

# The 2021 Guide to Web Accessibility

5 Approaches to Avoid When Making Your Digital Properties Compliant



ESSENTIAL  
ACCESSIBILITY.

Today's business leaders understand the importance of having an accessible digital presence. Without accessibility, you're cutting your brand off from more than one billion people living with disabilities and exposing your organization to serious legal risk due to non-compliance with the ADA, AODA, Section 508 and other anti-discrimination laws.

When setting out to achieve digital accessibility and compliance, there are a number of approaches to consider. Which route will work best for your organization? If you're just starting out, it's important to note, many commonly considered approaches are incomplete, misleading, or worse, ineffective.

Whether the solution itself is insufficient or the team implementing the fixes lacks the necessary expertise to help you truly achieve accessibility, the end result is often the same: your website remains inaccessible to people with disabilities, your organization is still exposed to legal risk, and you'll most likely need to start the accessibility and compliance process again.

Don't waste time and money on futile accessibility and compliance solutions. In this eBook, we review five approaches organizations commonly consider when beginning their digital accessibility journey and explain why and how they will fall short.

- 1 World Health Organization
- 2 World Health Organization
- 3 WC3

## Accessibility by the Numbers



**1.3 billion**

people with disabilities globally<sup>1</sup>



**105 million**

Friends & family with an  
emotional connection to disability<sup>2</sup>



**\$6 trillion**

Global spending power of people  
with disabilities<sup>3</sup>

# 1

## The Approach: Automated Testing Tools

**The Problem:** Fail to capture 60-80% of accessibility issues

Automated testing tools are an important component of website accessibility audits, but are they a standalone solution? Absolutely not.

Automated tools are only able to capture roughly 25% of the accessibility issues occurring on your digital properties. This makes them useful for establishing a

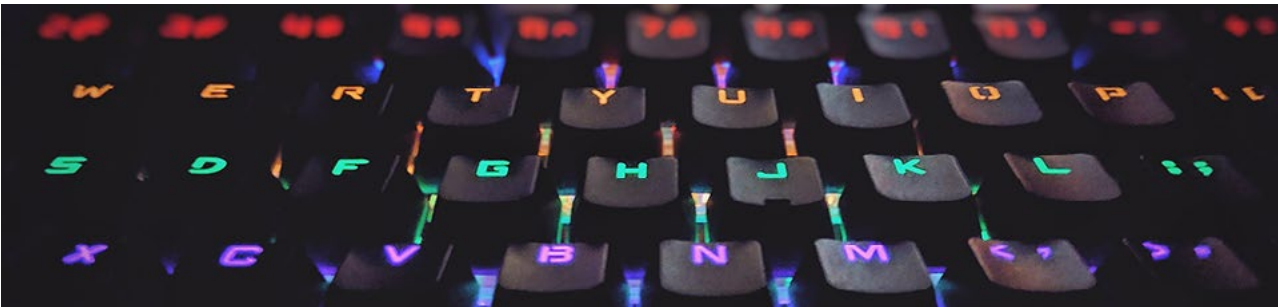
general baseline of your accessibility status, but in no way does it provide a complete picture.

To truly understand the scope of accessibility issues occurring on your digital properties, automated testing tools must be paired with manual audits performed by experts with disabilities.

Trained experts will dive deeper into the issues flagged by automated tools and, more importantly, test critical areas and capabilities on your site that automated tools aren't capable of accessing. These areas include:

### Keyboard-only navigation

Navigating a website without a mouse is a necessary capability for many users with disabilities. A manual test is the only way to determine if your digital properties are optimized for keyboard-only navigation, which will allow users to browse your website, access page menus, interact with links, etc., using only keyboard commands.



## Screen reader compatibility

Screen readers are frequently used by people with vision impairments to navigate the web. Manual testing using a screen reader is critical to discovering issues with color contrast, missing links, text tags, alt tags, page titles, etc., that would otherwise render some or all of your content inaccessible.

## User experience

Today's websites are complex, and automated testing tools can't interact with them the same way a real user would. For example, consider testing your website's checkout experience. An automated testing tool cannot add items to a cart and complete a purchase, leaving one of the most critical functions of your website untested.

### Comparing the Capabilities of Web Accessibility Testing Tools

Criteria to Test	Automated Testing Tools	Manual Testing
General website functions	✓	✓
Keyboard-only navigation	X	✓
Screen reader compatibility	X	✓
User experience	X	✓

**Summary:** Automated testing tools are an important component of accessibility testing, but they are not a complete solution. Think of them like a lawnmower: a helpful tool you can use to complete a job, but on their own, ineffective.



# 2

## The Approach: Overlays/Plugins

**The Problem:** Completely ineffective

Let's be clear: accessibility overlays do not work. Period.

Overlays are superficial approaches to accessibility that make no real improvements to your website, do nothing to limit legal risk, and can actually compromise your user experience. Here's how they 'work': you'll get a snippet of JavaScript code that you insert into your website, and a clickable icon or link will become available

containing a menu of options (alter font size/color, etc) that users can engage with to make web content accessible.

This approach forces people with disabilities to abandon their preferred assistive technologies and learn yet another tool in order to engage with your content. It also fails to fix accessibility issues at their core and leaves you exposed to legal action.

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🗨️ **Customers are still exposed to frustrating, barrier-filled experiences, while companies think they've done their due diligence to achieve accessibility and compliance, only to discover they've barely started.**

**\$25,000**  
**Estimated minimum cost to  
fight an ADA lawsuit**

According to disability rights attorney Lainey Feingold “These tools do not focus on the needs of people with disabilities to participate in the digital world. And they do not involve disabled people in creating the accessible technology and content they need. Instead, they leave people with disabilities out of the equation and ignore well documented evidence that installing one line of code does not eliminate barriers to digital inclusion.”

It’s a scenario where no one wins. Customers are still exposed to frustrating, barrier-filled

experiences, and companies think they’ve done their due diligence to achieve digital accessibility and compliance, only to discover they’ve barely started.

**Another problem?** A quick Google search of accessibility overlays will paint a completely different picture. Go online and you’ll be met with countless claims and rave reviews touting the unbelievable efficacy of accessibility overlays, but this good press is all fake. Accessibility advocates and reputable accessibility and compliance vendors are on the same page – **overlays do not work**. More than 100 websites with overlays have recently received lawsuits and countless others have likely been served demand letters. They will not be the last.

**Summary:** There is no quick fix to achieving accessibility. Ensuring your digital properties conform to WCAG and comply with anti-discrimination laws including ADA, AODA, and Section 508 takes time and requires an ongoing, multifaceted approach. Be wary of any accessibility vendor who tries to convince you otherwise.



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## The Approach: Consultants

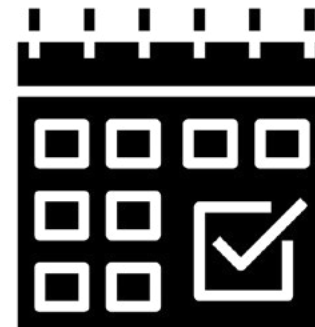
### The Problem: Not a full-service solution

There's no shortage of accessibility consultants who are ready and willing to audit your digital properties and issue a report outlining your accessibility issues, but what happens next?

They don't provide the support, training, or legal compliance necessary to help you move forward, so once their report lands on your desk, you're on your own. It's a costly way to end up only slightly ahead of where you started. Not to mention, today's websites are dynamic - by the time you determine how to proceed with the necessary accessibility fixes, your site could be much different than it was during the audit, rendering the report irrelevant.



Achieving digital accessibility and compliance is no easy feat. You will have a number of questions and require plenty of support along the way. You'll also need to re-test regularly to assess whether implemented fixes were successful or not. Do you really want to re-engage a consultation at every iteration? Why not engage a full-service accessibility partner who will function as an extension of your team from the start, and keep you on track long after you've crossed the finish line.



**Summary:** Consultants don't provide full-service solutions. They can help get you started, but they don't offer the capabilities or support to see you through your digital accessibility and compliance journey.

The average website has a shelf life of

**18 - 30**

months before it will require a significant redesign.

- Business2Community







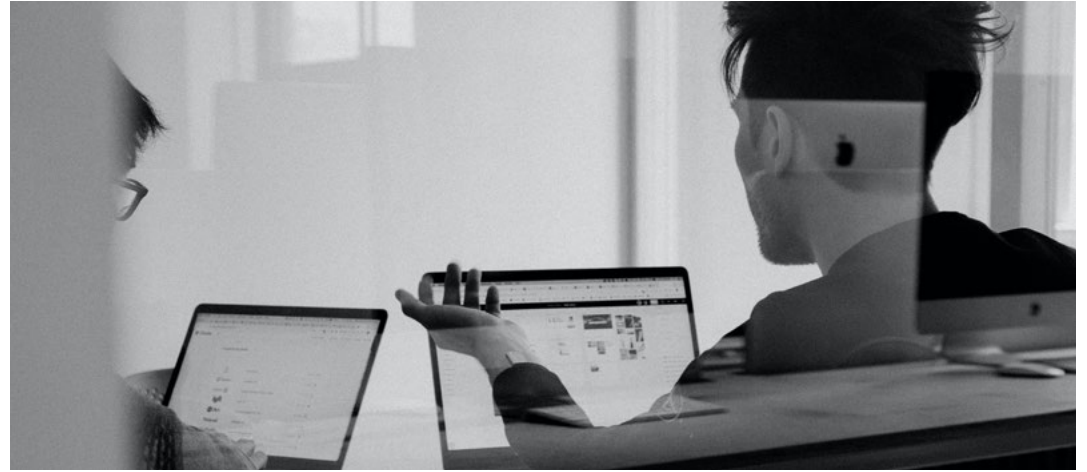
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## The Approach: Internal Teams

**The Problem:** Costly, disruptive to day-to-day tasks

Assembling an internal team to achieve digital accessibility can feel like the most practical choice, but there are a number of drawbacks to consider before moving forward.

- 1 Steep learning curve.** At the risk of sounding like a broken record, achieving digital accessibility and compliance is not easy. It requires intricate technical knowledge and expertise, and is not something that can be learned overnight. Do you know what keyboard traps are, or what path-dependent input means? Does your team? If there is an issue with either on your website, would they know how to fix it? Are you confident all fixes will be correctly implemented?



**2 Removes team from day-to-day responsibilities.** Assembling an internal team pulls its members off their daily tasks – how will this impact other business functions? Additionally, expecting your team to juggle competing priorities for an extended period is unfair and likely unrealistic.

**3 Takes time.** If you're violating compliance requirements or you're at risk of receiving an ADA demand letter, you want to resolve any and all accessibility issues quickly. Because of the learning curve, that likely won't happen if you're relying on internal teams. Extending the process prolongs your exposure, so unless you've got \$25,000<sup>4</sup> to fight an accessibility lawsuit (and that's just one lawsuit) or \$100,000/day to pay non-compliance fines<sup>5</sup>, it's likely best to streamline your accessibility efforts by working with experts.

**Summary:** Achieving digital accessibility and compliance requires a structured process and specialized capabilities – assigning the task to internal teams may prolong the project with no guarantees the work will be completed correctly.

4 Medium/Kris Rivenburgh, 5 AODA.ca

# 5

## The Approach: Design Agencies

### The Problem: Not accessibility experts

Another approach organizations frequently consider is outsourcing accessibility to their website design agency. They've designed a beautiful, well-functioning site and are already in your code, so it should be easy enough to make a few tweaks and have it meet accessibility standards, right? Not exactly. Web design and digital accessibility are not synonymous - just because someone can design a website, it doesn't mean they can make it conform with WCAG.

Digital accessibility is a highly specialized skill set requiring unique knowledge. Even if design agencies claim they're capable, accessibility is not their main focus, so there's a strong chance you're being misled - intentionally or otherwise - when told you're compliant. At the end of the day, the onus is on you to ensure your digital properties are accessible. Don't leave it to chance.


**Summary:** The vast majority of web design agencies are not compliance experts – outsourcing accessibility to them is risky.

# The Effective Approach

Now that you know what approaches to avoid when working to achieve digital accessibility and compliance, how should you proceed? For most organizations, the best way forward is working with a reputable accessibility vendor. They have an in-depth understanding of the complexities involved with achieving accessibility and compliance and will work with you throughout the entire process to ensure all issues are identified, remediated, and that your progress is sustained as your digital properties expand and evolve over time.

The right vendor will provide a full suite of services, including:

- Automated and manual audits performed by experts with disabilities
- Remediation roadmap development to resolve issues in order of severity
- Regular retesting to ensure fixes have been implemented correctly
- Guidance and training to educate your internal team and engrain accessibility and compliance into business processes moving forward
- Legal support to evaluate ADA demand letters and assist in response efforts as necessary
- Accessibility and Conformance statements to showcase your commitment and adherence to digital accessibility and inclusivity
- Ongoing monitoring and maintenance of your digital properties to ensure accessibility efforts are sustained

Don't waste time or money on incomplete or ineffective approaches to digital accessibility and compliance. Protect your brand by partnering with a knowledgeable accessibility vendor and achieve results much quicker. 



eSSential Accessibility is an Accessibility-as-a-Service platform that makes your digital assets conform with WCAG and compliant with AODA, ADA, Section 508 and other anti-discrimination laws. Our technology helps your organization deliver accessible web, mobile, and product experiences, ensuring people of all abilities have equal access.



To learn more about how to make your web, mobile, and product experiences fully accessible and compliant, visit [www.essentialaccessibility.com](http://www.essentialaccessibility.com)

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