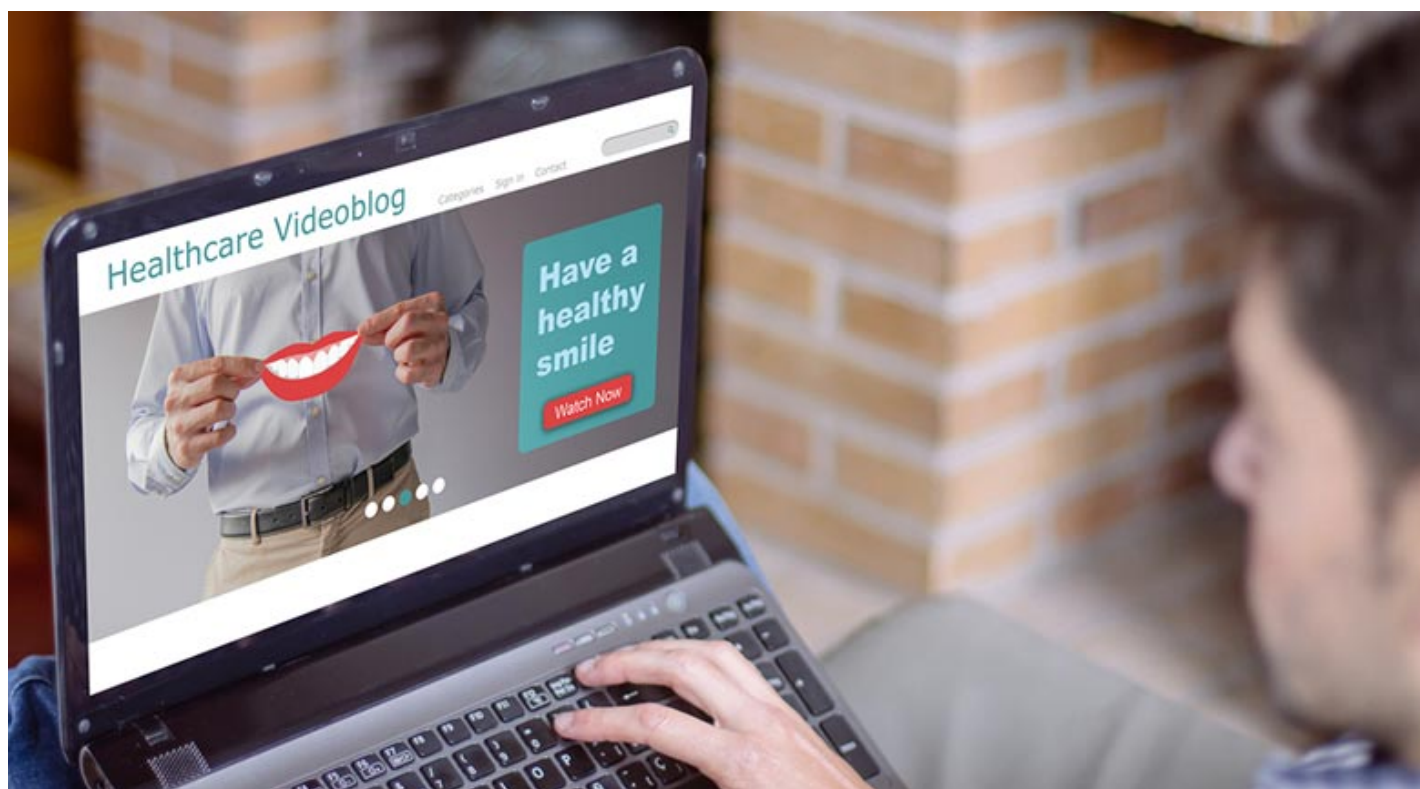


ADA and Healthcare: Why Healthcare Providers Need to be Accessible

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The *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) was signed into law to protect people with disabilities from discrimination. When it comes to the healthcare sector, both public and privately owned healthcare facilities and providers, such as hospitals and clinics, fall under the purview of the ADA, under Title II and Title III respectively. The mandate, however, is the same: people with disabilities must be provided with equal access to all healthcare services and facilities available.

The equal access required by the ADA not only refers to the physical structures of the hospital or clinic, such as having enough space in examination rooms for a person in a wheelchair or scooter to turn, or providing qualified sign language interpreters, but extends to all digital properties.

People with Disabilities and the Healthcare Industry

In the United States, 19 percent of the population has a disability, and *healthcare expenditure for this patient segment costs \$400 billion a year*¹. Despite this figure, the needs of people with disabilities are often overlooked, and they do not receive the same class of care provided to those without a disability. Unsurprisingly, people with disabilities report a lower level of satisfaction with the care provided.

There's also the aging population to consider. Fifty percent of the US population is projected to be above age 50 within the next four years, and with age comes a higher chance of developing a disability. For example, *adults between the ages of 55 and 64*² are at a higher risk of developing a chronic disability than their parents' generation.

This demographic, commonly referred to as the baby boomers, is living longer than previous generations, and is a financially formidable force, not one that any organization can afford to overlook. These people control *70 percent of the country's disposable income*³ and are set to inherit \$15 trillion by 2036.

They are also a savvy, wealthy group of consumers who expect excellent service. If they do not receive it, they will go elsewhere – an inclination not exclusive to baby boomers alone.

Digital Accessibility for Healthcare Providers

Despite providers' best attempts to be accessible, people with disabilities still face many barriers to quality healthcare. These barriers often start from a person's first interaction with a website. For example, a patient who is blind may use screen-reading technology to book an appointment. If your site isn't developed properly, he or she won't be able to decipher what's on the page, resulting in a frustrating experience.

If a patient has a physical disability and limited dexterity, he or she may need assistive technology to engage with the website. While the ADA does not specify web accessibility, there are several reasons to be accessible online.

Legal Requirements

As healthcare providers fail to meet the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** 2.0 Level A and AA requirements, as demanded by the ADA, they become open to legal action.

Read more about the ADA guidelines here.

Tenet Healthcare, which operates three hospitals, is currently in court, as a class action complaint has been brought against them on behalf of all people with a vision disability. Tenet Healthcare was found to be in violation of ADA Title III, as its websites were not accessible via screen-reader technology.

WellPoint, Rite Aid and Anthem all entered into settlements after being sued for not having websites that conformed to WCAG 2.0 Level AA. Not being WCAG 2.0 compliant can turn into an expensive experience for any healthcare provider in the U.S.

Download the State of Digital Accessibility in Healthcare

What are the barriers to accessibility?

There are different types of disabilities, ranging from mobility to vision and hearing disabilities, and the individuals who have them can face a number of barriers. People with limitations in mobility, who make up *13 percent of all people with disabilities*⁴, use various technologies to read and engage with content on websites.

However, when little thought has been given to how a person who cannot use a mouse can navigate the page, barriers appear. For example, when there are many buttons and links close together, some people might find it challenging to click on a particular link.

Other barriers include, but are not limited to, design and layout. People with disabilities may have difficulties reading content due to insufficient contrast between text and background colours. They may also have trouble perceiving hyperlinks that are only displayed in blue, without any other markers.

Screen-reader users face barriers when alternative text is not provided for images, excluding them from information available to everyone else. Despite the variety of assistive devices, if digital properties do not follow the technical requirements needed for accessibility, such as those laid out in WCAG 2.0, it hinders the person from successfully interacting with the website or mobile app. This is a direct violation of the ADA, and it is for such a reason that Tenet Healthcare is currently in court.

An Innovative Solution

eSSENTIAL ACCESSIBILITY has developed a comprehensive accessibility solution to help organizations follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and achieve and maintain compliance with standards and regulations. This includes integrating web compliance evaluation services with assistive technology to deliver a transformative experience for people with disabilities.

Learn more about eSSENTIAL ACCESSIBILITY's innovative solution.

References

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