



SKYNET TECHNOLOGIES

# 2021 **ADA Website Accessibility** Standards & Requirements – Everything You Need to Know!

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# Introduction

“ The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect. ”

**Tim Berners-Lee,**

*W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web.*

One out of four people is facing some sort of disability which results in more than 20% of the adult population in the USA are facing disabilities that negatively impact their ability to use the website and consume its content. According to World Health Organization(WHO), more than a billion of the world's population is suffering from visual impairment of one or the other kind. More than 5% of the total population is having a hearing disability.

These astonishing facts reveal that accessing the information on the web is challenging for these people. It is not enough to build a sturdy and beautiful website. It has to be accessible and usable by everyone.

This social exclusion is a bad sign for business as well. Just imagine, if a person who is deaf or blind or couldn't use a mouse for navigation, then they would go for brands and enterprises who build products that meet their needs. Also, many big giants in the business faced legal penalties and that marred their brand reputation.

With the rise in the number of lawsuits, it has become imperative for businesses to build ADA-compliant websites.



# What is ADA Compliance?



The Americans with Disabilities Act(ADA) standards are released by the Department of Justice(DoJ) requires companies to offer websites that people with disabilities can use and access. You need to incorporate a few standards to make the website ADA compliant and make it accessible for everyone including people with disabilities - both physical and cognitive/mental disabilities and they could be temporary or permanent.

# Is ADA Accessibility Compliance Mandatory?

The ADA act that came into existence before the web became a fixture in our lives doesn't state website accessibility explicitly but the spirit of the law says yes. Visually challenged, hearing impairments and other kinds of disabilities limit the users' normal ability to access a website and they have to rely on assistive technologies like screen readers. So, the Department of Justice started taking notice of this discrimination and started issuing legal notices to websites that aren't accessible.

Over the last few years, many websites and mobile apps have been facing legal litigations and massive penalties for inaccessibility aspects. Even the courts have ruled that websites could also be places of public accommodation under the charge of violation of Title III of ADA. Also, though the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines(WCAG) are not the law, they also find frequent references. Having an **ADA-compliant website helps businesses to avoid potential legal lawsuits and penalties.**



# What are WCAG Guidelines?

WCAG stands for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and are the standards frequently referenced to ensure web accessibility. When we deal with **ADA compliance**, **WCAG guidelines** are the defacto rules to make your website ADA accessible to the users.

## The Core WCAG Principles Include



### Perceivable

Your website users should be able to perceive all the information and content that appears on your website. It could be text, images, videos, or more. For users with any sort of disability who may be finding it difficult to read the text or listen to the audio on your site, there has to be an immediate fallback option for them to be able to perceive.



### Operable

Website users should be enjoying the capability to navigate across the website and use all the features. For instance, all the users should be able to use your navigation menu and any other site tools.



### Understandable

Your users should be provided with the means to understand your website content which could be text, images, videos, and other tools. You can include instructions for using particular features to understand the usage.



### Robust

Your users should have the ability to have the same experience as others even if they are relying on assistive technologies. For instance, those who are reading the content using a voice reader should have the same experience as others.

# What are **WCAG** Guidelines?

For easy implementation of these 4 core principles, they are translated into actionable items through this checklist.

**Level A:** Build a website for improving the accessibility to some users. Some of the criteria include having a text alternative for helping a non-text content person, being able to operate your website through a keyboard interface only, having descriptive titles, and more.

**Level AA:** Build a website so that almost all the users can access it. There are more than 50 criteria, some of which are having audio descriptions for a pre-recorded video, including captions for live audio content, resizing the text up to 200% without causing any readability difficulties, descriptive form labels, and more.

**Level AAA:** Build a website that all users can access which is complex. This includes having a mechanism to identify the meanings of the phrases on the web, having a sign language interpretation, and 70-odd criteria.

Conformance to WCAG 2.1 AA is a safe option although there are no hard-and-core rules. **The latest roll-out was WCAG 2.2** and has added a few more criteria.

Section 508 is another rule that also deals with accessibility aspects. It is an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act that mandates the electronic and IT that includes websites to be accessible to all.



# How to Build ADA-Compliant Websites in 2021?

Building an ADA-compliant website entails a lot many things that achieve compliance for your websites. Here is the checklist you need to follow to make your website ADA compliant.

## Overall Website Look



### Website Design

Website design is the first thing you need to focus on while building an ADA-compliant website in 2021. Make sure the website layout isn't too complex and confusing for the users to navigate to the pages or content they desire. The design should be made intuitive to provide ease of navigation for the users.



### Website Structure

Website Structure is also an important visual component. Use proper markup techniques for structuring your website content. Proper headings and their hierarchy, white spaces between elements, grid layout, and other elements contribute greatly to the website structure.



### Color Palette

While flashy colors are more eye-grabbing, they are highly distracting, and also people with visual challenges like color blindness may find it hard to view your website content. You should pay attention to choose colors wisely. Both the text and its background should maintain proper color contrast to ease the visual appeal to the users.



### User-Friendly Forms

One of the challenging aspects for people who rely on screen readers is Forms. They should be simple and clear with a proper standard format for the names, addresses, and other fields. The form labels or any instructions should be in a neat and legible format for the users to understand.



### HTML Parsing

The code should be free of any errors, especially HTML errors like missing brackets or tags. Having any HTML errors results in broken links or error pages making the navigation difficult for the user. So, verify if everything is right with your HTML code and all the elements are properly nested.



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## User Navigation



### User Access and Control

Users should be provided with a degree of control over their experience on your website. They should be able to pause or refresh or update the content. Make sure that there are no auto pop-ups for promotional aspects like subscriptions or special offers. Pop-ups that offer assistance can find a place but don't overdo it. Also, maintain soft transition without any sudden and unprecedented changes.



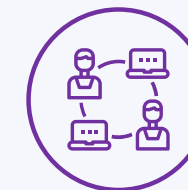
### Keyboard Navigation

An ADA compliant website should support keyword navigation fully enabling people who cannot use the mouse to use it for navigation across the site. They should never get stuck at any place on the website and should fully navigate both front and back easily with a keyboard.



### Navigation Consistency

Maintain a consistent navigation layout throughout the website. Include 'skip navigation' or 'skip to content' to allow the website visitors to bypass any irrelevant content and go straight to the desired part. List same links on every website page and in the same order.



### Multiple Access Ways

Users should be given multiple ways to access different pages and content on your website. You can include search bars, breadcrumbs, sitemaps, navigation menus, to provide this. A sitemap link must be provided ideally on every page in the footer section and more particularly on the homepage without a miss.

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## Alternatives



### Alt Text

The images on an ADA-compliant website should have descriptive alt text. The value should reflect the meaning of the image and should be relevant. All the infographics, charts, logos should follow this norm. People who use text reader software would benefit a lot from the description of the images.



### Video & Audio Alternatives

If your website is loaded with multimedia elements such as video or audio, you need to find an alternate way for making this content accessible to the hearing and visually impaired. Things like video or audio transcriptions would do the needful as they can be read using assistive technologies like screen readers.



### Audio Descriptions

Your audio elements must have a text transcript that is clear and easy making the website visitors understand the audio. Each of these audio transcripts must be properly labeled and linked to the right media elements.



### Live Captions

Your videos may also contain certain discernible sounds or voices which requires closed captioning and optimal synchronization. Live captions in the videos would help deaf people to read when the video is playing.

# How to Build ADA-Compliant Websites in 2021?

## Titles and Languages



### Descriptive Titles

The titles and headings provided on the web pages should be self-explanatory that reflect the purpose of the content. This helps the users to understand the intent of the website and could confirm if that is the page that has their desired content. Also, any abbreviations and acronyms should be explained for a better understanding of their meaning.



### Hierarchy and Sequencing

The content should be organized in a logical manner with proper sequence and visitors should be able to navigate along with the website intuitively. The sequencing of the content pages preserves the meaning and also reduces unnecessary confusion by letting the users move between webpages seamlessly.



### Focus Indicator

If a user goes off the keyboard, there has to be a focus indicator that lets the users understand where they were on the page earlier and how to traverse to different sections or pages.



### Anchor Text

It lets the user understand the purpose of each link on your website, For instance, instead of simplifying saying 'click now', you can add a descriptive anchor reflecting the true intent behind the content like 'contact us' or 'Buy now' which are more specific. Anchor text could be title links, URL links, generic links, or keyword links.



### Website Language

The default language of an ADA-compliant website should be easily recognized by any accessibility and assistive software. The default language should be accessible to the majority of the web users and should be identified in the HTML header code, making it clear for the text readers to identify it. If you are running a multilingual website, make sure to reset the primary language for each.



### Text Resizing

ADA has a laid-out rule that the text can be resized up to 200% of its original size and should still be readable when enlarged. Make sure that the text resizing shouldn't in any way impact the users' ability to read and view the content.

# ADA Web Development

Isn't it shocking to know that more than 70% of the potential customers drop off if they find accessibility issues on your website? To build a base of happy customers and convert the leads into customers, you need to improve the accessibility aspects of your website. You can review the existing website or even go for an ADA website audit to understand the current accessibility status of your website. You can finetune your websites by reducing the clunky and unpleasant user experience by simply implementing the above items mentioned in the checklist.

No matter what the web application is and what platform it is built on, whether it is a Drupal website, Magento, WordPress, Symphony, or an ecommerce website or developed by any web languages like PHP, Laravel, Drupal, Java, Dot Net, etc. make sure they are ADA compliant. No matter what the platform or application is, the web applications that are poor in accessibility aspects, despite being built with high-quality web standards and industry practices are bound to fail in the market in terms of customer satisfaction and approval.

## Benefits of an ADA compliant website development :

- Improve the usability of your website
- Expand the target audience
- Uplift your brand reputation
- Avoid Legal penalties
- Better SERP Rankings

You can review the existing website or even go for an ADA website audit to understand the current accessibility status of your website.



# ADA Mobile Application



There are no separate and specific rules for **making mobile apps ADA compliant**. The mobile apps are also covered by the same standards that are applicable for web applications and should follow WCAG 2 standards including multimedia access. Even the Section 508 standards do not include anything particular about mobile apps but the general accessibility requirements are applicable for mobile apps as well. You can focus on designing aspects to make the mobile apps provide automated adjustments and fit the screen size.

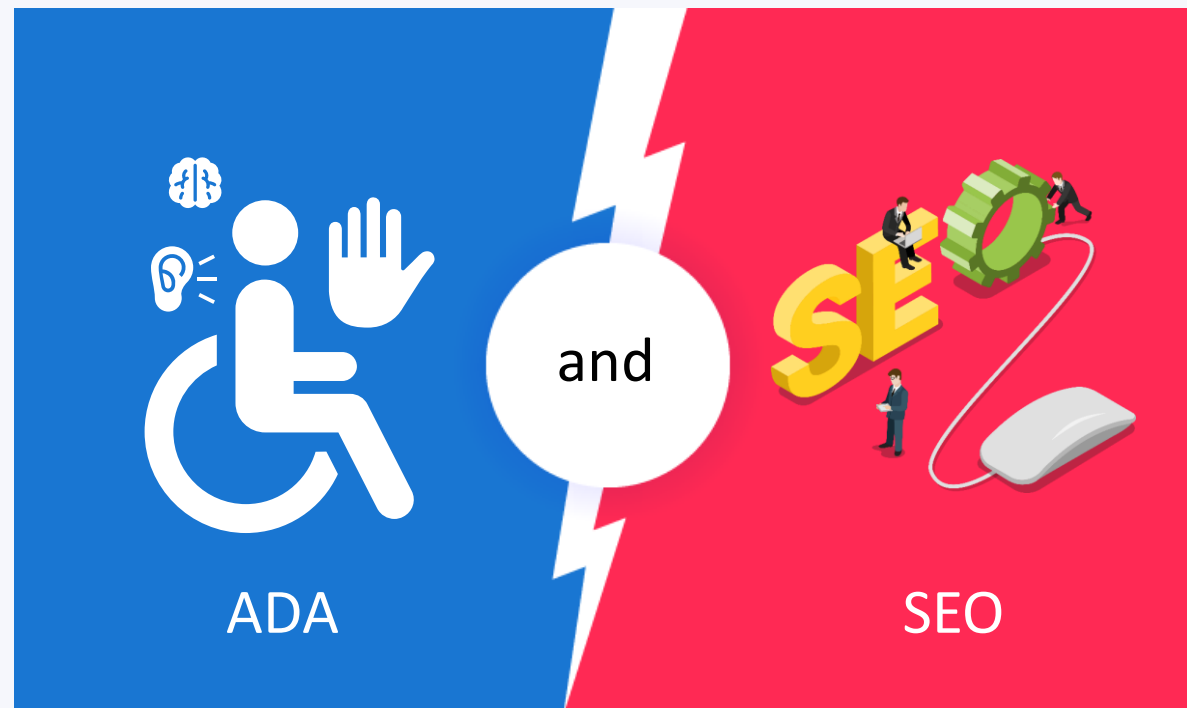
Additionally, most of the mobile apps come with audio and video files and people with disabilities find it as a serious impediment. So include an option for captioning on the videos, full-transcript for audios, and make sure both are in synchronization to avoid any mess-ups. Even the color palette should be carefully curated and used as people with color blindness may find it difficult to use your apps in close proximity.

And most importantly, due to the small screen sizes, users may find it difficult to fill in the forms at times. The error messages should be clear and on point. People who rely on assistive technologies like screen readers should be able to comprehend the error message perfectly. There are a ton of other things you could do to make your mobile app ADA compliant and make sure you follow the same guidelines you use for non-mobile applications as they are overlapping.

# ADA and SEO

Building ADA-compliant websites do much more than improving the usability of people with disabilities. Your website is more likely to improve its search engine optimization. This is because the goals of **web accessibility and SEO are more aligned**. One can build clean interfaces and easily navigable options for helping people with disabilities that eventually improve your SEO as well owing to the longer user stay and reduced bounce rates. For instance, among various shared goals of web accessibility and SEO are having alt text, providing closed captions, and transcriptions.

Search engines like Google also rely on the text equivalent sources of video and audio files which is also one of the WCAG standards. The multimedia transcript and closed captioning also help improve the SEO as it facilitates easy indexing by search engines like Google to find the relevant information on the website. So, making a site ADA compliant automatically calls for a better SEO.



# Benefits of Making Websites ADA Compliant



Creating a website that meets **ADA web accessibility** helps people with disabilities to have proper access to the website products, services, and content. However, this isn't limited to the impact on people with disabilities alone, there are a whole lot of other benefits that help your business as well.

- Widen your audience reach
- Broaden Market Penetration
- Meet the needs of website visitors
- Avoid legal penalties
- Improves the usability of the site
- Write high-quality code
- Create an inclusive user experience
- Improve search engine rankings
- Build brand reputation
- Help your business grow
- Better Your conversion potential
- Save costs due to penalties
- Improve Your business revenue
- Gain a competitive edge

# ADA Audit

If you want to avoid a legal lawsuit and script a fantastic user experience, you should be steadfast in your commitment to building ADA-compliant websites.

1. **Get your website or mobile app audited for ADA compliance using WCAG standards**
2. **Seek remediation or fix the website to address the issues uncovered in your audit**

**Conduct an ADA audit** to identify the accessibility issues on your website. Run through the WCAG 2.0 or 2.1 AA guidelines to uncover any inaccessible areas. While conducting an independent audit, go for a manual audit and not just an automated scan.

Post-audit, you can also ask for remediation measures along with the report results. Remediation measures can help you make the updates to your website. A skilled and professional developer can help with both the audit and remediation.





# How Can Small Businesses Afford Accessibility?



If you are a small business or a startup with tight budget resources, you can always find companies that provide **ADA accessibility services** at competitive prices. You need to remember that you are going to have greater returns on your ADA investment. Your content would reach a wider audience and that is likely to improve your conversion rate. Also, you are saving unnecessary costs levied by the courts.

All in all, the benefits overcompensate the initial costs invested in hiring a development team. So, don't make it an afterthought. Building an inclusive website is always a good business decision. So, irrespective of your business scale and size, find a good web development company that could help reach both your access as well as business goals.

# How Can Skynet Technologies Help you with ADA Web Accessibility Services?

Ensuring that a website is fully compliant with ADA standards can be a challenging endeavor to embark on but it is one of the vital business aspects to protect your business against complex lawsuits and offer a more inclusive user experience. If you are low on resources and do not have the bandwidth for ADA web design and ADA web development, you can go for a technical team that would serve the purpose.

**Skynet Technologies** has been in the web development business for over 20 years and is aware of all the nuances of building the best websites that could widen the user reach. We have the technical bandwidth to make all your digital assets be it a website or mobile app conform with the WCAG AA guidelines to avoid any potential legal litigations your website may face. If you are looking for quicker ways to achieve ADA web accessibility, you can bank on us for getting closer to ADA compliance.

Our ADA web accessibility services include **ADA compliant web design**, ADA compliant **web development**, ADA compliance mobile app, ADA web audit, and Remediation. We also offer ADA consultation services if you need to know further details about ADA and web accessibility services. To learn more about ADA web accessibility compliance in 2021, reach out to our web development team by **requesting a consultation**.



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