



Patient, Heal Thyself!

Advocating for Accessible Healthcare Websites

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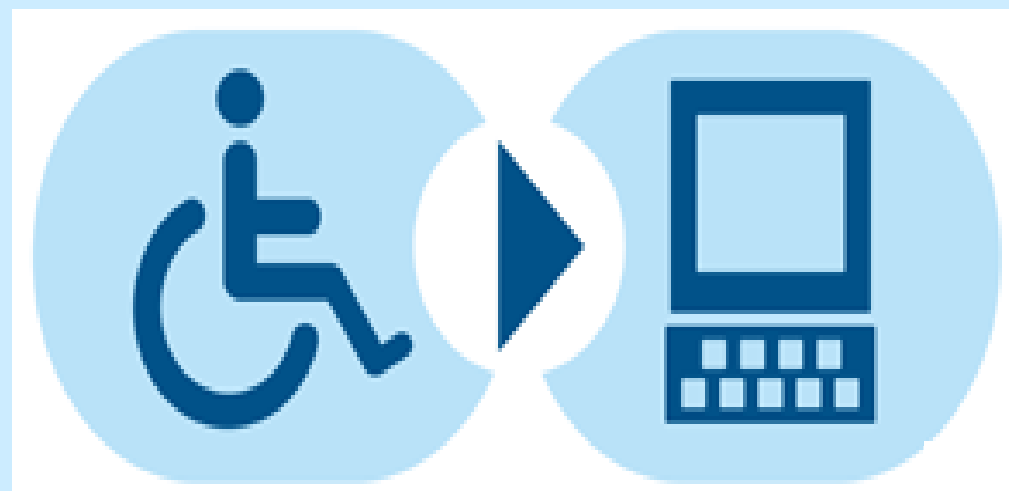
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“Fair and Equal” Website Access for All

Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can use the Internet (e.g. websites). More specifically, providing Web accessibility assures that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web, and that they can contribute to the Web.

Motivation

- Website accessibility is mandated by federal law.
- The requirements are clear and can be readily achieved.
- The reality is that the law has fallen woefully short of its goal.
- Patients are increasingly seeking health related information via the Web.
- For those with disabilities, the Web may be their preferred source for supplemental information.



Legal Mandate and Social Goal

The Web is an increasingly important resource in many aspects of life: education, employment, government, commerce, healthcare, recreation, and more. It is essential that the Web be accessible in order to provide equal access and equal opportunity to people with disabilities. An accessible Web can also help people with disabilities more actively participate in society.

Research Questions

- What prevents attaining the goal of providing accessible healthcare websites?
- What is the current status of accessibility in healthcare websites?
 - What are the most commonly encountered problems?
 - How do web managers perceive their role and responsibility in delivering accessible websites?
 - What do webmasters identify as the factors which inhibit attaining accessible websites?
 - What can be done to incentivize managers to make their websites more accessible?

Research Design

Units of Analysis

Websites that are patient oriented for the delivery of supplemental health care information.

Sampling

Purposive sample of the most used health related websites.

Data Collection

Time period:
Sep-Dec 2009.

Multi-Method Approach

SURVEY:

Format: Online questionnaire for IT managers and webmasters.
Reveals the actual impediments to attaining accessibility.

AUTOMATED TESTING:

Format: Software based testing of each website in the population.
Supports a generalized picture of compliance with accessibility laws.

EXPERT TESTING:

Format: A skilled professional administers a defined protocol.
Determines legal compliance and may identify other important problems.

ACCESSIBILITY TESTING:

Format: Individuals with disabilities conduct open ended testing.
Identifies the actual state of accessibility beyond the legal requirement.

Design Significance: Taking an *Action Stance*

The Action Research approach involves designing research efforts that lead to effective and positive change.

- Intent of identifying the actual impediments.
- Reveal the problems that must be overcome to move accessibility to the forefront in the minds of the decision makers.
- Develop a set of best practices and recommendations that will result in more effective steps towards attaining web accessibility.
- Provide feedback and findings that will impact the way managers approach making websites accessible.
- Identify how *Information Policy* can be better shaped to improve the legislation that directs website accessibility.