How to jumpstart accessibility on your employee experience tools

Jumpstart the accessibility of your employee experience tools

The disability population is an "**emerging market larger than China**." With roughly one-quarter of the workforce **self-identifying as having a disability**, that's a lot of people in the talent pool who could successfully fill open positions at your company (or who are already working for you). And yet, so few organizations invest in having an accessible consumer-facing website, let alone in accessible internal systems for their employees.

There's no reason to miss out on the employees you need on your team. Do the right thing. Invest in accessible tools (looking at you, intranets and training software) that help everyone be more effective in their roles.

This guide will dive further into the benefits of accessibility and help you tackle some of the most common barriers to digital accessibility so you know what to look for and fix.

Accessibility impacts your bottom line — for better or worse — so make the investment in your internal systems

Creating accessible systems for your team is the right thing to do morally, but it also impacts your bottom line. Demonstrating your organization's commitment to accessibility lets people know their differences are accepted, welcomed and valued. That should be enough of a motivator to make sure your company's existing and yet-to-be-created internal systems are accessible for the employees who work hard for your company.

But there are also **business growth reasons to focus on digital accessibility**. First, technology is one of the central drivers of productivity and success in today's workforce. So when workplace technology is not accessible, it excludes certain employees.

The number of excluded employees is higher than you think for several reasons. Firstly, so many people live with **invisible disabilities** you aren't privy to. Also, your employees are not required to disclose disabilities, so it's likely people have disabilities you don't know about. Finally, everyone will experience a form of **situational disability** (illness, broken bone, even a loud environment) at one time or another, which will impact their ability to do their job as usual. For example, if you break your arm, you might need to use your keyboard to navigate instead of your mouse.

Regardless of the nature or cause of the disability, inaccessible sites and digital tools are a barrier to successful, ongoing employment.

The opposite is also true. When your technological infrastructure is accessible, it optimizes your employees' performance. They can use the tech they need to do their jobs well, therefore bettering your company's overall productivity — and profitability.

And if you continue to put accessibility on the back burner, it's likely you'll soon lag behind other companies. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) programs are commonplace at companies, and nearly 70% of these programs now **include digital accessibility as a part of being an inclusive workplace**. All to say, accessibility is becoming a large priority — as it should be — in the labor market and beyond.

PSA: Usability and accessibility are not interchangeable

Before we go any further and offer ways to make your internal systems more accessible, it's important to understand that usability and accessibility are not one in the same.

Accessibility is a facet of usability and goes a long way toward creating a good user experience (UX). But it's very possible to have an accessible platform without having a usable one — and vice versa. So you need to be sure you are considering both accessibility and usability best practices as you develop and optimize your employee experience tools.

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The good news? Accessibility features often make a system more usable by default. Just think about many of the products we use daily that were initially designed to help people with disabilities participate more fully in everyday life, including:

- Curb cuts (the little ramps built into the curb of a sidewalk or road)
- Siri and Alexa
- Video captions

When you keep people who may have the most difficulty navigating your technology top-of-mind, you'll automatically craft a better product for everyone else.

Make your employee tools accessible, one step at a time

Despite its benefits, understanding what accessibility looks like in practice can be overwhelming. And creating a user experience that is accessible and exceptional is not something just anyone can tackle. Fortunately, there are a handful of tasks you can take on to get started on your journey to accessible employee tools that make an incredible difference.
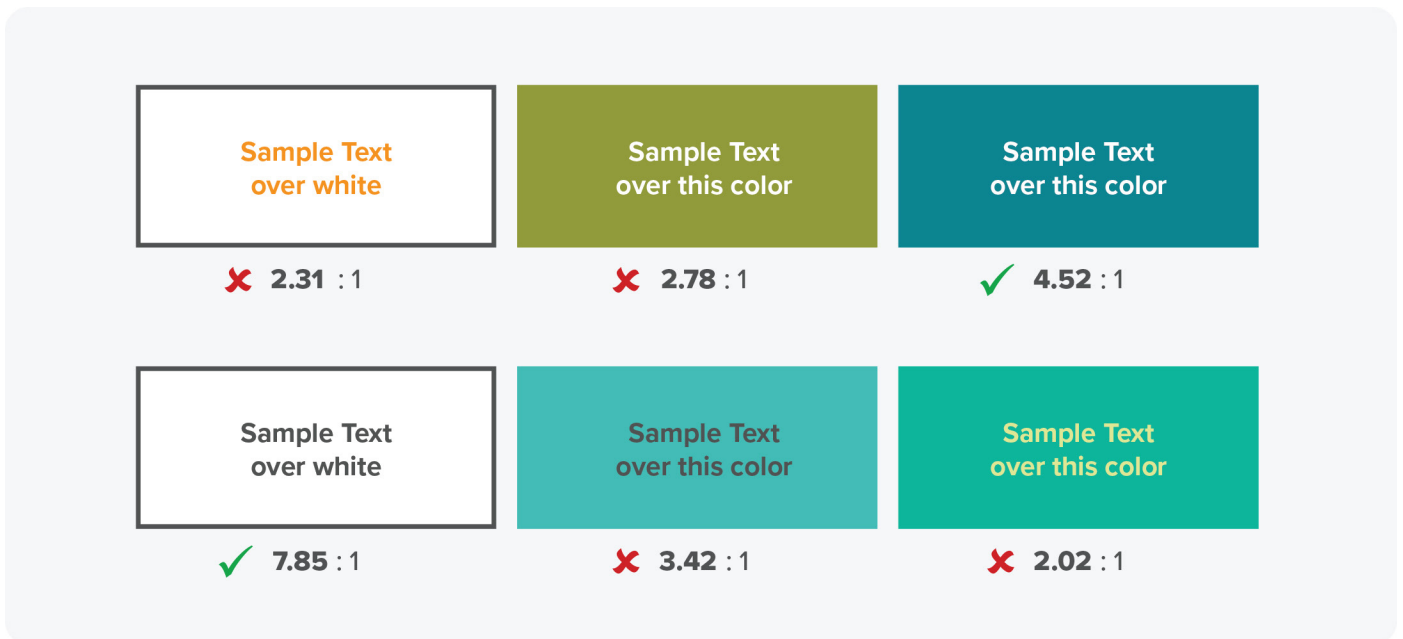
There are several lists out there detailing the most common website accessibility issues. The issues included in these lists fluctuate. However, there are several issues that reliably make the lists. And there are some that, with a little guidance, you can address yourself. We've identified them in this guide as a place for you to begin.

1. Color contrast

Color contrast, or how one color stands out from another, is an important consideration when creating communications and designing your tech platforms. You need to be sure that the colors you use for text and graphical elements have enough contrast from the background colors they're placed on.

Color contrast is mathematically driven. This explains why one particular color combination provides enough contrast but a slightly different and very similar combination does not. So you can't rely on your eye or intuition to select a good palette. Instead, there are many free online tools you can use to check contrast. One available tool is **WebAIM's Contrast Checker**.

Ensuring your selected colors have sufficient contrast will ensure your communications can be read by people with a variety of vision impairments, such as low vision, color deficiencies or loss of contrast sensitivity. This also helps ensure your materials meet common industry standards for accessibility, or **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**. And, colors with sufficient contrast are generally more legible for everyone.

Sample Text over white	**Sample Text over this color**	**Sample Text over this color**
✖ **2.31** : 1	✖ **2.78** : 1	✔ **4.52** : 1
Sample Text over white	**Sample Text over this color**	**Sample Text over this color**
✔ **7.85** : 1	✖ **3.42** : 1	✖ **2.02** : 1

2. Alternative text

Alternative text, or alt text, is a written description of an image that can be read aloud by assistive technology for users with vision disabilities. Assistive technology is any tool, device or software that helps someone with a disability perform tasks and participate in activities that might otherwise be challenging for them.

It's a sad but true fact that many people forgo alt text when developing a digital tool. They don't know what it is or why it's important, so they just don't fill in that field. You can easily remedy the situation by adding alt text to every image within your internal tools. In the alt text field, simply explain what the image depicts and why it relates to the words on the page.

✔ A conceptual illustration of three diverse people building an accessible website including closed captions and controls for video, transcripts for podcasts and alt text for images.

✖ Three people making a website.

✖ A conceptual illustration of three diverse people building and accessible website. The background is tan and has charts and some abstract plants. The first person, a woman with pale peach skin and red hair wearing a white shirt and green pants, is holding a tablet. The second person, a woman with brown skin wearing a red tank top and navy pants, is adding a podcast with a transcript. The third person, a man with olive-colored skin wearing a turquoise shirt and gray pants, is pointing to the computer screen. There also is an image with alt text.

Another tip: You should avoid embedding text in photos. If you must do so, add the embedded text as alt text.

By the way, alt text is a great example of how making something accessible also makes it more usable for everyone. Alt text is offered in place of an image that fails to load when someone has a slow internet connection, for example. They can read the alt text to understand the image without having to wait for it to load.

3. Headings and consistency

It's important to use headlines and subheads consistently to organize the content on your internal platforms. This helps your employees — with or without disabilities — quickly scan and understand your content. And while this is important for people with sight, it is a critical way of navigation for screen reader users. **Nearly two-thirds of screen reader users surveyed by WebAIM use headings** (as long as they're properly implemented) as their primary way to explore a page.

Moreover, never skip heading levels. For example, whether you are working in your website's CMS or creating a Microsoft Word document, do not use Heading 1 (H1) then skip to Heading 3 (H3). This creates visual inconsistencies and also interferes with how information is presented to team members who use assistive technology.

✓ **H1 Heading**

H2 Heading

H3 HEADING

Body copy paragraph

✗ **H2 Heading**

H1 Heading

H3 HEADING

Body copy paragraph

✗ **H1 Heading**

H3 HEADING

Body copy paragraph

4. Styling

There are several things to consider when styling your content, but three easy places to start are:

- **Center-aligned text should be used sparingly.** Left-justified or left-aligned paragraph styling supports readability and comprehension for all visual readers, and works best for people who use screen readers.

- **All caps text should also be used sparingly.** Use on longer lengths of content reduces legibility but screen readers misinterpret this content as acronyms and read content out letter-by-letter. When all caps text is used, the text should be typed in sentence case then styled as all caps.

- **There is no set-in-stone guideline for minimum type size** because shape, size and legibility varies widely from font to font. A good guide for online content is 16 px for body content with headlines and subheads increased at appropriate increments to create hierarchy. Minimums for printed materials should be determined based on application, reading expectations and viewing distance.

5. Hyperlinks

Ambiguous link text such as "click here" or "read more" slows all users down; it requires readers to search the surrounding content for context. And this link text can be a total roadblock for someone using a screen reader that presents information like headings and links in grouped lists. Imagine pulling up a list of links and hearing "read more link" over and over again without being able to see or understand what "more" even refers to. That's a frustrating experience, and a waste of time for an employee trying to figure out a piece of information they need to do their job.

Instead, write descriptive link text. Something like, "Review your 2024 employee benefits package" is more helpful for everyone.
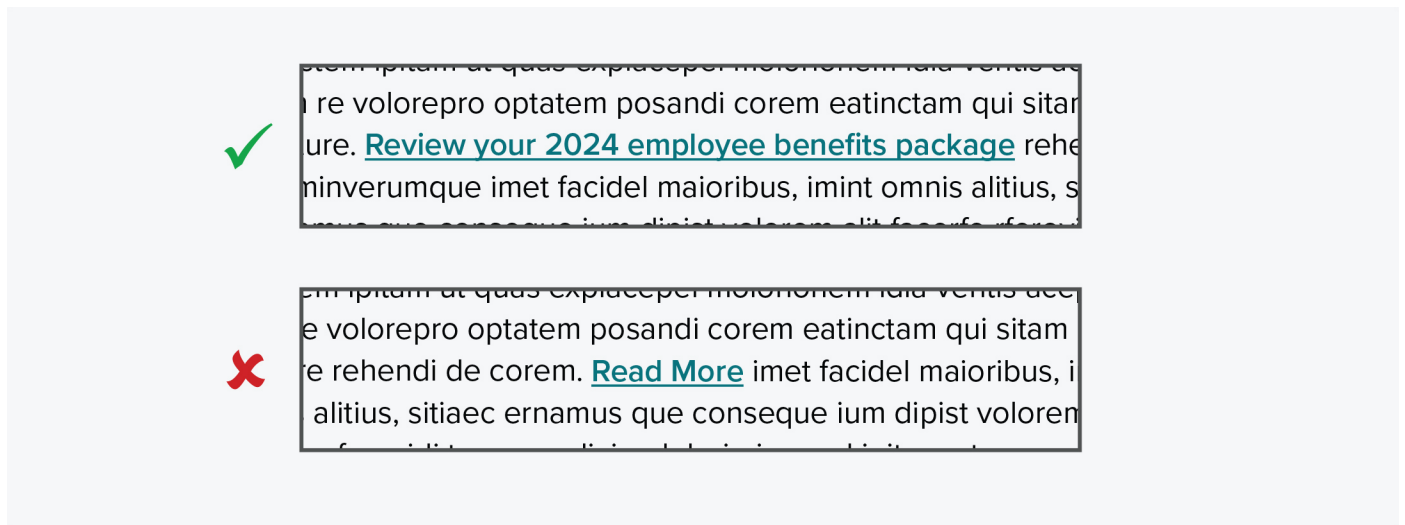
6. Video captions and transcripts

Training videos or other video content can be a great resource. But for employees with hearing impairments, a video without captions is unusable. What's more, captions help everyone. Captions give people the option to read the text if they need or prefer to. For example, your employees might be watching training videos on the floor of your store where it's loud.

You should also consider providing transcripts. Transcripts support those who would rather read than watch/listen to content. This could include anyone with attention disorders or cognitive differences, or vision disabilities. With transcripts, these folks can read at their own pace or have assistive tech read to them.

SEO bonus: When you add a transcript, you're adding searchable text to the page.

Your accessibility journey is just beginning

Once you've addressed each of the areas mentioned above, your internal systems are on their way to being usable for all of your employees. But there's still a long way to go to achieve holistic accessibility. Other common accessibility barriers we see include:

- **Inaccessible forms and documents**
- Poor HTML structure
- Lack of keyboard accessibility and navigability
- A bad UX, especially on mobile
- Clickable areas that are too small

Correcting these accessibility issues on your platforms is, unfortunately, not as straight-forward as correcting the first set of common challenges we noted. This is where a partner might come in handy. At Sanger & Eby, we're accessibility experts. Let us handle the more complex accessibility issues impacting the tools your employees need to do their jobs, so you can get back to doing yours.