Personalising the Document Experience of an Assistive Technology User

User Experiences

Alex

Failed a class project

I was working on a group project, that included a presentation. My group members created the PowerPoint presentation but did not make it accessible for me. I was unable to access the content of the slides I was supposed to present on and subsequently received a failing grade.

It would have taken maybe 5 minutes to change the theme to one that was easier to access and to add alt text to the images on the slide so I could describe the picture on my slide.

Matthew

Inaccessible documents cost me a job

I was working as a guidance counselor intern. Often I was handed printed information, or inaccessible pdf files, just before IEP meetings. I appeared unprofessional in the meetings when I could not quickly reference the same information others were in those documents. Headings and data tables with proper collum and row headers would have made a huge difference in my experience.

I sense that I was not hired for the full-time position that came open after my internship because of this demonstrated unprofessionalism. I also worry about what message I was sending to those students. As a guidance counselor, and person with a disability, I tell my students that the only limitations they have are those they put on themselves, to encourage them that they can do anything they want to. I was unable to demonstrate to them that I could be professional in a setting tat reqlly required it, and it wasn’t because of any limitation I was putting on myself, it was because of a limitation of the accessibility of an electronic document.

Rickie

My sons school puts out a monthly calendar in pdf format. The calendar includes important information such as teacher work days, early outs and other breaks, as well as the lunch menu. I am unable to access this pdf document and have sent him to the bus, on very cold mornings, on teacher work days and he has been out there for up to 30 minutes waiting for a bus that isn’t going to come. I have accidently sent him to school without lunch on days that they are serving food he cannot have, making him go without lunch.

This is important information that affects the health and welfare of my child. I live in a state that does not have Right to Parent laws on the books and I have friends who have had their children taken from them because it appears they are neglecting their child when in fact they simply don’t have the information they need to provide the right materials or direction to their child. It terrifies me that this type of thing could happen to me! I am blessed that my husband is able to read these documents, most of the time, but he works a job that takes him away from us quite often and lets face it, I’m human and I might forget what he read off to me at the beginning of the week.

A calendar, in table format, with meaningful collum and row headers, would make it possible for me to hear information, such as the day/date as well as whether I’m in a row that is displaying information such as start or release time, would make the content of the table more meaningful and useful.

Laine

In accessible documents caused a CPS investigation and caused “professionals” to question my ability to be a parent

In recovery, after delivering my 9lb 12 oz baby via C-section I was presented with a packet of information I was supposed to read, answer some questions on and sign off that I had read. I asked for someone to read them to me and scribe the questions and was told that they couldn’t do that, it was against hospital policy because they couldn’t confirm that the patient had really done the work.

I asked for the documents and questionare in an electronic format and was told I could find them online, but not where. Sleep deprived from a new baby, trying to nurse and recovering from a major surgery I finally found the documents online only to discover that some of them were scanned images I couldn’t read; One of the documents was 50+ pages and contained multiple sections without headings – making it impossible for me to navigate sections to review information or quickly find information I wanted/needed; and the pdf form to answer the required questions was not actually “fillable” because the fields had not been labeled and I had not way of knowing what information nwas supposed to be typed where.

I had not completed the documents by the required time for them to process my release. I then had a counseling session with a hospital social worker because I had not done the paper work. This social worker asserted that I was not capable of caring for a baby because I couldn’t access these documents. And, if I couldn’t access these documents then other important information like dosing instructions on bottles of medicine wouldn’t be something I could access, therefore do, for my baby. She also asserted that because I couldn’t read printed, or electronic documents, that it wasn’t safe for me to nurse my baby because I couldn’t see if his nose was clear; I couldn’t change a diaper because I couldn’t see if I had cleaned up all of the poop and that I couldn’t make a bottle for a baby because I wouldn’t’ have any way of knowing how much water to measure, if I had measured the right amount and how much formula to measure or how to measure it.

I finally resolved this situation with my doctors help, but a few weeks later I received a call from a social worker with Health and Wellfare following up on the report submitted by the social worker at the hospital. Fortunately I live in a state with Right to Parent laws and this social worker knew the law and had some experience with blind parents. She closed the case after our phone conversation. I realise that I was luckier than many.

Kate

I was preparing for a blind date. This is awkward for a lot of people, but more so when you carry a white cane and you know the person doesn’t know you’re visually impaired. You already know you’re going to be answering a lot of questions like, “How much can you see?”.

Our friends set up for us to meet at this romantic Italian place. So, I got online to access the menu so he wouldn’t have to read to me and I could demonstrate my ability to be independent in even these little things. The menu was a scanned image of the menu and I could not access it.

It was embarrassing to have to ask him to read the menu to me. He was put off by my request and discussion quickly spiraled into me answering all kinds of questions like, “How do you cook?”, “Do you have someone who cleans for you?”, “So, if we were to hook up would we be in your parents basement or something?”.

Needless to say, this was a first and last date, but it didn’t have to be. If I had access to the information in an accessible electronic document I would have been able to place my own order and he would have been more likely to see that I am capable and perhaps not voiced the same questions, rather observing me to find out the answers.

Screen Reader Use

Data collected by, and adapted from: Web AIM Screen Reader Survey #7 https://webaim.org/projects/screenreadersurvey7/

By Region

Region

North America

Europe/UK

Asia

Austrailia and Oceania

Africa/Middle East

South America

Number of Respondents

991

380

141

61

39

35

Percent of Respondents

60.0%

23%

8.5%

3.7%

2.4%

2.1%

By Disability Type

Which disability do you have?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Response | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
| Blindness | 1358 | 75.8% |
| Low Vision/Visually-Impaired | 366 | 20.4% |
| Cognitive | 39 | 2.2% |
| Deafness/Hard-of-Hearing | 90 | 5.0% |
| Motor | 33 | 1.8% |
| Other | 41 | 2.3% |

Screen Reader Usage

Primary Screen Reader

Which of the following is your primary desktop/laptop screen reader?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Response | Number of Respondents | Percent of Respondents |
| JAWS | 811 | 46.6% |
| NVDA | 555 | 31.9% |
| ZoomTextVoiceOver | 42 | 2.4% |
| System Access or SA To Go | 30 | 1.7 |
| Window-Eyes | 27 | 1.5% |
| ChromeVox | 7 | .4% |
| Narrator | 6 | .3% |
| Other | 60 | 3.4% |

Mobile Screen Reader Usage

