

ADA and Your Website

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ADA Website Compliance

Navigating the Current Landscape

The Americans with Disabilities Act (**ADA**) is an important civil rights measure that hoteliers have supported since its inception in 1990. The law mandates that persons with a **disability** have equal access to hotel facilities and amenities to help ensure a welcoming experience for all guests.

The thinking behind the **ADA** now extends to **hotel website** accessibility for disabled persons related to how information is presented and reservations are made online. The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) has taken notice, and their position on how this is currently affecting the **hotel** industry is stated below.

AHLA Statement

An Emerging **Compliance** Cottage Industry to Watch

AHLA and our members strongly support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are committed to ensuring that individuals with disabilities are provided unfettered access to our properties.

Indeed, the intent of the ADA is to prohibit discrimination and ensure all Americans have equal access to public accommodations. Unfortunately, the law has been used as a weapon by scheming lawyers seeking to extort easy settlements from small business owners through demands for exorbitant attorney's fees after alleging ambiguous violations of the law. AHLA is working with federal lawmakers to help find a remedy to the growing "cottage industry" of bad actors exploiting the ADA and small business owners. The lodging industry applauds the House of Representatives for passing the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017 (H.R. 620) that would provide hoteliers a defined period of time to address a violation to ADA before a lawsuit can move forward.

<https://www.ahla.com/issues/americans-disabilities-act>

A Good Faith **Compliance** Effort: Regulatory Guidelines vs. Law

The Americans with Disabilities Act (**ADA**) is law.

The Web Content **Accessibility** Guidelines (WCAG) is not law, yet.

Taking steps to evaluate your **hotel's website accessibility** means you are making a good faith effort to adhere to industry-standard best practices related to **ADA compliance** and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA (WCAG). While WCAG is not yet law, it's important to be prepared, and be ready for change. In the meantime, the realities are as follows.

- No **website** can meet 100% **compliance** for **ADA**/WCAG because we and the industry are operating from guidelines, not approved and regulated legislation.
- The guidelines change without notice, and any changes you make to your **website** after launch (i.e. update to images and/or some text) may affect your **compliance**.

But this doesn't mean that you should do nothing. We highly recommend that you conduct a **Website Performance Analysis** on your site regularly, especially after you make substantial changes. Keep a record of your regular audit results and fixes made as evidence should a legal suit occur.

Issues Defined

Finding the Must-Fix Issues to **Make Your Website Compliant**

Vizergy's **Website Performance Analysis** service options can help you determine **ADA** issues that you may or may not need to address based on their severity and cost/benefit or risk factors.

A **high-severity issue** presents a good chance that the issue will impede a user with impaired vision from using the **website**. Some examples include:

- Images with no alt tags
- Form fields with no labels
- Duplicate HTML ids
- Missing or wrong placement of H1 elements
- Insufficient link text (such as "click here" or "learn more")

You should address these issues. Details are provided on this addendum. <link to addendum>

Less severe, cautionary issues do not fully prevent a disabled person from using your **website**. However, they may decrease the ease of use or possibly present hurdles to navigating the site by confusing an impaired user. Some common examples are:

- Redundant ALT text – if two or more images have the same alternative text label
- Redundant links – two adjacent elements have links to the same location (such as an image and a call to action button)
- Justified text – when text is styled to be fully justified, it can create inconsistent word spacing that decreases the legibility of the text
- Links to PDF documents – PDF documents are considered less user accessible than HTML page content

Based on the results of your **Website** Performance Analysis, Vizergy ADA specialists will recommend which of your issues are important to address to protect your **hotel**, and which may be optional. Vizergy aims to **make your website** as **compliant** as is possible under the current guidelines, in the most cost-effective way.

Common Issues Addendum: **Website** Performance Analysis for **ADA Compliance**

The following expands upon common issues found through **website** audits for **ADA**:

Forms

Forms are one of the most important areas that we focus on because this affects the DRSB, which appears on all pages of a **hotel website**. This can cause many error issues.

Form fields need to be properly labeled so that visually impaired users can know which information or selection is associated with every form input / select box, etc.

Images & Alt Tags

Inline images need to have alt tags (alternative text) that describe what is in the image. Otherwise, screen readers have no idea what the image contains.

We build all current widgets with an alt tag field that corresponds to the image. (Note: the one area where we do not have control over this is in the text editor—the generic, “any HTML allowed” content box that is bundled with many widgets.

This gives you the ability to manage or add the greatest range of page content—that is why we provide it—but that WYSIWYG editor does not provide an image alt tag check. We find this is an area that, over time, can cause problems as content is added to the site.

Links

There are several ways that links can cause issues and confuse users: elements marked up as links but which are empty (often found in icons or control interfaces on sliders, etc.), links which are not descriptive enough (such as “Learn More” or “Click Here”), or duplicate link text that goes to different pages (such as a portal site that has several links labeled “Careers” that link to a brand careers page as well as a location-specific career page respectively).

Some of these issues have been corrected in our templates and widgets. Other times they require a manual audit of the site because they occur in content or in various menus throughout site.

Headings

Proper use of heading text is important because there are several ways this can cause errors: if a page has no <h1> element, if there are multiple <h1> elements, if an <h2> or <h3> comes before an <h1> in the markup, if there are empty heading elements, etc.

Some of this is addressed in the template, but most often it requires diligent content entry as well as manual audit. This is another area where a client adding content to the page can cause errors over time.

Presentational Attributes Used

This refers to outdated means of positioning HTML elements using inline markup, often found on images to align or set dimensions to, or in iframes.

This usually requires a manual audit, as it can appear in default video iframe embed code, etc. When we find it in any of our widgets, we update the widget with the current compliant styling format.

Incorrect Reference to “Aria” Elements

This often refers to aria elements – which are used to label elements for screen reader use – that are not labeled correctly for various reasons. They are often found in modal popups where code has been copied and pasted from Bootstrap example documentation or from other sources. When we find this occurrence in widgets, we address and correct.

Other Image Issues

There are various issues that can be present with the way images are used, such as text within an image or the use of “decorative images,” which are images used within the CSS and removed from the content itself.

These issues are not marked as high a priority, but if found with a manual audit, we will correct or confirm that they are adhering to the standard.

General HTML Issues

There are certain HTML5 elements that require certain labels or to be named in certain ways. There is also a required “hidden” link at the top of the content that can be accessed via the tab key that should be present to skip over repeated content to get to the page main content.

Additionally, certain markup is considered outdated such as the use of the tag to make text bold or certain elements that should fall within the boundaries of a containing element. These elements and

issues have been or are being addressed in our templates as well as all current custom website builds moving forward.

Color Contrast

This is considered an AA issue, but one that there is not a strong consensus on the best way to address.

Even in the Siteimprove™ seminar, the presenter stated that color contrast was a tricky area and perhaps not one that would fall into a high priority in terms of meeting compliance standards.

Without fail, every site I have seen has some type of color contrast issue, usually related to text color not being of high enough contrast to the background container. This can in some cases make it difficult for those with visual impairment but not using screen readers (those visually looking at the screen) to see displayed text.

Often these are brand colors and if we followed this rule to the letter, all sites would have very stark color schemes with no subtleties. So, for the time being, we have been noting the issue when found so that a client is aware of it and can make the decision on whether to adjust or not.

Third-Party Embeds

Third-party embeds include Google maps, social media feeds, tracking codes, etc. This is another tricky one – even the big players like Google maps are not compliant.

The map itself contains many errors, with images missing alt text, empty select form elements, etc.

We routinely find third-party tracking/analytics code that uses tracking pixels that flag for missing alt text, or various third-party widgets with improperly formatted iframes that we are not able to adjust. In this case, it is important that the client make the decision if they want to continue to use this third-party code on their site.