

**WCAG Compliance:
Making Your Digital Workplace as Accessible as Your Physical Workplace**



What is WCAG Compliance?

According to the CDC, approximately 1 in 4 adults is diagnosed with some sort of disability. So, it's no surprise that there is legislature and standards for accessibility in the workplace. In addition to the laws that require your physical workspace to be accessible for those who are physically disabled, there also exist corresponding rules for your digital workspace.

1 in 4 adults are diagnosed with some sort of disability

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the main international standards organization for the internet. They are a set of recommendations for making web content more accessible, primarily for people with disabilities, but also for all user agents, including highly limited devices, such as mobile phones.

WCAG or Web Content Accessibility Guidelines include a series of standards and definitions to cover individual site viewers with disabilities that range from blindness or deafness to hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, repetitive stress injury, or conditions such as Down's syndrome.





Businesses and agencies look to the standard as a guideline and use the WCAG standard codification to inform decisions. To support this, the standard contains three defined levels of compliance:

- Level A: The most basic level. Must be met in order for a site deliverable to be considered accessible.
- Level AA: Should be met for the site to be considered accessible. This level is appropriate for organizations looking to maintain a reasonable level of accessibility.
- Level AAA: The most stringent level. This level is appropriate for organizations to consider the delivery accessible or under conditions where the highest level of accessibility is necessary to service employees, constituents, or customers.

These levels correspond roughly with some core capability. While not universally precise, most organizations align policy and expectation with the Level AA standard. It is important for each organization to choose the level that is appropriate for them, the people that they serve, and the level of acceptance and openness that they are trying to convey.

While not universally precise, most organizations align policy and expectation with the Level AA standard. It is important for each organization to choose the level that is appropriate for them, the people that they serve, and the level of acceptance and openness that they are

Why Compliance is Important

While not the most relevant reason necessarily, it is certainly the most prevalent in conversation around compliance: the legal and regulatory requirements. Businesses and organizations are often required by law to make information accessible to their employees and patrons. Laws such as Section 508 and the ADA in the U.S. and Directive 2016 in the EU represent legislative efforts. But similar legal ramifications exist due to court decisions in Canada, the UK, and Australia. More and more, businesses face significant financial legal burden if they do not offer accessible web pages and content.

For many businesses, however, their people are more important than any law. In our knowledge- and information-based economy, differently abled people are a vast (often untapped) resource of talent. In many competitive economic areas, increasing the available talent pool by a few percentage points changes the game for industry. “The IT industry needs to recognize and promote the importance of accessibility more widely. If one in 10 potential users require high standards of accessibility, surely it should be seen as a competitive advantage to make it available,” according to Martin White, author of [**We Need to Build Accessibility Into Our Digital Workplaces**](#).

“The IT industry needs to recognize and promote the importance of accessibility more widely. If one in 10 potential users require high standards of accessibility, surely it should be seen as a competitive advantage to make it available,” according to Martin White, author of [**We Need to Build Accessibility Into Our Digital Workplaces**](#).





For many organizations, particularly those pledged to ethical business, the value of leveling the playing field and creating a fair workplace has massive value to their culture and feeling of well-being. This moral and ethical behavior has proven benefits to help increase diversity and similarly increase both productivity and morale overall. Almost everybody wants to be part of a fair, just, and equitable organization.

Web technology is no longer a nice to have; it is a mature and required technology for individuals, families, and businesses. Web technologies are a necessity in modern business and the advantages of accessibility can and do assist both the able bodied as well as those with minor and significant disabilities do their jobs better and more efficiently.

Web technologies are a necessity in modern business and the advantages of accessibility can and do assist both the able bodied as well as those with minor and significant disabilities do their jobs better and more efficiently.

Compliant Content Management

Compliance ultimately begins during the content creation process. There are many considerations for content teams who are working to create content that is compliant (for example, captioning videos and ensuring that color contrast is appropriate in design). As you can imagine, the standards and guidelines can be complex. Fortunately, a content management tool can be a critical piece to ensure compliance at the level you want.

There are four key principles of web content accessibility for content creation and delivery, according to the WCAG guidelines. If your content is perceivable, functional, understandable, and robust, you've achieved a level of accessibility.



Perceivable

When designing a web page, your goal is most likely to deliver information to your audience. At its core, a web page is a delivery mechanism for your message. **Perceivable elements** help your users to process that message more easily. They include things like alternate text for audio, image, and video content that can be translated by a screen reader and textual descriptions of charts, forms, and functional elements like buttons and icons. To make your content perceivable, you might also use alternate forms like headings of input fields or allow adaptive elements so that individual browsers can increase contrast or text size based on user preferences.

Functional

A web page contains hundreds of operations that a user must complete in order to access its content. There are menus to open, buttons to click, and links to follow. **Functional elements** allow users to operate a web page without having to rely on a mouse. They include concepts like:

- Keyboard focus and speech input
- Features like breadcrumbs that enable navigation and findability
- Tools that allow users to manage clear page titles, control individual functional elements like image sliders, and reload page session without data loss

Understandable

Now that you've delivered content that users can process and operate, you need to make sure they can actually understand it. The intent to be fully **understandable** is to ensure that users can appropriately read the text on your web page, and that content appears in normalized predictable ways. Some techniques you can use to create an understandable web page is to clearly label language and site sections, use repeated navigation and other mechanisms to maintain a visual and functional language, and repeat similar elements like helper text to maintain content and context sensitive delivery.

Robust

In a world where mobile devices rule all, your web page needs to work across platforms. To make that happen, your content needs to be **robust**. In the WCAG, robust content is that which is accessible in different browsers and via technologies such as assistive readers and user agents. A robust web page uses markup that can be reliably interpreted, provides appropriate information for non-standard interface control, and for audio/visual content, includes transcripts descriptions, or alternate media such as sign language or closed captioning.

How to Achieve Accessibility

Developing and creating content for compliance requires both technical capability and organizational process and priority. The first planning step, from a content perspective, is to plan the types and structure of the content and information you need or want to present. Depending on whether you're populating your web page with documents or creating a fully immersive web experience with pages and multimedia, the technical and design considerations are very different.

Consider the following when developing accessible-compliant code:

- Ensure that all interactive elements are keyboard accessible
- Provide alternative text for all images
- Develop semantic markup that conveys structure and meaning
- Ensure that code that is reflective of the correct reading order
- Develop code that adapts to user technology like screen readers
- Ensure that all form controls have applicable labels
- Provide meaning for non-standard interactive elements

Additionally, compliance requires several design considerations. Translating an organization's brand identity and colors into an appropriately visually contrasted design and clearly defined visual and functional design language requires planning and thought as well as systems to allow and enforce those language elements. These translate into appropriate semantic markup and other front-end components.



While some of the intents of the standards are up for interpretation, there are many tools that are available to assist in delivering both the spirit and intent of the laws and standards. From 508 Checker, Accessibility Developer Tools from Google, Accessibility Insights for Web by Microsoft to Axe, Lighthouse, and Wave, there are numerous tools available to help in the testing process. Additional tools such as screen readers and mobile simulators will also be of great help in the process. Perhaps the greatest tool, however, is provided by the W3c and Web Accessibility Initiative. The [**WCAG Quick Reference Guide**](#) includes a searchable outline and breakdown of the standard itself, a list of ways in which individual items may fail the test, and techniques and tricks to solve the issues.

As an added benefit, continuous evaluation of your web pages helps ensure that the content never gets stale. This is not just a practice and process, but also a commitment to remain vigilant and up to date on the latest trends and technologies, as well as general best practices.

Once the technical and design elements are in place, you'll need a strategy and a plan to continue to create and test content and delivery in order to maintain your compliance. As an added benefit, continuous evaluation of your web pages helps ensure that the content never gets stale. This is not just a practice and process, but also a commitment to remain vigilant and up to date on the latest trends and technologies, as well as general best practices. It also requires a commitment to a standard that is acceptable for the business that you are in and an investment in practices, tools, and personnel to be able to provide guidance and feedback for improvement.

What Akumina Provides

How does Akumina help? Several ways.

Delivery Compliance

First, the Akumina Foundation site delivery is built to be compliant to WCAG 2.1 Level AA. Akumina has built the site taking advantage of the power of content management and structured content to deliver a maintainable and compliant framework to display your content.

Total Visual Control

Second, Akumina's core value proposition, strong content management and complete design control, empower any organization's designers and brand management to deliver any design they desire. It also empowers compliance officers with the freedom to make the changes they require to provide appropriate visual contrast, functionality, and navigation using standards-based front-end design patterns.





Pre-Defined Content Types

Third, the base of Akumina is SharePoint as a database. Akumina leverages pre-defined SharePoint content types along with some of our own base types that can be extended while maintaining the core structures required to deliver compliance. This same use allows Akumina to expose the underlying additional governance structures such as workflow and approval to ensure appropriate processes are followed to ensure content compliance.

Widgets

Finally, Akumina takes content management to the next level with our widget technology. Paired with Akumina master pages and style libraries, widgets allow you to reuse page styles, content structures, and functionality in such a way as to ensure that once built and populated, the patterns can be reused across multiple pages and sites, ensuring continued compliance.

Resources

WCAG 2.1 checklist

https://kma.global/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WCAG_2.1_Checklist.pdf

WC3 Accessibility

<https://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/accessibility>

Section 508.gov

<https://www.section508.gov/>

Foundation for the Blind

<https://www.afb.org/>

Digital.gov

<https://digital.gov>

Contrast checkers

<https://contrastchecker.com/>

Online readers - (ex. Jaws)

<https://www.freedomscientific.com/products/software/jaws/>

WCAG checker tools

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools/>

VPAT statements

<https://www.section508.gov/sell/vpat>

Ally project

<https://a11yproject.com/>

NVDA Screen Reader

<https://www.nvaccess.org/>



Akumina is the employee experience platform that empowers global enterprises to quickly create personalized digital experiences that help every employee in every role work smarter, not harder. By offering a customizable, brandable and multilingual platform that seamlessly integrates with leading enterprise cloud applications, Akumina delivers a contextual, collaborative and engaging workplace experience to every user on any device. Akumina's customers include the Whole Foods Market, GlaxoSmithKline, Vodafone, the Boston Red Sox and the Department of Defense. To learn more visit www.akumina.com and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.



LOVE THE WAY YOU WORK

SALES@AKUMINA.COM • 888.685.1465 • WWW.AKUMINA.COM