

IS YOUR WEBSITE ACCESSIBLE?

The right people? Yes, the right people. The people who choose to spend their free time working long hours for your event. The people who volunteer to do hard and often thankless jobs. The people who feel so committed to your festival or event that they come back year after year.

It is my business to watch and report on volunteer recruiting and scheduling trends that impact our event clients.

Is Your Website Accessible? (Why you and your volunteers should care.)

Volunteer managers (and Event Owners) are about to hear a lot about accessibility. Why? Because. Lawsuits.

Over the past few years, WinnDixie and Target were, among others, sued because their websites did not meet the spirit of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA indicates (broadly) that places of public accommodations will be made accessible to disabled populations. While the ADA does not specify the internet in specific terms, several courts have started to interpret the internet as a public place, the entry point to our services.

WinnDixie and Target are enormous companies. What does this have to do with my event management company?

I suspect the producers of "Hamilton" and the owners of the theatre asked the same question when they recently got sued.

The US federal government adopted Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA in January 2017 as the standard for federal agency websites. This step to set standards and meet the spirit of the ADA, leads many in the accessibility community and the technical community to believe that full adoption of these standards for public and private websites will be forthcoming. But bluntly the lawsuits and the heightened public awareness is here!

So as of right now no one is forcing us to make our websites accessible by a certain date?

Correct. However, as the number of accessibility lawsuits expand public attention to issues of accessibility are heightened. Waiting until 2018 could have consequences in both time and money. Law firms representing private litigants are increasingly aggressive regarding web accessibility. Firms send letters stating that your website is not accessible and request the opportunity to develop a plan to bring the website into compliance while emphasizing payment of attorney's fees and possibly alleged damages as terms to settle if you don't.

Your organization would be wise to consider the cost and time as an opportunity to expand your business with both disabled and aging customers who are presently unable to navigate your website or mobile application. Incorporating website accessibility designs and requirements is just smart [especially if a website or mobile application revamp is in your near-term business plans] business planning.

What exactly does "accessible" mean? And is it difficult to make your website accessible?

The "Accessible name is the name of a user interface element. Its value is a big part of what is communicated to users of assistive technology" (eg screen readers) says accessibility expert, Joe Watkins. "Without it, people who rely on those technologies would have difficulty understanding or interacting with much of the content on the page.

My volunteer management software, TRS, has gone through two accessibility audits over the past few years. The first for a federal event client and the second with a national Not For Profit multi-event client. These audits are becoming more prevalent across our industry. We found that the biggest accessibility concerns include 1) incompatibility with speech recognition and/or screen reading software, 2) no option to only use the keyboard 3) lack of or no text-based alternatives to media content, 4) poor color contrast and/or small text size, and 5) transaction timing requirements that didn't account for intellectual disabilities or age.

We had to make a few adjustments and the process made us more aware of the challenges of our users.

Bottom Line?

Save your company a lot of misery and make all your site volunteers and users happy. Remember many of these changes impact both people with disabilities and the aging. Many of our volunteers are older and often retired so these additions make it easier for them to use online systems.

Take these extra steps. 1) Ensure your programmers and graphic designers are referencing the ADA guidelines when updating and building your sites. 2) When you buy software ask specifically if they meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA.

Yep. Make the Internet a Better Place.

I, **Florence May**, love volunteers. Maybe it is the 15 years spent managing events with Visit Indy, Simply Hospitality and the United States Grand Prix (F1). Or maybe it is the 16 years delivering online volunteer management systems for many of the largest and most complex events in North America.

Over the past year my company, TRS – The Registration System, has provided volunteer management systems for the 500 Festival, the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Republican National Convention, the Democratic National Convention, Celebrate Fairfax, the Gilroy Garlic Festival, the US Mayors Conference, the Azalea Festival, USA Special Olympics National Games and hundreds of smaller events. In the process of supporting events, I study and discuss the trends that make certain events successful while others struggle.

May I Help You?

Contact me with volunteer Management related questions at fmay@my-trs.com.