



# **Why Document Accessibility Is Essential In Your Services**

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In the USA alone, it's estimated that 1 in 5 individuals have some form of disability. If you are an organization that sends business communications, this should be important to you.

Whether you send via print or digital channels, your documents need to be accessible. This includes invoices, general correspondence, reports, and more. Document accessibility and usability must be at the forefront.

## Why You Should Care About Accessibility

There are many reasons you should care about accessibility and usability in your content. And while we won't list all of them, we will cover three key reasons.

### 1. Inclusivity And Your Customer Experience

If your customer communications alienate part of your user base, that's a problem. Many transactional documents include personal and confidential information. And they are more far reaching than you may realize. Ask yourself whether your business creates and distributes any of the following:

- Wealth statements,
- Investor reports,
- Telecom invoices,
- Banking statements,
- Credit card statements,
- Health explanation of benefits,
- Medicare/Medicaid correspondence,
- Government and Agency correspondence, or
- Any other personal or identifiable information

A person who is blind or partially sighted — or who has a cognitive disability — will, at minimum, need an accommodation. You owe these customers the same level of care and respect you provide other users. By ensuring your communications

are accessible and usable, you can provide a great customer experience for everyone.

### 2. The Vast Marketplace Of Aging Clients

Of the 1 in 5 Americans with disabilities, many are over the age of 50. They may begin to lose vision to common diseases like diabetes and macular degeneration. This group is often overlooked as businesses seek new markets and lifelong clients. But that's a mistake.

These individuals often have significant disposable income. And if you treat them right, they'll stay with you for the rest of their lives. That said, with current laws, this demographic makes it even more important to ensure your communications can be easily consumed and navigated independently.

#### Rules And Laws To Be Aware Of

- ADA – The Americans with Disabilities Act
  - Title II – State & Local Gov
  - Title III – Public Accommodation & Commercial
  - Title IV - Telecommunications
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Affordable Health Care Act (1557)
- Food and Drug Safety Innovation Act (904)
- Telecom Act Section 255 (now part of Section 508 ICT)
- Air Carrier Access Act - Airline Accessibility DOT Rule - Title 14 CFR Part 32
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

### 3. Mitigating Legal Risks To Your Business

If a person feels they are being mistreated, they may, rightfully, turn litigious. Lawsuits and structured settlements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have increased exponentially. The ADA is,

essentially, a civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination. ADA requires communications to be accessible, independently navigable, and provided in a timely fashion. And organizations that fail to meet this legal imperative have faced lawsuits up to seven-digit values.

### **Notable ADA Lawsuits (And What They Cost)**

- Winn Dixie – Over \$250,000 plus legal fees
- Verizon – \$20 million
- Wells Fargo – \$16 million
- Target – \$6 million
- Harvard / MIT (multiple rulings) – Over \$2 million
- Florida (Cities, towns, and counties) – Average settlement of \$20,000

To prevent and limit litigation or demand letters, organizations must show due diligence in their efforts to fulfill accommodation requests. For print providers, this means taking print ready files and converting them into digital accessible documents, braille, large print, audio, or other accessible formats.

Organizations should also be aware that websites and web-based content need to be made accessible. With rising demand for web delivery and electronic presentment comes new challenges and opportunities. Individuals with disabilities want electronic statements that are fully accessible. That way they can make timely decisions and payments without incurring penalties. While this all may seem daunting, there's a good path forward.



### **How To Get Started**

Firstly, you should retain accessibility experts to implement both an inhouse and vendor-based solution. Testing and audits need to be done often. Most importantly, any accessibility program should have executive sponsorship. For more detail, follow the steps below:

- a)** Create an Accessibility Policy. This policy should guide individuals on your accessibility and inclusivity goals. Plus, it should provide ways to find organizational or client information in an accessible format. This can be, at minimum, an accommodation. It should also detail whether you will provide braille, digital accessible formats, or other formats.
- b)** Implement solutions to make non-inclusive content accessible for screen readers. This could include a website, a statement, or a document.
- c)** Implement a workflow that shows proof of due diligence. Ensure it shows ways and means to begin with accommodations and later move to accessibility for all.
- d)** Choose a vendor to partner with. Ensure you are both working on goals to make your communications inclusive.
- e)** Choose tools and solutions for on-demand remediation and high-volume document to accessible document production.
- f)** Implement solutions and document these solutions. Update your accessibility policies as needed.
- g)** Test, audit, and test again. Set up a monthly testing cadence.

### **Looking For A Partner In Accessibility?**

Crawford Technologies offers a full, end-to-end solution for document accessibility. We can help you navigate workflow and implementation. Plus, we'll provide critical advice to scale high volume digital and physical formats. We also offer consultation, assessment services, solutions, and awareness training for organizations that need to communicate better with their clients.