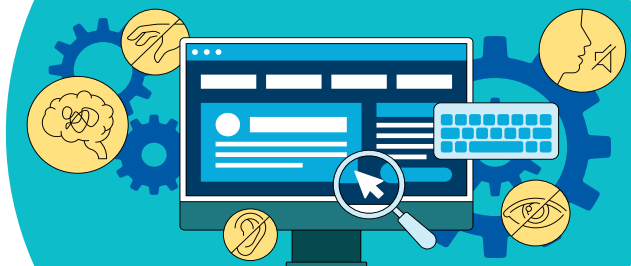


Planning for Website Accessibility

(Improves Your SEO too!)

Accessible websites ensure all users can use your website, no matter their disability or device.



While planning a website redevelopment, the topic of website accessibility should always be considered.

While its easier to design and build from the ground up with accessibility in the forefront, an existing website can also be edited to comply with accessibility standards.

These standards or guidelines are covered in depth by the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which is often referred to in legislation involving website accessibility. The WCAG is extensive and geared towards helping developers and authors of websites, apps, and any online content, so it can get very technical at times.

We've summed up many of the guidelines for consideration when working on a redevelopment project or even an existing website. Achieving accessibility is always better when managed from the beginning, as many issues can be corrected during the design phase before ever going into development and testing phases.

If your website has the right accessibility coding in place, you'll be much closer to ensuring *full conformance*.

We recommend accessibility testing throughout the phases of your development. Use the following checklist to cover many of the essentials of website accessibility.

Image Alt Text

Unless purely decorative, images should have descriptive alternative (alt) text.

For screen readers this is a necessity, otherwise images will be skipped, or the image's file name will be read aloud. A short descriptive alt text allows those with visual impairments to listen to what the image represents. Image alt text is also beneficial for search engine crawlers.



Inclusive Color Palettes

When determining the colors used within the design of your website, you want to be sure to use colors with high contrast for optimal readability.

Check your existing color scheme against dark and light text to determine the best contrast. WCAG Level AA requires a minimum of 4.5:1 for normal size text and 3:1 contrast ratio for large text (18pt normal weight or 14pt bold).



Audio/Video Captions

Will you have audio or video on your website?

Plan to prepare text transcripts of this content. Transcripts and captions benefit those who cannot watch a video, whether that is due to disability or their current environment - someone might be watching a video with audio turned off.

Transcripts also improve the indexability of videos, as search engine crawlers can't listen to audio/video either.



Unique Page Titles

Another element that makes your website better for both human users and search engines.

Page titles help users understand what a page is about, allowing the user to quickly decide if the page is relevant to their needs (whether that be while on your site or in search engine page results). A screen reader will announce the page title to the user first thing, so for those relying on this type of assistive technology to navigate between pages, this is critical. Fortunately, you have a head start on this by completing our [Website Page/URL Mapping Worksheet](#) included in our [Website Redesign Kit](#).



Keyboard Navigable

Your website should be able to be fully navigated by a keyboard.

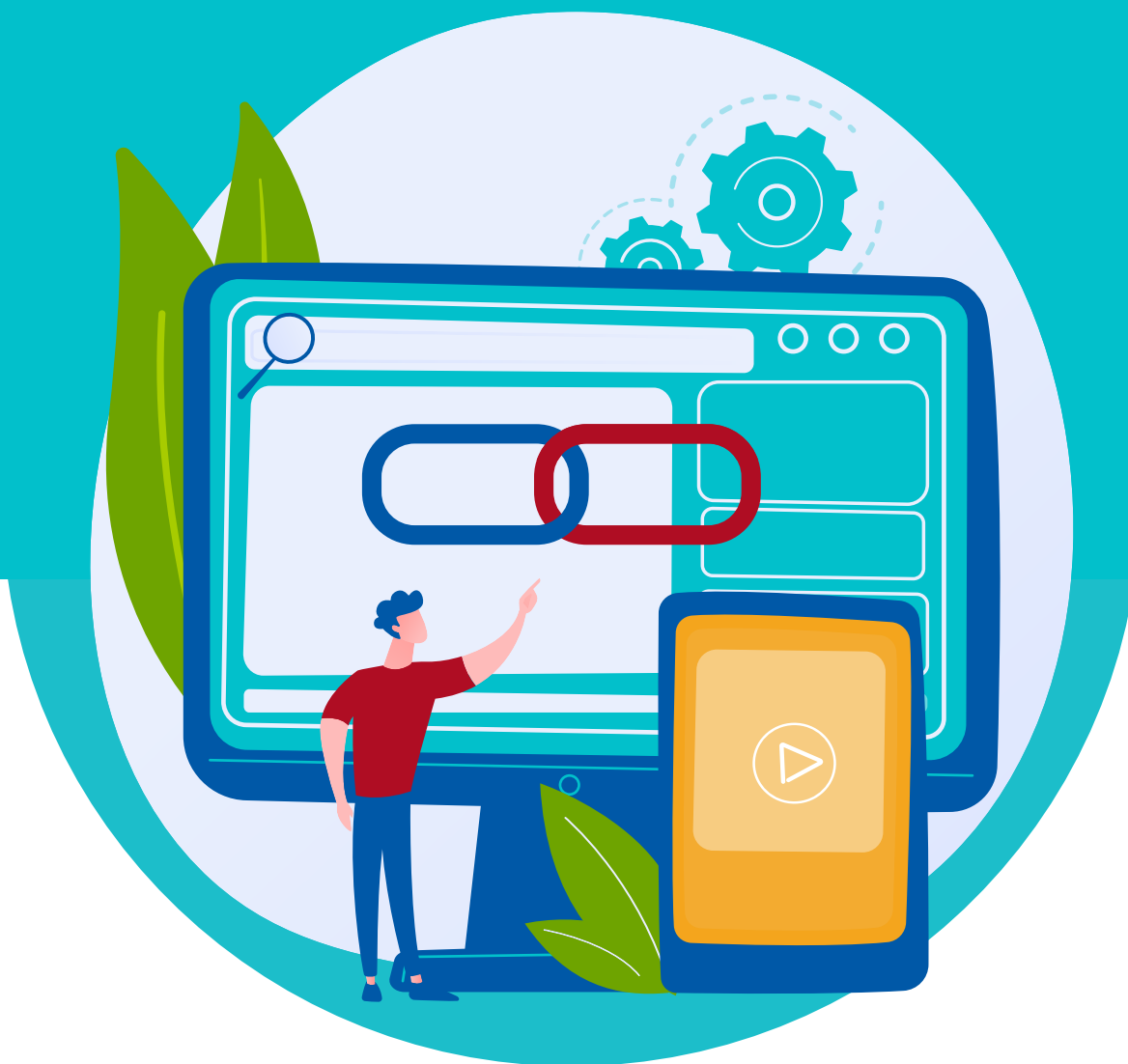
This will ensure your website is inclusive to all users, including those with visual impairments or even cognitive impairments which might make a mouse hard to use. You also want to make sure keyboard navigation occurs in the correct reading order.



Skip to Content Link

This provides direct access to the page's main content.

The header and navigation should be the same on every page, but that doesn't mean a user wants to listen or tab through the navigation when visiting each page or your site. Provide a skip link as the first interactive link on the page. This doesn't mean it needs to be visible to all users but needs to be able to be focused on when using keyboard to navigate.



Avoid Seizure Triggers

Content that flashes (i.e. a scene involving very bright lightning flashes) at certain frequencies may induce a seizure in certain individuals, such as those with epilepsy.

It can also be very distracting to normal users. Avoid using flashing content, or make sure they are under a certain threshold (no more than three times in any one second period).

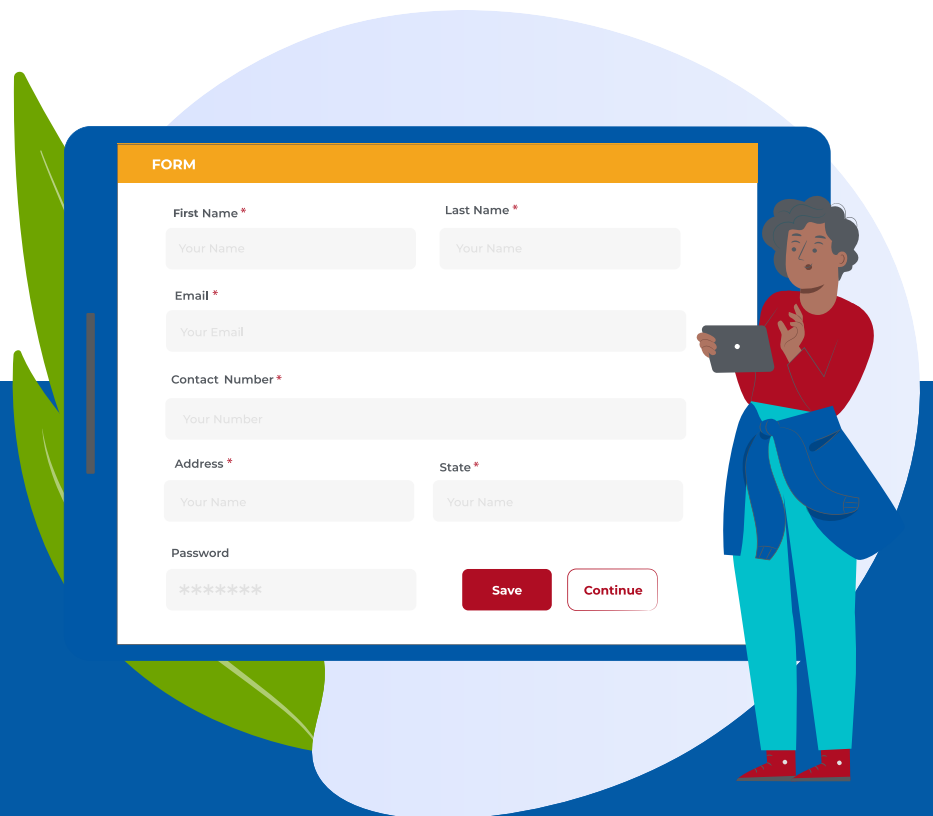


Accessible Forms

At the very least, your site will have a general contact form, but there may also be more complex forms incorporated into your site.

You'll want to make sure the fields of your form have descriptive labels and properly labeled when a field is required, and that your form has correct tab order (i.e., tabbing through the inputs doesn't skip around or over fields).

Form errors should be easily identified; suggestions on how to correct the error should be provided. The use of autocomplete should be incorporated where appropriate; this helps all users complete forms correctly and quickly.

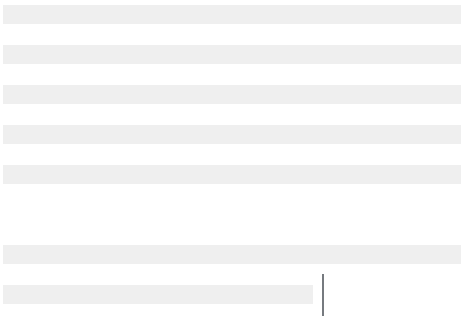
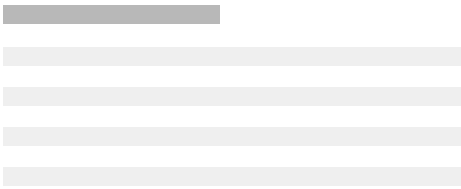
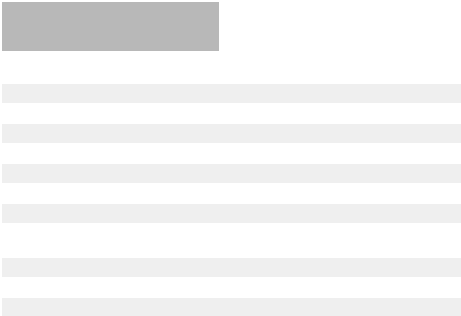


Use Headings Strategically

Organize your content with the use of headings, but don't skip heading levels and be careful with h1 tags.

An h1 tag should only be used for the page's main heading/title, so typically there's only one h1 per page. The following subheaders should then be h2 tags, h3 for subsequent headings within a section, with the correct hierarchy.

Assistive technology has a useful headings quick key that enables users to quickly get to each heading, so a user can find exactly what they're looking for.



Choose Accessible Fonts

Choose fonts that are easy to read and can easily be magnified.

Visual impaired users may use assistive technology or browser options to increase the letter/word/line spacing of text for better readability. Sans-serif fonts are often easier to read than serif fonts.

Also take notice on a chosen font's letters, to make sure letters don't look too similar, having some users misconstruing what they're reading. For example, some fonts may have an i and j that look strikingly similar. This can be confusing to some readers with dyslexia and other impairments.



Use Descriptive Links

Avoid links that say “click here” or “learn more”.

This one might be hard on a news or blog feed perhaps. If cannot be avoided, be sure the link title accurately describes the link. Using descriptive link text is best practice, however, and is better for search engines. Accurately describe where the link is going. For example, if linking to a product/service page, instead of the generalized “click here”, try something like “to learn more about accessibility issues on your website, [get a free accessibility audit.](#)”



Use Tables Sparingly and Correctly

Now that web design is more modern and responsive, the use of tables for layouts should no longer be used.

When using tables for data, the table cells need to be properly labeled in HTML, so screen readers know how to announce these to the user. Tables are one of the hardest elements for a screen reader to properly convey to a user. So, when used to display data, it needs to be properly HTML coded with table headers, so the data is accurately described. This way a screen reader can accurately describe the relationship of each cell.



Ensure Website Accessibility with Blue Atlas Marketing

If you haven't considered website accessibility before, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Contact Blue Atlas Marketing to learn more about the importance of ADA compliance and where you can begin with important updates.

How Accessible is Your Website?

Want to know where your existing website stands? Start with our [free WCAG Compliance Audit](#) to test your website's compliance status.

