Making Technology Accessible for All

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Anyone who creates or manages a website, produces video content, designs PowerPoint presentations, plans events or sends emails should be attuned to ways they can ensure full accessibility for everyone.

That is the message driving the work of a team of specialists at the UA's Disability Resources, who at a local and national level are driving best practices associated with full accessibility of electronic and information technology.

"Our goal is that accessibility would no longer be something we think about at the end, but that it is built into the design or selection of the technology," said Jeff Bishop, the IT accessibility analyst for the UA Disability Resource Center.

"That is the true answer: If something is being developed or implemented, we need to consider accessibility when we are looking at security, functionality and other assets," Bishop said. "We strongly urge collaboration to ensure accessibility."

While litigation drives much of the national discussion around ensuring that electronic and information technology is universally accessible, the UA team has been working more proactively, Bishop said.

Most recently, the Disability Resources team launched its itAccessibility site to inform the campus community about the larger University commitment to access and ways to create accessible content for individuals with and without disabilities.

Among the tips:

- Use formal headline elements? do not merely bold or italicize sections? to organize documents and ensure screen readers can access the information.
- Be extra attentive to contrast when designing a website or crafting an email. Lighter shades of gray, orange and yellow are especially difficult to read.
- Avoid adding embedded images and/or image-only PDFs to emails.
- Ensure that website images are "visible," use the proper label on images with an alt attribute in image tags.
- If you are responsible for purchasing and procurement, either choose products that have built-in accessibility features or work with the Disability Resources team to determine solutions for improved accessibility.
- Need help with audio or video captioning? Disability Resources may be reached via email at itAccess@email.arizona.edu or by phone at 520-621-3268.

"We want a paradigm shift," said Carol Funckes, the UA's senior associate director of Disability Resources. "We want people to always think about accessibility."
Working in partnership with units across and beyond campus for the past few years, the team has regularly facilitated training sessions on IT accessibility. For example, the team has been working with the UA BookStores to begin offering more accessible versions of textbooks and supplemental materials. The team also has been working with the UA Libraries' Summon Search software and with UA Online to ensure accessible course content.

The team also conducts product testing and has designed guidelines and tutorials for the campus community to help drive decisions, especially as students, faculty and staff are engaged in program development, instruction, outreach and other forms of innovation.

In fact, the team has been offering training to students that is forward-thinking ? designed to aid them in their professional careers as program developers.

"Accessibility is a fast-growing trend in the higher education field," said Dawn Hunziker, the IT accessibility consultant at Disability Resources. "Our biggest challenge is that technology is moving so fast and is being incorporated into all aspects of our lives. It's very exciting to watch all the changes and ensure that the benefit of technology is available to everyone. At the same time, it can be daunting."

Both Bishop and Hunziker have been working on a national level, serving on various committees and boards working to shape standards associated with core products ? such as software and consumer-driven hardware, including operating systems and mobile devices.

"We are working to increase the UA's leadership position across the nation," Hunziker said. "We want to keep the momentum going and be a voice for access, ensuring that we are creating accessible environments throughout higher education."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/making-technology-accessible-all

Links:
[2] mailto:itAccess@email.arizona.edu