Sorenson

Beyond Compliance: The Accessibility Advantage for Your Business

WHITEPAPER

Executive Summary:

This white paper explores the strategic imperative of exceeding accessibility compliance in 2024. Moving beyond a “checkbox” mentality, we present accessibility as a powerful tool for expanding market reach, building brand loyalty, and driving innovation.

We outline the limitations of current accessibility standards and propose a data-driven framework for crafting a comprehensive accessibility blueprint. This white paper is a call to action for leaders seeking to unlock their businesses’ full potential through inclusivity.

In today’s experience economy, businesses compete for customer loyalty by creating seamless and inclusive interactions. Accessibility, once viewed as a niche concern, is now a differentiator for your organization among socially conscious consumers.

While compliance is essential, it’s no longer enough to “get by.” We’re talking about a strategic shift that unlocks a hidden billion—the one billion people globally living with disabilities, a massive and untapped market segment with immense purchasing power. It’s time for business leaders to stop checking boxes and lead with accessibility in their businesses.

The Evolving Landscape of Accessibility Compliance

Accessibility is not only a moral obligation; it's often a legal requirement. Frameworks like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the U.S. and the European Accessibility Act (EAA) for the EU exemplify this. These regulations are part of a global movement towards inclusivity, carrying significant consequences for non-compliance.

The imperative for compliance, however, transcends legal requirements and is deeply rooted in equity. It ensures that all individuals—regardless of disability or language background—have equal access to information, functionality, and the ability to participate in society fully.

The accessibility landscape is constantly evolving, driven by technological advancements and demographic shifts. For instance, AI-powered tools are revolutionizing accessibility, while the global aging population demands new solutions. Businesses that cling to minimum standards risk not taking advantage of these opportunities.

Current accessibility standards struggle to keep pace with the constantly evolving landscape of user needs and technological advancements.

Pace of Change

The rapid advancement of technology is fundamentally transforming business leaders' approaches to accessibility. Innovations in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing are swiftly addressing business challenges. However, the disparity between these advancements and existing frameworks creates obstacles for users with disabilities and impedes innovation.

The Nuance Trap

Many accessibility standards are too broad and do not fully consider the specific needs of individuals with different disabilities or the complexities of modern digital platforms. This approach can create barriers to providing seamless user experiences by failing to address the diverse ways people interact with technology.

Changes in Demographics

The global increase in aging demographics is leading to a marked rise in age-related disabilities. According to the World Health Organization, the proportion of individuals over 60 will nearly double from 12% to 22% by 2050[1].

This demographic shift challenges current accessibility standards, creating a significant disparity between the needs of a growing market segment and the accessibility features businesses provide.

Impact of Globalization

Business standards that lack linguistic and cultural accessibility are detrimental to a global market. In fact, 400 corporations surveyed estimated that communication barriers cost the average organization $62.4 million per year in lost productivity[2].

Not having multi-lingual options leads to loss of revenue for businesses, missed opportunities for to engage with non-English speakers or individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, cultural intricacies in design and functionality may inadvertently isolate users from diverse backgrounds.

Organizations must embrace a proactive approach to their DEI strategy to make a lasting impact in their industries.

Next, let's examine the compelling case for exceeding accessibility compliance, exploring the strategic advantages and ethical implications of this shift in perspective.

Going beyond the basic accessibility compliance requirements offers significant advantages for forward-thinking businesses. A proactive commitment to inclusion is more than ethically sound it is a considerable advantage.

Expanding Your Market Reach

By embracing and enhancing accessibility, companies can tap into a substantial and often neglected consumer base, potentially increasing their market share and boosting revenue. An example is Microsoft's inclusive design initiative, which has broadened its market and enhanced user engagement across its product lines, demonstrating that accessibility can drive significant business growth.[3]

Building a Positive Brand Image

Companies known for their commitment to inclusivity often enjoy a reputation as leaders in corporate social responsibility. This fosters goodwill, enhances consumer sentiment, and strengthens brand loyalty in a market increasingly conscious of social issues. For instance, Starbucks' efforts to be a People Positive company by opening sign language-friendly stores, expanding its community store initiative, and committing to inclusive design standards have bolstered its brand image.[4]

Innovating With Accessibility as a Core Value

Prioritizing accessibility encourages a culture of innovation within organizations. It pushes businesses to develop creative solutions that not only address the needs of users with disabilities but also improve usability for the general population. In turn, innovations such as Apple's suite of new accessibility features for cognitive, speech, and vision accessibility have set a high standard for accessibility that others aim to match.[5]

Proactively Managing Risk

Accessibility laws and regulations are continuously evolving. Companies can better prepare for regulatory changes by exceeding current standards, reducing legal risks and potential fines. This proactive approach ensures smoother transitions when new regulations take effect, minimizing operational disruptions. The European Union's recent updates to the Web Accessibility Directive[6] exemplify these evolving mandates.

To create an accessibility plan beyond compliance, organizations must incorporate new strategies that can adjust to the changing needs of a diverse customer base. This forward-looking approach uses advanced technology to improve interaction and accessibility at every stage, effectively enhancing the user experience.

Captioning and translation services are crucial for improving digital communications. For example, video content on digital platforms can have accurate captions and subtitles in different languages. Websites and digital interfaces can also use dynamic translation tools, enabling users to interact in their preferred language and making digital platforms universally welcoming and navigable.

Implementing some of these solutions enhances the customer service experience, demonstrating a dedication to inclusivity and ensuring language barriers do not obstruct business or customer satisfaction. In customer support roles, real-time interpreting can integrate into call centers or chat services, allowing support personnel to immediately communicate with customers in various languages, thereby expanding the company's scope and strengthening its global impact in an increasingly competitive market.

This paper has presented a case for exceeding accessibility compliance, framing it as a moral and strategic necessity. We have highlighted the limitations of current compliance frameworks, which often lag years behind the rapid pace of technological change, evolving demographics, and the interconnectedness of global markets. Businesses must proactively address these gaps to avoid missed opportunities, legal exposure, and a diminished reputation.

Expanding the traditional accessibility blueprint to include innovative practices—such as real-time multilingual interpreting in retail and customer support and advanced captioning and translation services for digital communications is essential. These enhancements ensure compliance and set a new standard in accessibility, demonstrating the substantial benefits of an inclusive approach for your business strategy.

Our framework provides a roadmap for organizations to assess their accessibility practices, prioritize action, and quantify the ROI of a more inclusive workplace.

In a rapidly evolving world, integrating enhanced accessibility practices is commendable and essential for sustainable success. As technology and society transform, the journey towards full accessibility is ongoing. Our responsibility as business leaders is to build digital and physical spaces that welcome everyone, from employees to customers.

Want to learn more about how Sorenson is building a more inclusive and accessible future by partnering with businesses? We would love to connect with you.

Book a call with one of our accessibility experts.

You can also reach out team at 800.659.4783, option 8, or sales@sorenson.com

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