

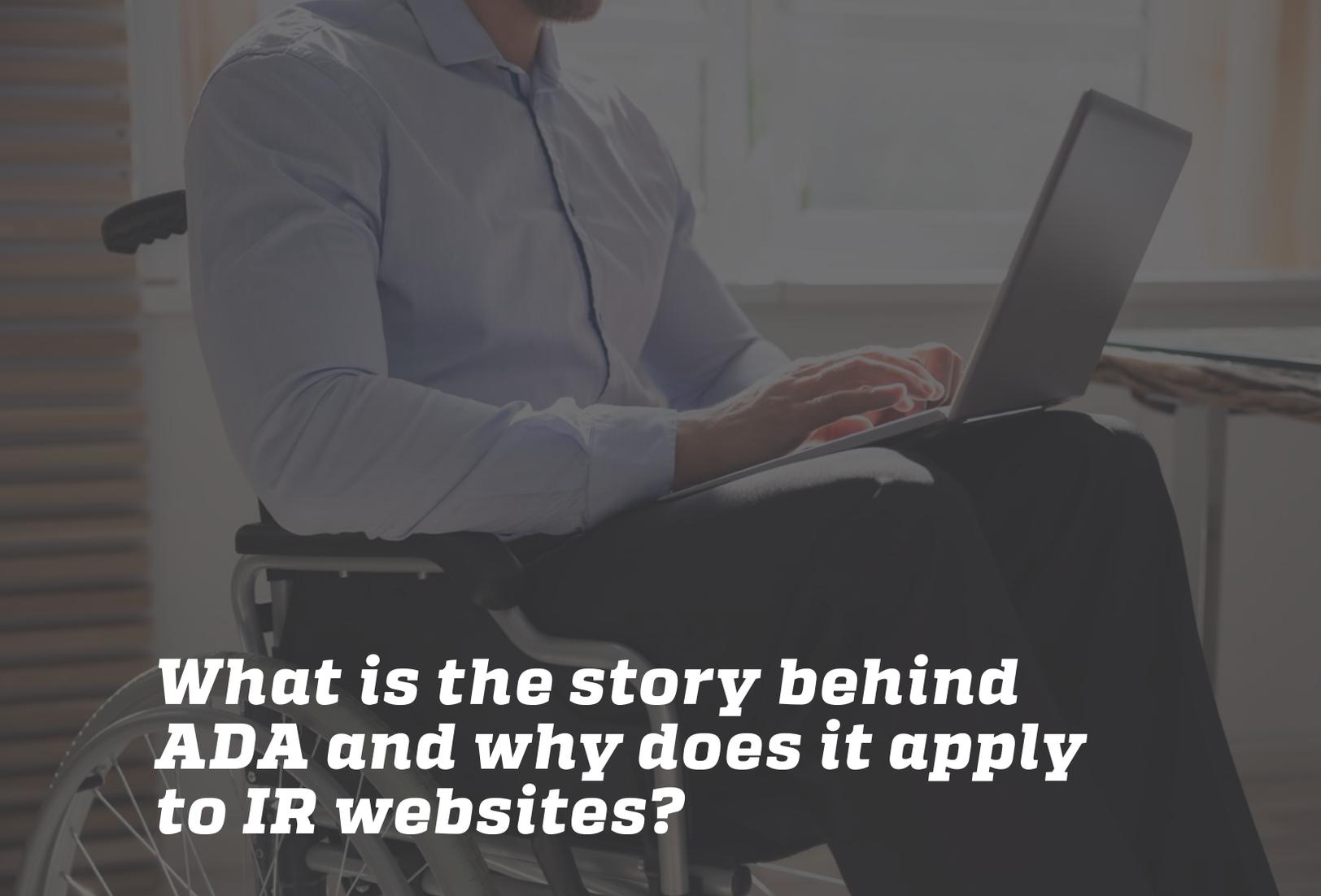


Why Your IR Website Needs To Be ADA Compliant

Everything you need to know about your IR website and WCAG 2.0 ADA compliance and testing

IR Website ADA Whitepaper

Tom Runzo, Equisolve

A person wearing a light blue button-down shirt is seated in a wheelchair, typing on a silver laptop. The background is a blurred office setting. The text is overlaid on the lower portion of the image.

What is the story behind ADA and why does it apply to IR websites?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became federal law in 1990 with the purpose of preventing discrimination while providing accessibility to those with disabilities. In 2003, the Department of Justice extended the accessibility requirements to public websites for domains ending in .gov and .edu.

On January 18, 2017, the [U.S. Access Board](#) issued a final rule that updated accessibility requirements covered by Section 508 and refreshed the guidelines for telecommunications equipment that is subject to Section 255 of the Communications Act.

What does ADA compliance have to do with IR websites?

Creating an ADA compliant IR website goes beyond best practices. If your IR website isn't ADA compliant you are alienating millions of people with disabilities. If that's not enough of a reason, it also will improve your IR website's Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Additionally, many institutions and fund managers follow Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) guidelines and look favorably on companies that demonstrate accessibility. Finally, civil lawsuits have been filed against several public companies whose websites are not ADA compliant.

From a more general business point of view, you want your IR website to be accessible to anyone who chooses to visit regardless of any disabilities. To put this into perspective, the National Federation of the Blind reports visual disability in 7.7 million (2.4%) of U.S. adults (ages 16-75). Approximately 8% of males with Northern European heritage (1-in-12 men) are color blind, or about 2.7 million, and another one million are deaf. These are just a few of the disabilities that must be considered for ADA website accessibility.

To be accessible, special consideration is given to how the code is written so that screen readers can narrate the text. Certain design factors are also required for accessibility that will be explained later in more detail.

In case all of these factors are not enough reasons to make your IR website ADA compliant then think about this: www.sec.gov is required by law to be an ADA compliant website, and your IR website contains the same SEC filings found on www.sec.gov.

You can see where this is going. It's only a matter of time, so why not be a leader in ADA compliance?

Additionally, since there is no clear laws governing the requirements for a business website, we have seen a significant influx in ADA lawsuits targeting business websites that are not accessible. Consequently, there are law firms on both sides of the argument that specialize in ADA compliance.

Federal Website Accessibility Lawsuits

2017 vs 2018 (First 6 Months)



Source: Seyfarth Shaw LLP

What types of disabilities are considered when developing an ADA accessible website?

The following disabilities are to be considered:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Cognitive
- Neurological
- Physical
- Speech

In addition to those with disabilities, there are benefits to all people in exceptional circumstances, such as:

- Temporary disabilities like a broken arm or temporary blindness
- Those with changing abilities due to age
- Situational limitations due to bright lights or areas where listening to audio is difficult or impossible
- Smartwatches and devices with very small screens and various input modes

What are the guidelines for making a website ADA Compliant?

In 2012, the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 \(WCAG\)](#) became the international standard for website accessibility. WCAG provides four principles (P.O.U.R.) that encompass 14 guidelines.

Perceivable

- Provide text alternatives to images
- Provide captions/text on multimedia
- Present content in different ways including assistive technology like screen readers
- Make it easier to see and hear content

Real World Example

Using shapes in addition to color to designate board members from chairpersons works for those that are color blind.

Using the image alt tag to describe the image such as; image alt=" audit committee chairperson" will allow a screen reader to properly articulate what is being displayed.

Name	Committee
John Smith	Member
Aretha James	Chair
Juan Perez	Member
Tom Cobley	Member

Operable

- Make all functionality available from a keyboard
- Give users enough time to read and use content
- Help users navigate and find content
- Do not use content that may trigger physical reactions such as seizures
- Make it easy to use alternative inputs other than a keyboard

Real World Example

Providing user-controlled slides to allow the user to cycle through the slides rather than auto-rotate. This assures that you have given the visitor ample time to comprehend the subject matter as well as to act on any desired action.



Understandable

- Make text readable and comprehensible
- Make content appear and operate in predictable ways
- Helps users avoid and correct mistakes

Real World Example

Provide enough contrast between readable elements and their backgrounds.



Abc

Abc



Abc

Abc

Robust

- Content must be robust enough to be interpreted by multiple technologies
- Compatibility must be maximized with current and future user tools

Real World Example

This is the most technology dependent of all the principles. As the website is created, a focus on web standards and rigorous testing should be accounted for. Robust coding to web standards will allow for successful parsing of content from user agents, such as browsers and screen readers.



These guidelines and principles comply with WCAG on three levels:

1. Level A (must satisfy).
2. Level AA (should satisfy): Makes sites accessible to people with a wider range of disabilities, including the most common barriers.
3. Level AAA (may satisfy): Most demanding level of WCAG compliance.

Does ADA Compliance Affect SEO?

Absolutely! Accessibility and great website development are closely related. In fact, Google encourages this by improving the organic rank for websites that are ADA compliant. While Google doesn't come out and say you get ranked higher organically, coding for accessibility clearly aligns with the fundamentals of search engine optimization. Additionally, the Google bots that index your IR website work very similarly to a screen reader used by the visually impaired.

How to Test Your IR Website For ADA Compliance

It is important to run your IR website through a service that can help identify ADA compliance issues like <http://wave.webaim.org/>. [WAVE](http://wave.webaim.org/) is maintained as a free service by [WebAIM](http://webaim.org/) – a non-profit organization based at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University.

This service will identify errors and warn against possible issues at different levels of compliance.

Will upgrading your IR Website to ADA Compliance Be Expensive?

If you are outsourcing your IR website, your vendor should upgrade your IR website at no charge. On the other hand, if you manage your IR website in-house, it will likely require anywhere from a few hours to a few days for your webmaster to test and ensure compliance.

Conclusion

Providing an accessible IR website is absolutely the right thing to do. In addition to the obvious accessibility benefits for those with disabilities, it will prevent your IR website from being penalized in organic search results and possibly become the target of an accessibility lawsuit. Given the fact that there is little to no cost and minimal time required to make your IR website ADA compliant, there is simply no reason not to comply.

Disclaimer

This White Paper has been prepared by Equisolve to provide information on recent regulations and developments of interest to our readers. It is not intended to provide legal advice for a specific situation. Equisolve assumes no responsibility to update the White Paper based upon events subsequent to the date of its publication, such as new legislation, regulations, and judicial decisions. You should consult with counsel to determine applicable legal requirements in a specific fact situation.



Tom Runzo, CEO
2455 E. Sunrise Blvd., Suite 1201
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304
954-858-8550
tom@equisolve.com
equisolve.com

