

IS YOUR BUSINESS WEBSITE ADA COMPLIANT?

BY DANIEL T. RUDDEROW AND SAMANTHA SALES, *Rudderow Law Group*



Daniel Rudderow

In recent years, the U.S. Department of Justice, disability advocacy groups, plaintiffs' law firms, and various other courts have now taken the position that businesses' websites are a place of "public accommodation" under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and that consequently such websites must be accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Many websites, however, fail to incorporate or activate features that enable users with disabilities to access and utilize all of a site's information. Individuals who are deaf, for example, are unable to access information in videos and other multimedia presentations that do not contain captions. Individuals with vision problems may be unable to read websites that do not allow the font size or the color contrast of the site's page to be modified. Blind individuals using a screen-reading software that reads the website's text aloud to them may not be able to use the website if it uses images to convey information without including text alternatives, such as captions below the image.

To avoid the pitfalls of a non-accessible website, businesses need to make their sites compliant with the "World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Level AA" – otherwise known as WCAG 2.0 AA. The WCAG 2.0 is a set of guidelines for making websites accessible to all, with the focus on ensuring that each website is "perceivable," "operable," "understandable," and "robust" for those with impairments. Each one of these principles must be satisfied for a website to be ADA compliant:

- **Perceivable.** To ensure that your website is perceivable, users must be able to see and hear the website's content in a way that accommodates to their needs. For example, a website that contains photo images and videos should provide text alternatives, such as captions or subtitles, for individuals that are blind or have minimal vision. By providing captions or subtitles for

photo images and videos, a blind individual using assistive technologies can have the text read aloud to them.

- **Operable.** To ensure your website is operable, users must be able to operate the interface. In other words, the user must be able to navigate throughout the website with ease. For example, keyboard accessibility makes all functionality of the content available from a keyboard interface without requiring specific timings for individual keystrokes.



- **Understandable.** To ensure your website is understandable, users must be able to understand the content, and the content must operate appropriately. For example, the website may contain a mechanism for identifying definitions of specific words or phrases used in an unusual or restricted way, identifying the meaning of abbreviations being used, or identifying the specific pronunciation of words where the meaning of the words is ambiguous. Another way to make your website understandable is by inputting an assistance mechanism that can help users avoid and correct mistakes by automatically detecting an input error and describing the alert to the user.

- **Robust.** To ensure your website is robust, its features should be made compatible with current and future users, as well as assistive technologies. One way to make your website robust is to implement a standard way of having users input basic information such as their names and addresses. For example, a website requesting a user's address may provide a dropdown menu that includes all fifty states for the user

or assistive technology to choose from. By having this standard dropdown menu with automated responses, future users and assistive technologies will find it easier to navigate the website and input their information. Millions of individuals in the United States and around the world have disabilities that impact their ability to access or otherwise use the internet. Many of these individuals use assistive technology to enable them to navigate websites or access information contained on those sites. Businesses must be careful in redesigning their websites to address these accessibility concerns. To assess whether a site is accessible, businesses may do a free quick test by visiting sites such as:

<http://wave.webaim.org>

With the advancement of technology and reliance on the internet and social media, businesses use their websites as a major way of interacting with customers. Making your website ADA compliant will not only help avoid ADA lawsuits, it can also expand your client base to reach new customers who happen to have a disability.↑

Editor's Note:

Dan Rudderow is the principal of Rudderow Law Group. He has more than 25 years of experience in manufactured housing, business, and real estate law. His practice includes litigation, transactional work and assisting community owners with day-to-day operations. Mr. Rudderow may be reached at dan@rudderowlaw.com or by phone at (949) 565-1344.

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