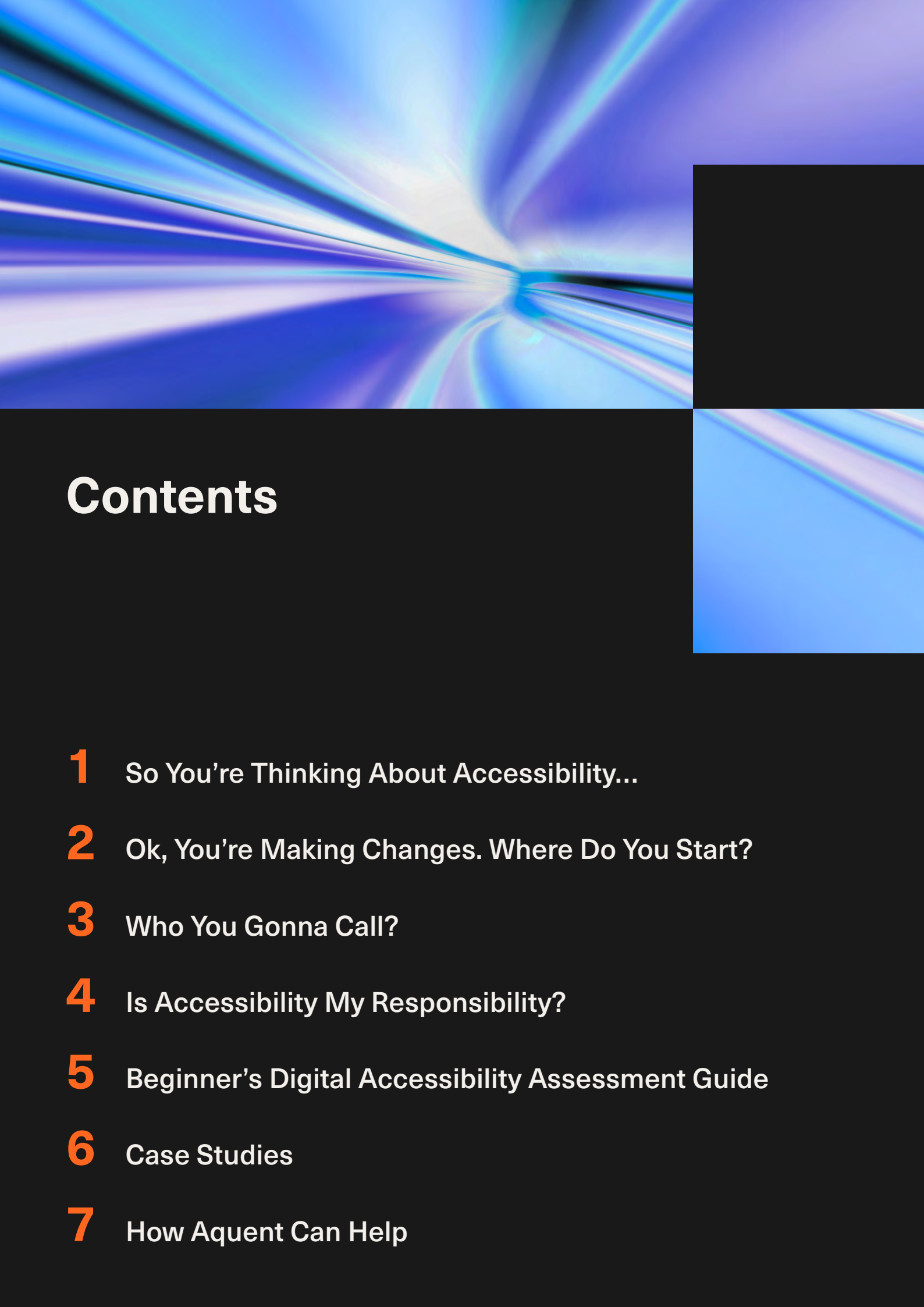




The Future is Inclusive

A guide to digital accessibility

A Q U E N T



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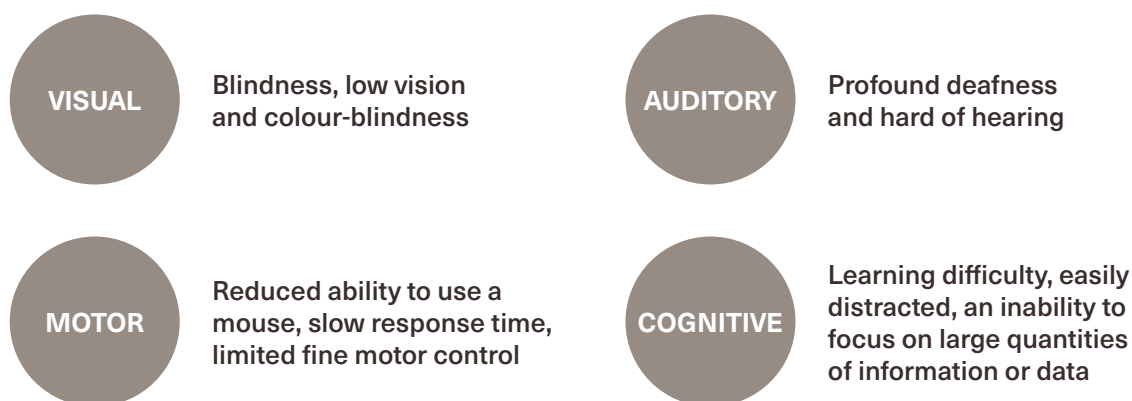
**So You're Thinking
About Accessibility...**

So You're Thinking About Accessibility...

Great! The first step is - without a doubt - having accessible design on your radar. It's something that's kind of a big deal, and it's something that Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, **said was critical for every user** way back in 1997 (ten years before the first iPhone, and nine years before Facebook was open to the public). It's even more important now with strict legal policy like the European Accessibility Act coming into force.

What Does it Mean?

Darren Wilson (UX Designer at UXcentric) **puts this simply**: “Digital ‘accessibility’ relates to design of content so that it can be used by everyone, inclusive of those with varying limitations of the following abilities:

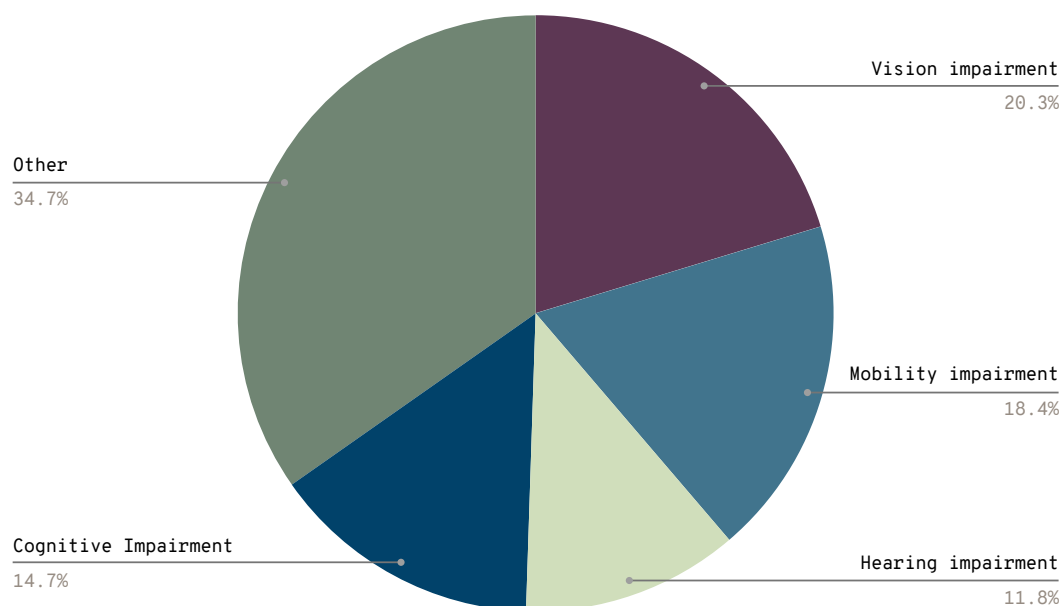


It's not necessarily a simple feat, but designing with inclusivity in mind improves the experience for everyone.

Why Should I Be Accessible?

According to the WHO, an estimated 135 million people in Europe live with a disability. As of 2022 approximately:

- **27.4 million** people experienced issues with vision
- **24.9 million** people experienced issues with mobility or dexterity
- **15.9 million** people experienced a hearing impairment
- Over **19.9 million** people experienced cognitive difficulties



And it's not just those with tangible or permanent disabilities (displayed in the chart above) that you need to consider. For each type of impairment there are those that are momentarily incapacitated and those temporarily less able, on top of those with long term disabilities. One example might be a mother carrying her newborn baby and trying to navigate your website with her one free hand - you wouldn't consider her disabled and yet, in that situation, she has the same needs as someone who only has one hand. In the middle of that range there are those like people who are recovering from a stroke or who have broken their arm - their requirements will be similar again.

The same is true for visual, auditory, and cognitive capabilities too. There are innumerable circumstances for the momentarily incapacitated, temporarily less able, and long term disabled. Once you realise you're literally catering for every person at some point in their lives, it becomes pretty clear that accessibility matters.

If you've designed your website, app or digital media without taking these people into account, you're not only ostracising at least 1 in 5 people in Europe, you're also falling short of the legislation that local governments have introduced to push for reasonable adjustment for disabled people.

Regardless of legislation, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that putting accessibility first benefits SEO, functionality for all users, and even profitability. In a **2018 Accenture study**, 45 of 140 companies that stood out for disability employment and inclusion saw a 28% higher revenue, 200% net income, and 30% higher profit

margins. It's also worth noting that, **according to We Are Purple**, the spending power of disabled households (dubbed the Purple Pound) is valued at upwards of £274 billion per year for UK businesses, with an estimated £2 billion per month being forfeited by businesses who remain inaccessible.

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**Ok, You're Making
Changes. Where Do
You Start?**

2

Ok, You're Making Changes. Where Do You Start?

If this is the first time accessibility is really coming on to your radar, then you're going to be asking yourself where you could possibly begin. It's a much simpler task than you might think, as many fixes are relatively simple to apply and improvements can be made in stages. In fact, **the WebAim Million project** found that despite the fact that 95.9% of one million popular sites had accessibility errors, the majority could be resolved with just five simple fixes.

What follows is a plan that you can take away and put into action, with insight into how you calculate the scale of the project you're facing, who takes responsibility, and whether you need to hire somebody with a specialist skill set or whether you have the expertise to make this work in-house.

The Steps to Digital Accessibility

These steps are predominantly for those who find themselves in a position with established web content or applications, wanting to update them to become accessible. The basics are, however, just as relevant if you're starting from scratch - you just have the advantage of doing it right the first time. Once you've committed to following up functionally with regards to accessibility, it's important to lay out a plan of action for how best to proceed. Fortunately, implementation is the easy part.

1. Start the Conversation

First and foremost, you're going to need to get everybody on the same page. Regardless of whether you're CEO, Dev team, or Junior Designer, you need to get the company to align on what you're hoping to accomplish, what systems are already in place, and what needs to change moving forward.

Consider the position that you were in prior to learning about the importance of accessibility, and bear in mind that you may need to highlight its importance to those struggling to understand why it matters. If there are obvious elements that your website or app fall short on, it might also be useful to take note of these and utilise them as examples of problems in this discussion. In **Inviqa's 2020 digital accessibility report** they identified that more than a third of digital product and development specialists surveyed didn't know whether a WCAG-compliant website was a fully accessible website, 73% were unaware of the proportion of their country with a disability or impairment, and 81% were unable to identify the consumer spending power of that audience. This highlights awareness and understanding as a clear reason for lack of accessibility adoption.

At the end of the day, getting the right people involved from the start makes this as seamless a project as possible. In a worst case scenario, you're at the beginning of your career trying to convince the C-suite that you should have been doing this years ago. In a best case scenario, you're responsible for the important decisions in your company and you can simply pull the strings to make it happen.

2. To The Drawing Board

Now that you've agreed that accessibility is a priority, you're on to the planning phase. There are two things to plan for: the company's accessibility policy, and the overhaul of your digital systems. It's worth establishing with relevant internal teams whether any similar documentation already exists to save writing one entirely from scratch.

In this planning stage, you'll need to run provisional assessments to identify the scale of the changes you're looking to implement and whether you have the skills and/or manpower to do this in-house. Alternatively, you'll need to consider how much it might cost to recruit someone (or several someones) to help out. There'll be various budget options from single contractor, to small team, to asking a specialist agency to help out. There's also the option of investing in **training for your staff**, so that they can affect the changes themselves once they understand how.

3. Make it Happen

You know what needs to be done, you've got some idea of who's doing it and the scale of the project. You've got the right stakeholders onboard to back the development. The next step is making it happen. If you're outsourcing the accessibility development, this simply means keeping tabs on changes, weighing in on elements you'd like to see, and making yourself available for input and review.

QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

- 1** **State Your Policy** - A simple but easily overlooked first step. It doesn't need to be long, but it does need to clearly outline your commitments and any specific company policy. You'll obviously want to make it known what you've done or what you're doing in the name of accessibility.
- 2** **Identify your Standards** - Share which accessibility standard(s) you're adhering to, at what level (if there are multiple), and what you're doing to ensure you maintain them.
- 3** **Know The Law** - It's best to make it clear what laws you're adhering to - specific to where your business is located and operates (if they aren't one and the same). Accessibility falls under disability and/or equality where it isn't clearly outlined elsewhere.
- 4** **Be Available** - Not only do you want to welcome feedback, you want to be able to offer assistance - so you should include relevant contact details (even if it's not a dedicated accessibility email account).

If you're hiring new talent or utilising your current team's skills, W3 recommends six key stages

- Build skills and expertise in your workforce as required
- Integrate goals into policies
- Assign tasks and support delivery to ensure smooth transition
- Evaluate early and regularly with milestone tracking
- Prioritize issues in a logical order
- Track and communicate progress

4. Maintain and Sustain

Once you're in a position where your content is largely accessible, you've got a tangible policy in place, and you've ticked off your largest milestones, you're on solid ground to claim that you're accessible. But as digital spaces are ever-developing, you need to also keep that momentum with clear structures in place to maintain accessibility. At this point it's worth considering how beneficial design systems can be to maintaining that standard across your digital media.

In essence, a design system is a bit like a set of controls or filters that ensure everything generated is of the same quality. An easy way to understand this is as an all-encompassing style guide that goes beyond design elements to include values, brand identity, best practises and components. Setting up this system and integrating accessibility into it ensures that any new content generated is up to scratch. Whether everybody is responsible on an individual basis, whether you nominate individuals to maintain the standard, or whether you have a dedicated team always on top of this, you need to make sure that changes or publications don't undo your hard work. There's regularly new content on integrating design systems and more [here](#).

A second component is keeping up to date with any changes to legislation or updates in technology. Examples of these might be legal alterations that were previously covered by EU law, or outdated coding becoming obsolete. Basic things like keeping on top of web browser changes and plug-in updates are a must.

Lastly, incorporate varied-ability user feedback. Nothing is more valuable to you than legitimate feedback from your target audience - particularly from those for whom you're making improvements. Depending on the type of business you run, you may be able to ask individuals directly, or utilise an email database with a short user experience survey. You might want to review this on a quarterly or six-monthly basis, or alternatively have a dedicated space constantly open for feedback. Ultimately, the individuals who engage with your platform and content are the ones who will know best what works for them.

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3

Who You Gonna Call?

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It isn't always easy to know who or what you need when you're embarking on a project like this, so here's an easy outline of your main options. There are a couple of ways to move forward in-house, at a variety of price points, and you've also got a few options with third parties.

Existing Skill Sets

The most affordable and, by far, easiest option is to utilise existing skill sets in the business. Identify whether one or more individuals have already taken on a project like this before. If such a person exists you've struck upon gold, as this will make project implementation far easier. Investing in individuals already in the business is also a trademark of a desirable employer, and likely to boost team morale.

Remember that there's more to accessibility than just web development, so you can also look to members of HR - with experience in writing policy, designers - for assistance with visual aspects and colour, and those proficient in writing for things like video captions or alt-tags.

Train and Go

The next step up from utilising existing skills is identifying individuals who could capably lead the project if they had a better understanding of accessibility requirements. It's logical to train up a team or an individual who you already work alongside, as - again - you're developing the skill sets of your own team rather than looking to take on somebody new.

If you're in an industry like technology or recruitment, you might benefit from accessibility training sessions for the whole office - as this knowledge is just as important for Sales, Marketing and HR. You don't necessarily have to take it that far though - particularly if it's less relevant in your field. You can access **free resources online**, attend short webinars, or follow a private training course. It will be up to you to decide what works best for your business.

Specialist Hire(s)

If you're running a small team, working in a completely different sector, or just don't have the expertise in-house, it might make sense to take on an accessibility specialist - temporarily (until you're in a good place) or permanently (to maintain and sustain after they've helped you get on track). You can use a recruitment agency to find this sort of specialist, or you can take care of fielding applicants on your own.

If you're in the position to hire somebody like this, you're likely looking for somebody with a strong User Interface (UI) or User Experience (UX) background. They'll be capable of assessing your platforms and providing relevant solutions in line with existing company policy and standards. They'll also be a creative individual, capable of collaborating effectively, and knowledgeable about accessibility expectations in line with current legislation and digital standards. Permanent salaries can range from €35K to upwards of €150K per year, and freelance hourly rates tend to range from €115 to €170 based on experience (figures from [Aquent Salary Guide](#)).

Third-Party Accessibility

The final option available to you, and likely the most expensive (though potentially most thorough) is to work alongside a company that specialises in accessibility. This can be a web development business, dedicated accessibility agency, or marketing firm with a UX arm. You may want to field for quotes and understand the specifics of how they calculate cost (as these can vary from business to business).

You'll need to have a rough idea of what you want to achieve - though it's likely that if they specialise in accessibility improvements they'll be able to make their own assessments and set out a plan of action. Most companies that offer these services will likely provide a range of services from a simple analysis to help you better understand your content's shortcomings, to composing a strategy for you to take away and implement, to the extreme of saying "Right, leave it with us. We'll see you in six months".

Is Accessibility My Responsibility?

The background of the slide is a dynamic, abstract composition of light streaks in shades of blue, purple, and teal, creating a sense of motion and depth. A large, bold, white number '4' is positioned in the bottom right corner, partially overlapping the light streaks. The top left corner features a solid black rectangle containing the title text.

4

Is Accessibility My Responsibility?

It's a common misconception that the burden of responsibility falls solely on digital developers and testers. As far as responsibility goes, digital accessibility is a team effort - particularly if you're doing this in-house. Ultimately how much responsibility each person bears is entirely dependent on the size of their role in overhauling or maintaining your digital accessibility.

Senior Management

It's likely in Senior Management's interest to set your company apart as an industry leader. A perception of your brand as one that is accessible and socially-minded is highly desirable - becoming digitally accessible and doing it quickly is one way to do that. **A study from Spain's Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)** revealed that Gen Z (1997-2002) places the highest value on a company's commitment to corporate social responsibility in comparison to other generations. As this generation's buying power grows, their perception of your business matters more and more.

Marketing

As the outward facing part of any company, and primarily responsible for customer acquisition, the Marketing department needs to make sure they're hitting the mark with digital accessibility for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, marketing teams can't afford to be excluding a fifth of the market by falling short on the accessibility front - **according to the WHO**, on a global front, that could be more than one billion people! Secondly, they're likely responsible for the most new content going out digitally, compared to any other team, so they need to maintain an accessible standard in everything they do. Finally, from a marketing perspective, hitting accessibility milestones positions your company as an industry

“Gen Z places the highest value on CSR...As this generation's buying power grows, their perception of your business matters more and more.”

HR

Of all teams, Human Resources would probably be your second or third guess when asked who should be responsible for digital accessibility, right? The Return on Disability Group's **2020 Global Economics of Disability report** highlights that over 95% of companies put the onus on HR departments, and that same percentage of companies are suggested to have limited their actions only to policy and awareness campaigns. It's no coincidence... the HR department is key for education, plays a role in diverse recruitment, and can assist in improving inclusivity but these things must take place alongside meaningful activity to improve accessibility.

You

And if you don't fall into any of these categories, does that mean you're exempt? Definitely not. As with many different beneficial causes, backing something that doesn't directly involve you at the moment is normally the right thing to do. In "So You're Thinking About Accessibility...", we explored how everyone is handicapped at some point in their lives (even if that's only temporarily), so you could yourself benefit from improved digital accessibility.

Alternatively, consider design and innovations as they exist today. One brilliant example is curb cuts (that dipped section on pavements) - they were initially designed for disabled World War 2 veterans. Now they make life easier for everyone, and are a perfect example of how tech designed for disability can be useful for everyone. And as accessibility advocate **Emily Morson writes here** "When assistive technology becomes sufficiently ubiquitous and widely used, it is no longer considered assistive technology. It becomes 'normal.'"

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5

Beginner's Digital Accessibility Assessment Guide

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W3's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) sets out an internationally recognised basis for measuring a site's accessibility. The levels are:

- **A - Basic accessibility requirements satisfied**
- **AA - Medium-scale accessibility requirements satisfied**
- **AAA - High-volume accessibility requirement satisfied.**

What follows is a set of criteria that you'll need to fulfil to bring your business up to standard in conformance with the lowest level "A". The WCAG suggests that "AA" level is an acceptable standard, and that its highest level "AAA" is aspirational. They offer a detailed breakdown of all requirements for each level [here](#).

Perceivable

Information and components must be displayed in such a way that users can see them.

✓ Text

Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be converted into forms other people can use, such as braille, speech, symbols, or large print. This includes but is not limited to; alt-tags for images, providing text alternatives for emoticons and similar, providing descriptions of graphs or tables, providing text labels on forms.

✓ Time-based Media

As with text, provide alternatives for time-based media such as videos or audio files so as to make them more accessible. Examples include closed captions on pre-recorded content, audio descriptions on video content, and transcripts available for pre-recorded content.

✓ Adaptable

Provide dynamic content that can be presented in various formats without losing information or structure. This is predominantly relevant to a website's coding where semantic markup or labels are utilised correctly. In essence, the idea is that the user experience isn't any different on desktop, mobile, screen reader or any other device. This section also covers clear reference to components, not limited to shape, colour or other limiting factors.

✔ Distinguishable

Put simply, this part covers ease of use regarding sight and sound. Ensure colour is not the sole defining factor of an element (e.g. a form turns red when information is entered incorrectly). You must also provide control of automatic audio, independent from system audio settings.

Operable

All elements must be dynamically functional to allow users to interact with them.

✔ Keyboard Accessible

Simply, all functionality should be accessible by keyboard. Navigation through the page should be possible via arrow keys, tab, spacebar or enter key. Navigation should be as per internet standard, or alternative keys for navigation should be advised.

✔ Enough Time

Any time restrictions or limits in place should be adjustable - either to pause, turn off, extend, or slow down, except where essential. This includes any autoscrolling or regularly-updating content.

✔ Seizures & Physical Reactions

Avoid designing content that triggers any seizures or physical reactions. W3 advises that if flashes are required, the content should flash no more than three times per second, or alternatively be below general and red flash thresholds.

✔ Navigable

Allow users a way to navigate and understand their location in the website or application. Again, this is predominantly related to coding - pages should utilise logical heading formats, have over-riding links back to main content, and links should clearly indicate where they take the user.

Understandable

Information and navigation should make sense to the user.

✔ Readable

The default language can be determined by program. Language can be specified in PDF documents and similar, and can be clarified in HTML coding.

✔ Predictable

Applications and websites act in predictable ways. This may change over time, but basics include changing by action rather than focus (e.g. clicking on content to trigger an action, rather than activated by mouse), and actions triggering relevant changes (e.g. turning off an autoplay video doesn't begin another video).

✔ Input Assistance

Help users correct and avoid mistakes by providing clear labelling and corrective instructions. Labels should provide expected data format and examples, and text descriptions should identify incomplete required fields or invalid data.

Robust

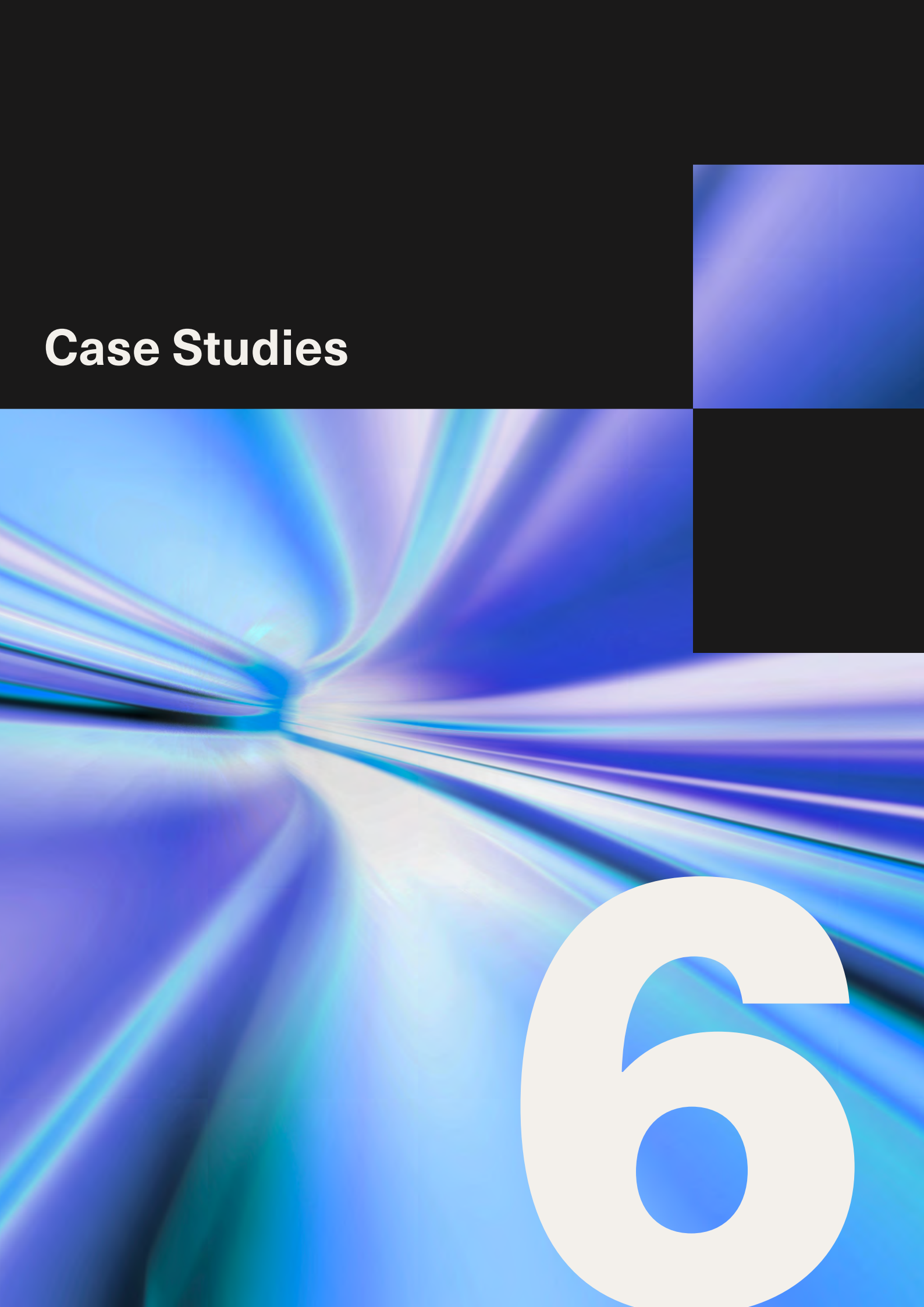
Content must be hardy enough that it can be processed by a variety of users and assistive technologies

✔ Compatible

Ensure proper and complete coding is in place, enabling your site or app is able to be parsed correctly. Make sure that all custom coding works in tangent with other common systems.

Despite being the minimum requirements to be graded at W3's "A" standard, this assessment ticks less than half of the boxes required for "AA" and "AAA" success. This is a good stepping stone to becoming more accessible though, and a great way to identify your first hurdles in terms of accessible development.

Case Studies

The background of the slide is a dynamic, abstract composition of bright blue and white light streaks that radiate from a central point, creating a sense of motion and depth. In the top right corner, there is a solid black square. The number '6' is prominently displayed in the bottom right area, rendered in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

6

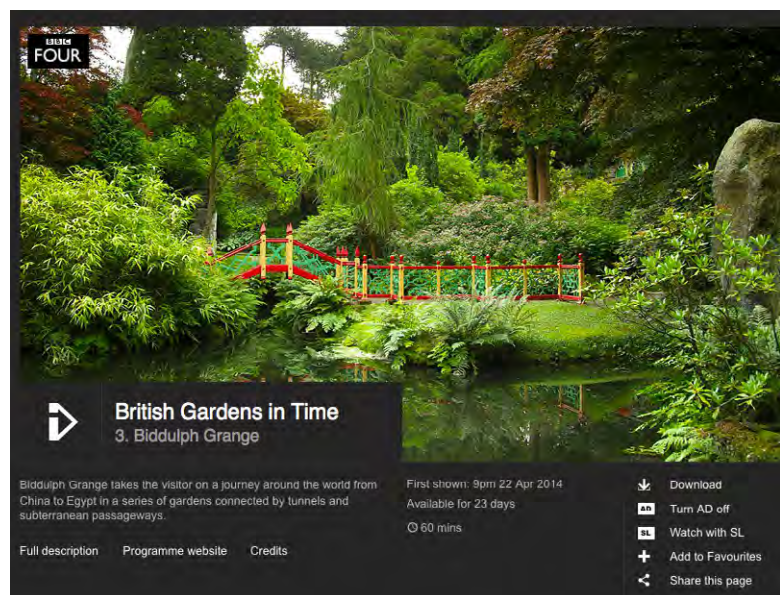
Case Studies

It can be useful to put the talk of a project like this into perspective, so we've featured below some relevant case studies of various improvements explored by different UX Specialists.

BBC iPlayer

The first is a case study **written up by Progress Telerik**, but carried out by UX and Design Lead **Henny Swan when she was at BBC**.

Swan highlights that BBC's iPlayer website had all the right components for an accessible website, but fell short when processed by a screen reader. Fortunately, they had a robust feedback system in place that meant that Swan was able to go through the issues with one particular user to better understand what was going wrong.



Issues on the page included duplicate links - primarily appearing much further down the page (making it more difficult to navigate when you weren't navigating visually), buried subset menus - activated by clicking multiple times, and poor auditory layout. All this despite the fact that the page was considered to be designed with accessibility in mind.

Moving forward, the design team focused on four key principles: “give users choice, put them in control, design with familiarity in mind, and prioritise features that add value”. One key element to remember from this example is that user feedback triggered the redesign, and without it issues like these could have gone unnoticed for a great deal longer.

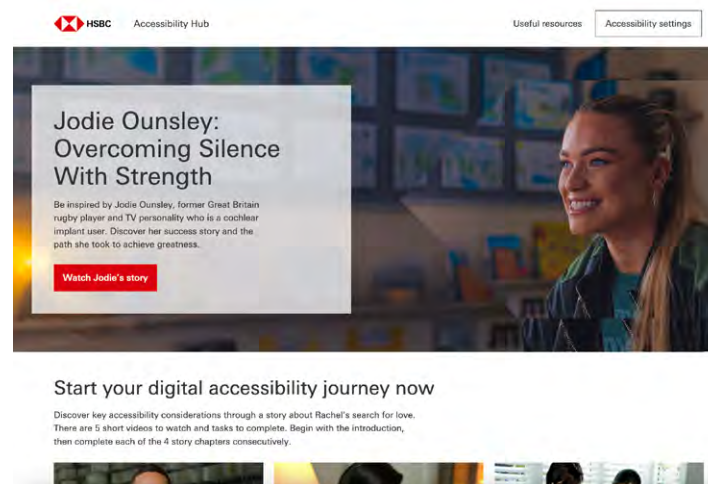
HSBC Accessibility Hub

HSBC had lofty goals of becoming the world's most digitally accessible bank and in 2016 **Hassell Inclusion helped them** establish an accessible platform to upskill some 235,000+ global staff.

From a gamified eLearning experience, to premium content featuring real people with real accessibility challenges, Accessibility Hub launched within HSBC in 2022.

Hassell Inclusion tested extensively with users who had disabilities, refining the experience to ensure very high levels of accessibility: in the simplicity of the interface; quality of captioning and audio-description; and personalisation settings for dyslexic and autistic learners.

Accessibility Hub helped HSBC motivate and upskill their digital teams to continually improve the accessibility of services delivered for staff and customers, globally. It's a great example of accessible content without sacrifices.



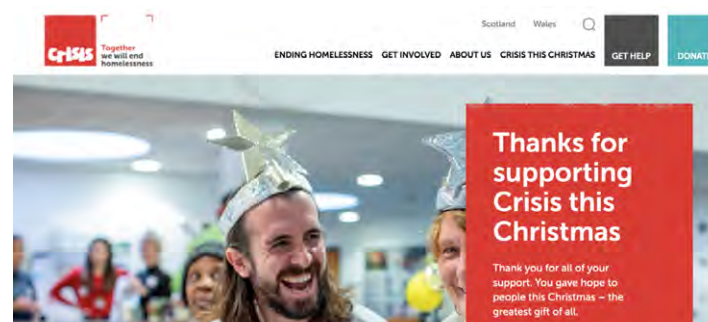
Crisis

Our final case study comes from **accessibility-focused UX Designer Gemma Sweeney**, regularly published by UX Collective. Following review in December 2019, Sweeney established improvements to the user experience that Crisis could implement on their website.

Primarily looking at keyboard accessibility and screen reader compatibility, Sweeney highlighted that users could face difficulties before they reach the main content due to repeated information and banner sliders, that it was occasionally unclear where focus fell when navigating via keyboard, and that navigating through the menus was more difficult. Sweeney recognised that charities were at a disadvantage for budgetary reasons, but that she believed with these few changes they would meet the WCAG level "AA".

Sweeney's first recommendation is the capacity to skip to the main content on the page - particularly important for those navigating in any way but visually. Improving the highlighted sections to denote clear focus allows for clear keyboard navigation, and she has suggested contrasting colour outlines. She also suggests altering the menu design so that when tabbing through, the main menu is included - where at the time you did not reach the menu until after you had tabbed over the logo in the top left and the Donate and Contact buttons in the top right.

Finally Sweeney advised thorough user testing and feedback to get a clear understanding of the genuine and natural experience target audiences might have.





How Aquent Can Help

How Aquent Can Help

Not only can we provide insight on how to reach your digital accessibility goals, we can also help out in more practical ways...

Finding You the Right Talent

At Aquent, we're proud to offer connection to a vast and diverse talent pool with a variety of specialist skill sets. From UX Design Specialists, to HR Advisors with extensive background in writing policy, to Graphic Designers at all levels - whatever need you might have, we've got somebody who can deliver.

And if you don't know exactly what it is you're in need of? We've got you covered there too. Bring us a rough idea of what you're hoping to achieve and we can give a bit of insight into what sort of skill set you're after, as well as providing the perfect candidate for the job.

Training with Gymnasium

Gymnasium offers a wide range of free tutorials, articles and resources including:

- **Designing Accessible and Responsive Websites**
- **Designing Accessible Forms for Everyone**
- How to Improve Your Website Through Accessibility Testing (**Part 1** & **Part 2**)
- **Using Motion And Web Animation Responsibly**
- **Creating Accessible Video And Audio Content**
- **Writing Effective And Accessible Alt Text**

And so much more at thegymnasium.com

We'd love to hear from you, so get in touch by email via amsterdam@aquent.com or by phone on 020 577 1111.

Further information

Check out our latest articles and webinars on accessibility below:

- **Accessibility by Design: How the EAA Can Enhance Customer Experience**
- **Seven Steps To Improving Accessibility**
- **How Brands Can Create a More Enriching Online Shopping Experience**