

## Digital Accessibility Buyer's Guide



## Introduction to Digital Accessibility

### What is it and why should you care?

Everyone uses the web, but not everyone uses it in the same way. Digital content is accessible if it is usable by people with disabilities, and the goal of digital accessibility initiatives is to make content fully available to and usable by as many people as possible.

Content creators and website operators directly influence accessibility by their design choices, coding techniques, and more. Digital content that has already been built without considering accessibility can be tested and updated to be made more accessible.

### Digital accessibility is essential to independence

Access to websites and digital platforms is essential for employment, education, and independent living.

### Digital accessibility is a legal requirement

With few exceptions, digital accessibility is a legal requirement under laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508.

Protected as a civil right, accessibility is central to inclusion and compliance.





# The Role of Digital Accessibility Vendors

## Why are they needed and what do they do?

Digital accessibility has been around as an industry for several decades. In fact, the first version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), the most popular and universally-accepted standards, was published in 1999.

Since that time, standards have evolved, technology has developed in ways few people imagined, and accessibility specialists have accumulated years of experience and expertise.

Some organizations have acquired or trained in-house teams with the skills and tools to perform accessibility testing and remediation.

Many organizations do not have dedicated accessibility teams and instead seek the services of qualified digital accessibility vendors.

### **The specific services and their associated costs can vary considerably from one vendor to another. Typically, a third-party accessibility vendor would:**

- Be familiar with and able to explain the rules and regulations that govern accessibility from a compliance perspective.
- Be familiar with and able to explain the best practices and guidelines, such as WCAG, that make digital content usable by people with disabilities.
- Perform manual and automated testing of websites, applications, digital documents, and other digital content according to those guidelines.
- Perform testing with assistive technology, like a screen reader, to identify accessibility barriers.
- Provide specific recommendations for removing accessibility barriers.
- Provide some level of confirmation that accessibility barriers have been removed and provide maintenance or support.

## Choosing a Digital Accessibility Vendor

### How can you decide which solution is right for you?

Committing to accessibility is an important decision - and so is choosing the right digital accessibility vendor for you.

The services and approaches of these agencies may overlap in some areas but differ in others. Here are eight questions to help vet prospective vendors and make a more informed buying decision.

#### 1. Do they have experience in your industry?

While the general tenets of accessibility might not change from industry to industry, there are some industries whose websites tend to contain certain elements or require certain tasks. For example, e-commerce websites are likely to contain robust search capabilities and a shopping cart, while education websites might be heavier in resource documents, like PDFs. Industry-specific experience may be beneficial.

#### 2. What kind of testing will they perform?

Most accessibility consultancies will state that they follow standards like the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to ensure that content is Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (POUR), but not all agencies will perform the same kinds of testing.

All accessibility testing should have the same goal of determining how usable the content is for people with disabilities. However, the specific types of testing performed may determine how well or how thoroughly the vendor identifies accessibility barriers.







Testing is often categorized as automated or manual. Automated testing uses tools or scans to identify potential issues in the code. This kind of testing is usually fast, but is not comprehensive or necessarily accurate. Manual testing with a keyboard, a screen reader, and other assistive technology is necessary for an accurate assessment of accessibility barriers.

Some vendors' testing strategy includes automated and manual testing.

### 3. What is the scope and methodology of testing?

Organizations that perform testing with the same technologies still might not perform testing in the same ways. When making a decision on which accessibility vendor to use, it may be beneficial to ask how the scope and methodology of testing are defined and followed.

It might be important to know how the agency will approach:

- Testing every page on your website or a selection of pages
- Testing according to a script or checklist
- Testing specific or important tasks or use cases

### 4. Who does the testing?

The goal of this question isn't to know the names of the specific people who will perform the testing, but you may be interested in understanding their background and experience.

Consider asking what training or certifications the testers have. You might also be interested in learning whether any of the testers have disabilities or are native assistive technology users themselves.

### 5. What reporting formats and types do they deliver?

After the accessibility vendor has completed the testing and generated findings, your organization will need a plan for what to do with that information.

Depending on who specifically will be making updates to the code and design, and on the systems and programs your organization uses or is authorized to use, you might find some reporting options more manageable than others. Therefore, you might want to ask how they categorize findings and recommendations; the software or formats those reports are available in; and what options you have for customizing, navigating, or importing those reports so they work best for you.

## 6. Will they help you understand and implement their recommendations?

You will have questions, likely many, about how to interpret and apply the audit report you receive. Depending on the expertise areas of those who will be in charge of doing that work for your organization, your questions and their nature may differ, and you probably don't know what most of those questions are yet.

That's why it may be a good idea to understand what kind of support the vendor will provide in that area. Whether your questions will be very technical or conceptual, specific or general, related to the priority or severity of issues, or anything else, it's worth asking the agencies you're considering what happens when you get stuck.

## 7. Do they provide maintenance and support?

Accessibility initiatives are typically best when they're maintained over time. As time passes, as content changes, and as technology changes, accessibility is likely to change, too.

It may be a good idea to ask vendors whether they provide one-time recommendations or long-term support, and what forms that support takes. Some organizations might provide customer service or account management, regular accessibility checks, and other valuable support services.





## 8. How do they help protect you from complaints and lawsuits?

The claims vendors make in this regard and the products and services they provide to this end vary broadly. Because accessibility is both a user experience and a compliance focus, odds are you want to know the answer to this question, and it's okay to ask it.







## Accessibility help

If you encounter any barriers to fully using this content, please email [A1y@Accessibility.com](mailto:A1y@Accessibility.com). We want to help.

### Headquarters

**100 SE 2nd St., Suite 2000-110  
Miami, FL 33131**

### Call Us Now

**305-901-8737**

### Email

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