

# The Importance of **Accessibility** Online and in Digital Marketing

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## Key Takeaways:

This go-to guide covers the definitions, websites, and essential players in Web accessibility. It also covers the rules of compliance for different marketing materials and how to test and update your content to ensure it is accessible to your entire audience. This will help you avoid costly lawsuits and reap the benefits of compliance adherence.

## What is Accessibility

Just like a building needs to be accessible to those with disabilities, if your online content isn't built with accessibility in mind, you will be excluding and preventing up to 25% of the population from engaging with you and your business.

[The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), first enacted in 1990 and falls under the broader aspect of [digital inclusion](#), outlines the criteria necessary to ensure equal access so those with disabilities can navigate, interact, understand, and perceive information online. Whether that's someone who requires a screen reader or someone who is physically unable to use a mouse, removing unnecessary barriers helps prevent discrimination and costly lawsuits. The Department of Justice is committed to enforcing the ADA as it pertains to web content, with more than [4,500 ADA-related lawsuits](#) filed in 2023 alone.

## WCAG Guidelines

So, how do you ensure that your digital content is accessible? [The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#), developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), are the de facto standards for web accessibility. Primarily intended for content developers, designers, and developers, WCAG is part of a series of international guidelines that are backward compatible, ensuring that updates and evolutions cover the information in the prior version.

## The Three Levels of ADA Conformance

The different levels of conformance to WCAG are represented by A, AA, and AAA, with A being the lowest and typically considered unacceptable. At the same time, the highest, AAA, is unachievable for some types of content. Level AA is the recommended technical standard level for most websites, as the balanced approach to accessibility without compromising elements like design or general usability.

## The Four Principles of WCAG and Accessibility

Commonly referred to as POUR, WCAG has four main pillars that can be used as a guiding light toward achieving accessibility.

**Perceivable:** Information must be perceivable by persons using at least one of their senses. Alternatives must be provided, such as descriptions for images or captions for videos and audio.

**Operable:** A website must be navigable by all users. This includes functionality considerations like navigation and interface, as well as ensuring that the purpose of hyperlinks is obvious from the text instead of relying on color or URLs for action.

**Understandable:** The user should be able to understand information with readable text and how to operate the interface. Labeling should be leveraged, and operations should be conducted in the same order across the site.

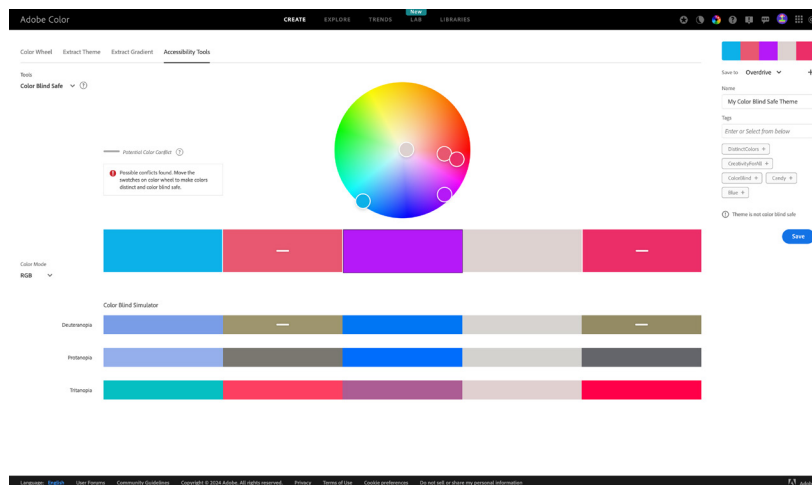
**Robust:** Content must be built to be easily used by both technology and people in a future-forward fashion, so it remains accessible by screen readers and other assistive devices, as well as different browsers.

There are some exceptions to WCAG, like archived content or preexisting social media posts.

## Accessibility and Color

An estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide have some sort of visual impairment. So, when creating a color palette for your brand, you should consider accessibility. Tools like [Accessible Palette](#) help you create a color system with the necessary contrast to pass WCAG 2 and the in-development [WCAG 3](#).

If your brand palette already exists, you should know how the different colors in it look to those with color blindness. You can test your color palette with tools like Adobe's [Color Blind Safe](#), which can display your palette as it's perceived by those with different types of color blindness in various color modes.



Even if built with accessibility in mind, not every color in a palette may contain the needed contrast when used in conjunction with another certain color in your palette. Your brand guidelines are an excellent place to outline which colors can be used together for text, CTAs, and icons.

### Accessible Combinations

The following table includes the contrast ratio results for text and background color combinations using the full-color palette.

This page includes a comprehensive list. However, not all color combinations shown are recommended for use in our visual identity.

The recommended colored backgrounds would be our primary blue, white, or secondary gray. Secondary blue and green backgrounds should be used sparingly.

Large Text - 36px normal weight or 24px bold or larger.

Body text - No smaller than 24px/300 weight, 18px/400, 18px/500 and 14px/700. Text should never be smaller than 14px on the web.

\*This color palette has undergone color contrast checks using the APCA guidelines for determining text contrast. The APCA guidelines improve upon the accessibility color contrast checks under WCAG 2, and are therefore compliant with the ADA.

		Colors	
COLOR COMBINATION	TEXT SAMPLE	LARGE TEXT	BODY TEXT
White/Secondary Gray on Primary Blue	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Green on Primary Blue	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Secondary Blue on Primary Blue	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
Primary Gray on Primary Blue	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
Primary Blue on White	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Green on White	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Secondary Blue on White	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Primary Gray on White	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Primary Blue on Secondary Gray	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Green on Secondary Gray	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
Secondary Blue on Secondary Gray	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Primary Gray on Secondary Gray	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
White/Secondary Gray on Secondary Blue	Sample	● PASS	● PASS
Primary Blue on Secondary Blue	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
Green on Secondary Blue	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Primary Gray on Secondary Blue	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
White on Green	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Secondary Gray on Green	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL
Primary Blue on Green	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Secondary Blue on Green	Sample	● PASS	● FAIL
Primary Gray on Green	Sample	● FAIL	● FAIL

## Accessibility and Websites

Accessibility touches everything about a website, from menu to font, functionality, and the actions you wish your audience to take. Here’s what you need to look out for.

### Color contrast

Continuing the theme of color, one of the most important aspects of website accessibility is maintaining sufficient contrast between text and background. Proper contrast is essential for readability, even for people without a visual disability.

In WCAG 2, “[Contrast ratio](#)” is defined as the perceived “luminance” or brightness between two colors, expressed as a ratio. Levels AA and AAA have different contrast requirements, which apply to text and graphics, text changes on interactive elements like hovers, background images, semi-transparent colors, and gradients (which should be tested on the lightest part of the gradient). For text, large is considered 24px or larger (or bold at 19x), while small text is 16px.

#### Level AA

Small text: 4.5:1 or higher

Large text/Graphics: 3:1 or higher

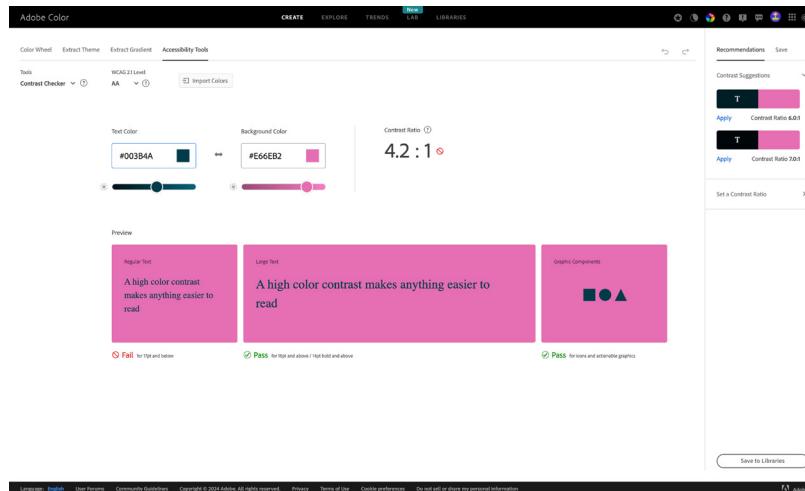
#### Level AAA

Small text/Graphics: 7:1 or higher

Large text: 4.5:1 or higher

Some notable exceptions to WCAG regarding contrast include inactive or decorative type on images and logotypes.

While a squint test (squinting and moving away from the computer so visuals are distorted) is a good place to start to see if your contrast is sufficient, it is better to use a contrast checker. [Adobe](#) and [WebAIM](#) have contrast checkers that show which colors pass for the different WCAG levels.



All the above regarding contrast may change or become irrelevant in the ratios when WCAG 3 is fully released. Instead, WCAG 3 will use the newer contrast method called APCA (Advanced Perceptual Contrast Algorithm), which utilizes a scoring system of levels instead of ratios. Thought to be more accurate and sophisticated, APCA aims to reflect visual perception more accurately than WCAG using perceptual contrast instead of just luminance. You can start getting comfortable with APCA using this [free contrast checker](#).

Additional elements you need to consider for website accessibility include:

- **Descriptive titles and headings:** Define your content hierarchy using H1, H2, etc., in a logical order to facilitate navigation and comprehension by screen readers. Both SEO and ADA require clear titles and headings that accurately reflect the content. This helps users with screen readers navigate the site, and search engines understand your content.
- **Logical structure:** A well-organized website with a clear hierarchy (using headings) benefit both SEO and ADA. Search engines crawl and rank content better with proper structure, and users with disabilities can navigate the site more easily
- **Keyboard navigation:** When navigating, focused items must be visually distinctive. For ADA compliance, your website should be fully functional with just a keyboard. This often aligns with SEO best practices, which emphasize user experience across devices.
- **Alt text:** Provide descriptive text for images, charts, and other visual content for screen reader users. Proper labeling helps boost SEO, as search engines can better “see” content.
- **Font size and type:** Select typefaces that are easiest to read in smaller sizes, like a sans serif, and keep font size at a reasonable size (12pt/16px or above). Avoid italics, as they are hard for screen readers to read.
- **Form labels:** Include clear labels associated with form controls like text boxes, dropdown menus, and row identifiers to give users context so they know what information to input and where.
- **Descriptive link text:** All links should include text descriptive of their destination or function instead of generics like “Click here.” Do not use full URLs, as they are more difficult for users and screen readers to read.
- **Action clarification:** Using colors only to convey your actions and CTAs can cause issues for users. Instead, use explicit language and other visual cues, like underlining or arrows.

- **Error identification:** Providing clear error indicators (text and color) near the relevant form fields helps users readily associate the message with what needs correcting.
- **ARIA (Accessible Rich Internet Applications):** HTML is insufficient for providing information to screen readers when creating custom components. ARIA is a set of specifications, such as roles, states, and properties, that convey information to assistive technologies.

[This guide from Accessibility Checker](#) includes step-by-step instructions on updating your site to comply with all the above guidelines and more.

## Testing for Accessibility on Websites

Many automated testing tools, such as [WAVE](#), [aXe](#), or [accessiBe](#), can quickly identify accessibility issues. However, these tools may produce false positives or negatives that make updates more complicated, so it's advisable to use a combination of automated tools, manual review, and user testing as part of your audit.

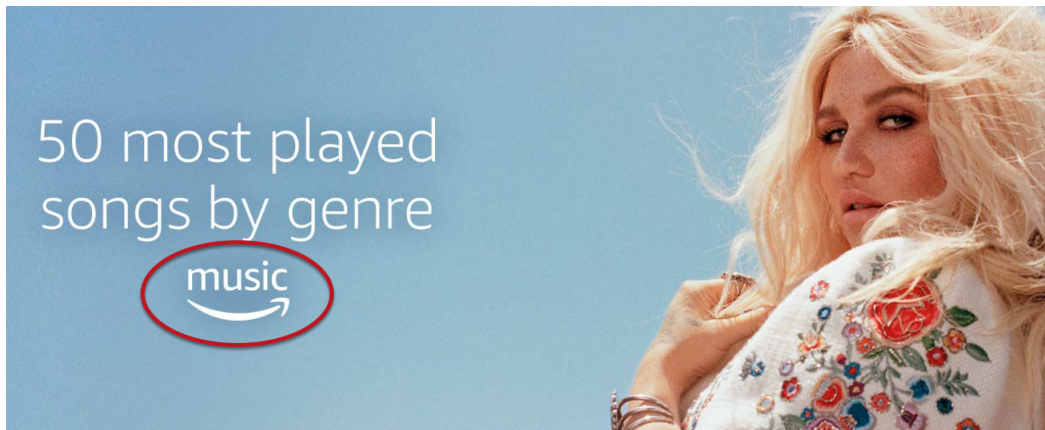
## Accessibility in Other Areas

### Logos

While [logos](#) do not need to officially pass ADA compliance if they have a text alternative that does, it's still best practice to try and make your logo accessible so it can be properly perceived and recognized by the members of your audience with visual disabilities. Upon upload, [this simulator](#) shows you how your logo looks to those with different types of color blindness.



Additionally, logo text is exempt from contrast rules when placed on a design, while the text on the image must pass. Still, you should make a concerted effort to make your logo legible in all placements, as it's crucial to brand recognition.



An example of insufficient contrast for text and logo  
Source: <https://webaim.org/articles/contrast/>

## PDFs

Content uploaded to websites needs to be accessible as well. There are specifics to keep in mind for PDFs, like including a plain text version as a Word document, as some screen readers cannot scan PDFs. PDFs should also have clear headlines that differentiate each section, easy-to-read text, and digital tags for content. Making your PDFs accessible has an added SEO bonus, as it allows them to be identified by search engines.

Adobe Acrobat Pro makes it easy to check for accessibility with its [Prepare for accessibility](#) and [Reading Order tool](#) functions. These tools outline errors in text, tables, titles, and images and how to fix them. [Several free checkers](#) are also available as well.

## Digital Ads

Like other creative assets, digital banners should follow the rules of contrast, text size, and simplicity to be effective across your entire audience base. It's also advisable to be very specific in your calls to action, avoiding the more generic ones like "click here."

While most display banner networks do not allow for alt text on image banners, you can always utilize HTML5 for animated and static banners to ensure full compliance. With HTML, you can add alt language to the code using the alt attribute in the <img> tags. Avoid adding effects like flickering if animated, as it can cause seizures.

## DOOH/Billboards

The details and requirements for printed and digital signage vary as physical billboards do not have specific rules to adhere to under the ADA. However, universal design best practices should be applied to physical billboards to communicate to your audience, like color contrast, font style and size, concise messaging, and content placement, so that content can be instantly understood at a distance.

For DOOH, it's important to use large, color-contrasting text and imagery for readability. Like with HTML5, strobe effects and flashing lights should not be used. If the digital billboard includes a video, there should be captions as well. Lastly, if it's interactive, the environment in which it is placed should allow those with disabilities to interact and include clear instructions on usage.

## Print

Printed materials, like traditional billboards, do not have specific ADA requirements. However, they should leverage the same best design practices to be accessible to your entire audience.

### Here are a few tips to stick to:

**Font:** While 12pt/16px is standard, 14pt/18px is recommended, including on captions. Do not use italics; opt for bold for emphasis instead. Use sans serif for larger content blocks, and make sure copy is adequately spaced out for readability. Avoid placing copy on top of imagery and fancy fonts.

**Color:** Just like in the digital world, contrast and how colors are perceived by those with color blindness must be taken into account when designing.

**Material:** The type of paper printed on cannot always be controlled, especially when it's for a magazine. But if the choice is able to be made, use matte over glossy and avoid lower, flimsy paper weights.

## Videos/Webinars

Making audio content accessible to deaf or hard-of-hearing users is a necessity for videos and formats like podcasts and webinars. Not only does this media accessibility benefit those with disabilities, but it also helps those who want to engage with your content through different methods.

For both video and audio, you should always include subtitles (open or closed), transcripts, and audio descriptions that describe the visuals of a video. [YouDescribe](#) is a free tool that will create audio descriptions for any video uploaded. If the content is embedded on a website, alt text should accompany it. Closed captioning should be a live option for webinars and included in on-demand versions. Provide explicit instructions for any interactive elements in advance, like polls or Q&A functionality.

Make sure videos are click-to-play, as autoplay can be dangerous for those with seizures. Color contrast is also important, as are audio levels for background music, text amount, and text orientation compared to caption placement.

## Email Marketing and Landing Pages

Email and landing pages should follow the same design rules to ensure accessibility.

- Include Alt Text for imagery
- Follow contrast ratio rules
- Avoid flashing content
- Use readable size text



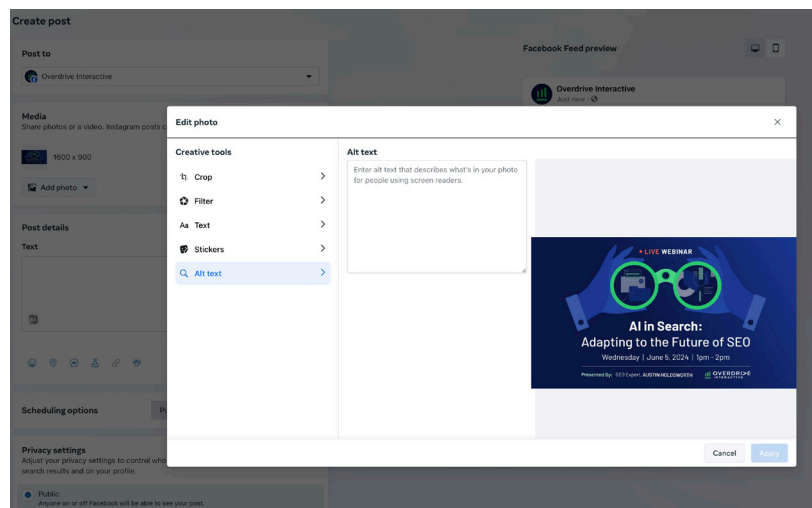
- Clarify navigation and structure
- Ensure keyboard accessibility
- Mobile-first responsiveness

There are also specifics for each that need to be adhered to. For emails, your links and buttons must have proper spacing to prevent accidental clicks. With landing pages, form fields should be properly labeled using the '<label>' element, with obvious error alerts. This [free validator](#) from W3 can inspect the HTML code to identify problem areas.

## Social Posts

Text-based posts are already accessible to assistive technology like screen readers. Images and videos need alternative text to describe their content, which can be added under Advanced Settings. For video, it's advisable to include open captions right in the video itself, but you can also add them as closed captions on [Facebook](#).

Avoid using all caps for text or fancy fonts as an overlay on imagery. While you can absolutely use engaging elements like emojis, be careful about how many you use, as they can be difficult for screen readers. For hashtags that contain multiple words, use title case, [#HowToBeInclusive](#), for example, so that screen readers can understand the individual words.



## Consequence of Non-Compliance with Accessibility

As stated, the Department of Justice is serious about enforcing the ADA. Individuals and advocacy groups have filed [thousands of lawsuits](#) against public-facing businesses for non-adherence, with last year seeing an increase of 42% more lawsuits than the prior. Government agencies can even levy fines or withhold funding in addition to these lawsuit settlements and fines.

Companies should always consult their internal legal team regarding the ADA and compliance to ensure they are meeting legal requirements, even if they are following the above guidelines and running continuous checks of their marketing materials.

Beyond legal ramifications, there's brand reputation to consider as well. The backlash of non-

compliance can damage a company's reputation, causing a loss of market share and new clients or potential future employees to seek employment elsewhere.

## Benefits of Compliance

The benefits of adherence are innumerable. With ADA compliance adherence, companies experience an expanded market and wider reach. This broader reach for your website has SEO implications as well.

A larger audience means more traffic to a site, while making items like PDFs enriched with alt text, proper HTML structure, and semantic markup gives more information for bots to crawl. Google also prioritizes a good user experience in its ranking factors, and many ADA best practices overlap with UX, like heading structure and easy-to-use navigation.

### Benefits include:

- Increased market reach and audience
- Improved SEO and website traffic
- Enhanced user experience and lower bounce rates
- Reduced risk of legal issues

There are more conceptual benefits as well. Factoring in diverse needs can lead to out-of-the-box solutions and innovative interfaces. It can also improve reputation through the promotion of corporate responsibility, which can boost both image and morale. These items can also lead to enhanced search engine performance, along with improved engagement and metrics.

## Next Steps

- Limit your potential liability with a website and marketing material audits for accessibility.
- Overdrive recommends creating an action plan for updates and integrating accessibility into brand guidelines.

Making your content more accessible benefits everyone, including those without disabilities. Design is rooted in empathy and understanding, with principles like UI/UX focused on creating apps, sites, and tools that are easy to use for your audience. Accessibility takes that further step to ensure all members of your audience are accounted for and able to have full access to your content.

Your path to ADA compliance starts with an automated and manual audit of your website and marketing materials. From there, put together an action plan on the items that need to be updated. Then, make sure your brand guidelines outline your commitment to ADA so future efforts are spearheaded with accessibility already in mind.

## Three Reasons to Talk to Overdrive:

- 1. Performance Marketing Approach:** Overdrive is recognized as a full-service performance agency that combines strategy, creativity, media, data, and technology.
- 2. Data-Driven Insights:** Overdrive emphasizes the use of data and analytics to inform marketing strategies. By leveraging consumer insights, Overdrive helps brands decode buying signals, enabling our targeted campaigns to resonate with audiences and drive engagement in an increasingly distracted marketplace
- 3. Innovative Creative Solutions:** Overdrive prides itself on its ability to transcend traditional marketing boundaries through innovative creative solutions. Our work not only captures attention but also inspire action.

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*Daring Pragmatism that Drives Outrageous ROI*



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**Paid Search Management**



**Creative Services**



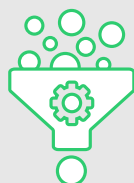
**Content Development**



**Analytics**



**Media Planning & Management**



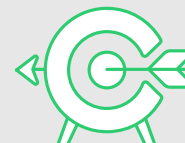
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