

WCAG 2.0 / Accessibility, is it an impossible standard that provides the basis for excuses?

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Since the inception and launch of WCAG 2.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines *WCAG*) 2.0 / <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>) it has been a bit of a bumpy road. Although several organisations claim compliance and a want to adopt it, its complexity, time requirements and the level of training/support required have challenged many. From speaking to clients, users and industry experts since the launch of WCAG 2.0 (automation) testing, we have found that the matter is seemingly becoming less important and an unachievable standard.

What's more the actual results for sites are also showing a downward trend. **Just 1.5%** of the 200 Government Sites in the *Central Gov. INDEX* (<https://sitemorse.com/index/uk-central-government/2016-q2>) are **anywhere near AA complaint** (WCAG 1.0 - Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), yet accessibility is claimed by lots and is a requirement.

Sitemorse are not trying to speak as experts, or want to defend anyone but, in discussing this, it seems that considerable numbers were at least heading towards WCAG 1.0 even though some considered it onerous and not all understood its importance. With a number of organisations achieving WCAG 1.0 (automated and manual checking in harmony to deliver accessibility), WCAG 2.0 is being considered over bearing and the sheer level of understanding and site work required to even start to embrace, let alone achieve it is seen as difficult to manage.

There are many benefits to an accessible site **but, if the standard itself is the reason the need is negated, then the value is considerably diminished.**

What we are suggesting, is to create a list of priorities that can be done to improve accessibility. This will be based on the data we have collected from 25+ billion pages and feedback from industry experts, clients and users. With this information we will consider the checkpoints of WCAG 2.0 and come up with 10 things that should be dealt with to improve accessibility which will all be understandable, manageable, measurable and achievable. By dealing with this list, the experience for all users regardless of their access needs will be improved. This isn't a perfect solution but by dealing with this list it can improve accessibility by 65-70% which is better than no improvement at all. If the top 10 could be agreed, we can then make these accessibility priorities something for all to meet, **which can be measured consistently and lead to accessibility improving step by step.**

Purists may complain about Sitemorse but, we are not looking to have any thoughts or comments as to the limitations of automated testing, as we know it isn't the only answer. However, we are now removing a swath of the requirements by **doing something that benefits the majority, which is far better than an excuse to do nothing.** It is not correct or appropriate for people to comment but it is more the reality, now is the time to be both practical and pragmatic.

If it would assist you, we are happy to offer any reader the report for their own site / content ([Example](#)) and once the WCAG 2.0 *Accessibility Top 10* have been circulated we can identify your initial priorities.

Article Links

(Web) [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#)

(Web) [UK Gov. INDEX](#)

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17 Comments

**Wilco Fiers**

Accessibility researcher

Accessibility is a complicated subject. Saying that's because of WCAG 2.0 is confusing cause and effect. There is a very broad spectrum of people that need some sort of accommodation for their disability. And there is the added complexity of assistive technologies that all behave a little different. Accessibility consultant is an expertise, as much as frontend developer or UX designer is. Boiling it down to a top 10 is not a bad idea. The 80/20 rule works pretty well, also for accessibility. But just do a quick search in Google for top 10 accessibility tips. There are lots of those out there already.

Totally granted, it's not looking all that good for the field. Our losses in many places outpace our gains. We need disruptive new approaches if we want a shot at a web that really is 'inclusive'. Maybe that takes a new approach on WCAG, or maybe 2.0 is just right as a basis for a new revolutionary solution to be build on top of it that would change everything. Fact is that nobody's ever solved this problem before, so there is nobody who can tell us.

If you care about this stuff, one of the best ways to help really is by engaging with the accessibility community at the W3C. W3C Community groups are open to anyone, and are a great place to explore new creative solutions such as for accessibility.

Like Reply | 9 Likes · 1 Reply

**Michelle Hay**

Digital Manager at Sitemorse

Thank you for your comments and suggestions. We very much agree that disruptive innovation is the way in which a fully accessibility web can be achieved – creating that innovation is the next step. We hope that this comprehensive list of 10 will be a great start to get the solution that is required.

Like Reply

**Adrian Roselli**

Consultant

I am not sure what you mean with the parenthetical use of "automation" in the sentence "... since the launch of WCAG 2.0 (automation) testing, we have found that the matter is seemingly becoming less important and an unachievable standard."

If you are talking about WCAG 2.0, it is a standard that has existed for 8 years and is generally well understood by practitioners. Organizations that are new to it, as with any organization new to any standard, law, or requirement, obviously find it onerous at first since it represents a change to existing processes and technologies.

That in itself does not make it less important.

In my experience, since WCAG 2.0 supercedes WCAG 1.0 and is the baseline used in international laws and in court settlements, organizations have not been trying to achieve WCAG 1.0 compliance for about 8 years. I am not sure who would still be trying to achieve 1.0. I cannot imagine anyone is suggesting trying to achieve 1.0. I certainly cannot understand why you are even drawing any comparisons to WCAG 1.0.

You suggest coming up with a list of 10 things that should be dealt with to improve accessibility. That has been done. There are numerous articles already presenting lists as brief as 5 items. Most of these are low hanging fruit that can be tested with automated tools.

You also suggest you will use data from 25+ billion web pages (which you have admitted are mostly doing it wrong), industry experts (I suggest you start with W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative and its membership), clients (who should not be guiding this as it is in their best interests to block any efforts), and users (which must include users with a broad range of disabilities or you are doing it wrong). I would suggest you start with the WCAG standard instead.

You have already stated that "Sitemorse are not trying to speak as experts," which may explain why you are unaware that there is already a lengthy selection of automated accessibility testing tools — there are 76 listed at this W3C page: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools/>

Even with you speaking as non-experts, this surprises me since the product you wrote this article to shill is listed there. It also greatly reduces my confidence in your product.

I understand your desire to keep criticism of this article at bay, especially when there is a lot of criticism to offer. However, saying "It is not correct or appropriate for people to comment" or "we are not looking to have any thoughts or comments as to the limitations of automated testing" will not fix the flaws in this piece.

I encourage readers to use this quick list of 10 items for your own testing and also to use one of the other tools on the WAI list (as those authors seems to care about accessibility for users, not as a way to sell a product to clients who want to avoid WCAG):

1. use valid HTML; 2. set the lang attribute of the page; 3. use proper heading structure; 4. put alt attributes on images; 5. make sure color contrast is good; 6. make sure form controls have labels; 7. use closed captions and audio descriptions; 8. allow users to stop and pause timed media; 9. ensure links have more meaningful text than "read more;" 10. make sure all controls are usable by a keyboard.

That simple list, off the top of my head, can be checked with automated tools and is a great first step toward WCAG 2.0 AA compliance.

It does not and should not replace it by any means. After all, a shortened list generated by a company trying to pitch a product will not protect you in a lawsuit.

Like Reply | 19 Likes · 5 Replies



Tina Holmboe
IT Architect at Handelsbanken i Sverige

Could you show us an example of the algorithm that can automatically check point 9?

Like Reply



Adrian Roselli
Consultant

Tina Holmboe I am not going to write Sitemorse's code for them, but some first steps involve making sure the link text for every link on a page is unique. Then look for any link text that consists of some of the common patterns in default WordPress, Drupal, etc. templates, such as "read more," "click here," "next page," etc. (if Sitemorse truly has 25 billion web pages of data, its team can identify far more). Those can be automatic fails. Further, an algorithm could check for how long or short the link text is and flag it. Another step is to check that all link text throughout a site that points to a specific URL is consistent and flag when it is not. Those can be flags that require developer intervention to evaluate.

Like Reply



Adrian Roselli
Consultant

Michelle Hay The move from WCAG 1.0 to 2.0 has happened. It is already encoded into law (AA) within the US and elsewhere across the world. There are settled lawsuits that have further entrenched it in case law (also AA). The fact that anyone still thinks WCAG 1.0 has any relevance any more is the bigger issue as it can lead site owners to believe they can pick which version to support.

Anyone hired to provide accessibility testing who advocates for WCAG 1.0 or suggests WCAG 1.0 as a viable option is risking getting sued by their own client when their client is sued for accessibility failures. I know if I hired someone to mitigate risk, and I was sued as a result of that failed mitigation, I would turn around and sue the vendor.

The point is, do not move anyone from 1.0 to 2.0. Just get them to comply with WCAG 2.0 AA. And, frankly, if you are going to repeat that you are not speaking as experts on WCAG then *stop selling it as a service*.

Like Reply | 3 Likes



Adrian Roselli
Consultant

Michelle Hay, I think you deleted the comment to which I was replying. Now I know to screen-shot what you post.

Like Reply



Michelle Hay
Digital Manager at Sitemorse

Adrian Roselli no comments from this page have been deleted.

Like Reply



Léonie Watson
Director of Developer Communications, The Paciello Group (TPG)

You mention that "results for sites are showing a downward trend", and that "just 1.5% of 200 government sites... are anywhere near AA compliant (WCAG 2.0)".

It isn't clear when/if the Sitemorse Index reports switched to WCAG 2.0. The Index reports still reference WCAG 1.0, but in the article you point to the latest Index report as a reference for WCAG 2.0 compliance [1].

Using this Sitemorse press release from 2014 [2] as a reasonable indication that WCAG 2.0 was being used by that time, the figures from the Central Gov. Index reports suggest a fairly stable conformance rate for Level AA since then (2014 Q2 96%, Q2 2015 94%, Q2 2016 97%).

That said, the dataset needs to be significantly larger before patterns and trends can reasonably be identified. What really isn't clear, is how these results show that WCAG is the cause of any perceived trend?

You also mention "feedback from industry experts", but make it clear that Sitemorse does not speak from a position of expertise. Nobody thinks WCAG is perfect, but the interesting thing about the WCAG Working Group is that it consists of 85+ people from 30+ organisations, including some of the most respected names in the accessibility industry (SSB, Nomensa, TPG, Deque, Knowbility, Raise the Floor, Barrier Break and others). In other words it has a lot of people contributing a lot of knowledge and expertise. They even acknowledge the point you make - that WCAG can be challenging when you first encounter it - which is why they developed the WCAG Easy Checks as a simple checklist that everyone can use [3].

This isn't to say that no-one else has anything useful to contribute (far from it), but it does beg the question - why reinvent the wheel?

- [1] <https://sitemorse.com/index/uk-central-government/2016-q2>
 [2] <https://sitemorse.com/news/2014/4/11/sitemorse-helping-you-with-wcag20-across-your-digital-presence/>
 [3] <https://www.w3.org/WAI/EO/Drafts/eval/checks>

Like Reply | 18 Likes · 2 Replies



Tina Holmboe
IT Architect at Handelsbanken i Sverige

Personally, I think the problem(s) with WCAG 2 can be partially - if somewhat sarcastically - illustrated by this quote from their Easy Checks page:

"Click headings with [+] buttons to get hidden information"

(I can find NO heading that has a 'button' of any sort on that page)

Like Reply | 1 Like



Ryan Benson
508 Specialist at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Tina Holmboe At the top of the WAI page, it states it is a working draft, so things like hiding text to make it easier to consume for the editors, makes sense. If you review the live version[1], you'll find this issue is not one.

- [1] <http://www.w3.org/WAI/eval/preliminary>

Like Reply | 1 Like



Eric Scoles
Web Development and Internet Marketing Professional

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I'm not clear on how what you're advocating differs from WCAG 2.0 Level A compliance. You can even make a lot of progress toward Level AA compliance by just creating & adhering to 'a list of priorities that can be done to improve accessibility.'

Like Reply



Tina Holmboe
IT Architect at Handelsbanken i Sverige

It certainly isn't an impossible standard - but it does have too many holes (read: excuses). It's a fine line to walk between the "We wanna!" of marketing/hax0rs and "We want to be included!" of, well, everyone else.

Some days everyone have to give a little.

Like Reply



Robert Jolly
Accessibility Strategist, Project and Operations Team Lead

When you said this: "This will be based on the data we have collected from 25+ billion pages and feedback from industry experts, clients and users."

Will you please release your data for the rest of us in the industry to review and perform our own analysis on?

Like Reply | 4 Likes



Michelle Hay
Digital Manager at Sitemorse

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