## Meeting Report: Does your intranet meet accessibility standards?

### UKeiG Intranets Forum

### Disability Rights Commission, Manchester, 5 July 2007

Following the success of the London-based Intranets Forum meetings; demand has been high for meetings in other parts of the country. The Disability Rights Commission's (DRC) offer of a Manchester venue allowed the Forum to spread its wings. An added bonus was the DRC's excellent facilities enabling 20 participants to attend in Manchester, and a further 12 by video-link in London.

Simon Pickering, the DRC's Practice Development Officer, spoke of their seven-year process leading to the publication in 2006 of the "Guide to good practice in commissioning accessible design". The project assessed publicly available websites for their level of accessibility for disabled people; over 1000 sites were tested with a staggering 81% failing the basic World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standards.[1] Following the results of the study, the DRC worked with the British Standards Institute to develop a Publicly Available Specification (PAS 78), detailing best practice and recommendations, guiding readers through the commissioning, building and maintaining of a site, and the involvement of specific disability groups. Until 30 September 2007, the PAS is freely available for downloading from the DRC website.[2] To-date, there have been 54,000 downloads across the world.

Steve Beesley, the DRC's Software Development Manager outlined key points to achieving an accessible and usable website or intranet. The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)[3] defines accessibility as content usable by someone with a disability. Usability is concerned with ease and efficiency of use whether disabled or not. Hence, there is no real tension between accessibility and usability.

A Survey in 2005 by User Vision[4], a usability and accessibility consultancy, found the top five annoyances for disabled users to be:

- No in-site search
- No sitemap
- No internal page navigation e.g. back to the top links
- Pop-ups
- Inability to change font size/colour contrast.

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[1] http://www.w3.org/

[2] http://www.drc-gb.org/library/website_accessibility_guidance/pas_78.aspx

[3] http://www.w3.org/WAI/

[4] http://www.uservision.co.uk/

Key points proposed to improve accessibility were:

- Start by improving the accessibility of the most popular sections of your intranet.
- There should be no more than five links on a page; otherwise those using screen readers can become very frustrated.
- Write for the intranet; reading a screen is 25% slower than reading on a page. It is very important for those using assisted technologies that the first sentence on the page contains the most important information, allowing users to assess the relevancy of the page easily.
- Scrolling should be limited, with no horizontal scrolling.
- Organise content using lists and bullets.
- Hyperlinks should be part of the text.
- Ensure options to change font and colour are easily found.
- The accessibility statement needs to be clear and easily found.
- HTML is the most preferable format, then PDF and Word, in that order. PDFs should be appropriately marked up for accessibility. The Adobe website gives advice on making PDFs accessible.[1]

Carol Phillips, the DRC's ICT Officer, highlighted key features of the DRC's Intranet. When staff log on, the intranet is immediately displayed. The homepage is interactive, with a very popular weekly poll. At the time of the meeting, and the recent change of Prime Minister, the poll was "Will Gordon Brown be a better Prime Minister than Tony Blair?" News is split between main organizational messages, which appear on the homepage, and the Staff Notice board, which contains day-to-day news. Their most popular sections include the staff directory, and the training section, administered by the Human Resources department.

A recent new feature has been "My Site" containing personalized information, including flexi-sheets, staff directory profiles, and issues logged with the IT service desk, together with a listing of closed IT calls. The next development will be a listing of training courses attended, and benefits available to individuals. As would be expected from the DRC, their intranet has many of the standard accessibility features; they use font size 14 (although the recommended is normally 12), the ability to re-size the font, and to change the colour.

Claire Pillar from the North Cumbria NHS Informatics Service talked us through her recent experience of undertaking usability tests. They have an overarching intranet, and each of the three trusts for North Cumbria has their own intranet. Claire's advice is to keep usability tests to a small number of people, and keep the tests short; citing Jakob Nielson's[2] guidance that five users for a set of questions is enough: after the fifth user, one observes the same findings. Tests were limited to 30 minutes, and limited to five questions. Tests were videoed, and surprisingly, no one objected to their screens being videoed, and all were willing to share comments. The questions used deliberately included acronyms and words that tested spelling.

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[1] http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/

[2] http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html

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Observations from the testing included:

- Scrolling is not liked
- Lack of awareness of the site search
- The site search was itself poor
- No need for two navigation bars
- The breadcrumb trail was not observed
- With staff having access to two intranets, lack of branding resulted in staff not realising which intranet they were using.
- Users generally do not know how to search within a page, and do not know how to search within a PDF.

What next? Test again. Due to the wide geographical area of North Cumbria NHS, Claire has plans to trial testing through watching users remotely.

UKeiG wishes to thank David Sparrow, the DRC's Library & Information Services Manager for the venue, and his support.

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