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Week 3 Group Discussion: Disabilities and Accessibility

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The six disabilities addressed in this week’s content were: color blindness, epilepsy, vision impairment, blindness, hearing impairment, deafness, and physical impairment. Each of these disabilities has a drastic effect on the overall accessibility of digital content. However, this does not mean that persons with one or more disabilities should be unable to access that content.

Vision focused disabilities are generally the most obvious issues which must be overcome. To cater to those people who are color blind, a site should use other means than color of conveying information (W3C, 2008, p. 1.4.1). Additionally, contrast between data objects should be maintained to a “ratio of at least 4.5:1” (W3C, 2008, p. 1.4.3). These two rules will ensure that the color palate of a site is not a hindrance to its users.

For those people who are visually impaired, or blind, visual data may be inaccessible regardless of layout. However, this does not mean that the data itself is inaccessible. By formatting the site so that all content is readable via assistive technology, such as Thunderstorm and WebbIE, these users will have access to the content, as well (Screenreader.net CIC, 2012) (WebbIE, NA).

The internet has been both a boon and a source of frustration for those people who are hearing impaired, or deaf. Tom Babinszki posted a blog entry on the Even Grounds accessibility site detailing an average day in the life of a deaf person on the web (Babinszki, 2010). After reading Tom’s entry, one comes to the understanding that, while the internet is full of text, the web is full of sound. The issues deaf people encounter are easily overcome by developers who are willing to take the time to give their audio content subtitles or captions. In other cases, a simple choice to choose a text version of an application, rather than an audio version, can make all the difference.

Epilepsy, while related to vision impairment, is something that developers rarely consider. Essentially, flashing content on a page can cause seizures in users with this disability. Section 2.3 of the WCAG addresses this fact by outlining the “Three Flashes or Below Threshold” (W3C, 2008, p. 2.3.1). Essentially, any content on a page which has visual movement (e.g. a .gif or video clip) does not flash more than three times in any given second. This ensures that the likelihood of vision related disturbances are minimized for these impaired users.

Finally, physical impairment is a disability that covers a wide range. However, the ability to make a site accessible for these individuals is easy. The site simply needs to be fully keyboard compatible. This means that a person who uses a keyboard type of device can use the keyboard’s functions to move through and navigate content, without hindrance (W3C, 2008, p. 2.4).

Overall, disability does not need to mean inaccessibility. There are easy solutions, which when followed, will make a site not only accessible for disabled users, but quite possibly, easier to navigate for everyone. The web is for the sharing of content, whether this is educational or enjoyment, no person should be denied access.

References

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