



Accessible Internal Communications

Creating an accessible workplace doesn't begin and end with the accessibility of your organisation's physical environment. In today's new normal of increased hybrid working and employees working remotely, it's never been more important to ensure cohesion and connectivity amongst your staff. Accessible internal communications are therefore crucial for inclusivity, and for boosting employee engagement and productivity.

Below we've included the top factors to consider when creating accessible internal comms.

To learn more, book a free 20-minute consultation with one of our accessibility experts.

Make a strategic commitment to ensuring your intranet is accessible

Simply stating that your intranet must be accessible isn't enough. Steps must be taken to enforce accessibility standards for your intranet, and guidelines are available to ensure you get it right.

Be transparent about what sites are included, state ownership for accessibility, and be clear on your budget and time for accessibility testing. **The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** are a set of guidelines for making digital content accessible for disabled people. The WCAG was developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), an international standards organisation for the internet.

It is imperative that anyone who uploads content onto the intranet has knowledge of how to make it accessible. The following are key points to consider:

Use hyperlinks correctly.

Avoid long hyperlinks or links which simply say “click here”. The link text should be descriptive and clearly describe what it links to.

Make any functions accessible.

You should be able to use all the functions using just a keyboard and voice control systems.

Use HTML headings such as H1 and H2.

This is essential if someone uses screen reader software to access the site.

Don't rely on colour.

Colour should never be the sole navigational tool or the only way to provide information.

Use alt text wherever possible.

Ensure all images have alt text or are marked as decorative if they do not provide any information and are purely there to make the site look good.

Check your colour contrast.

All images and page content should have a sufficient colour contrast between the text and the background. The minimum ratio should be 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text (at least 18pt) or bold text. **WebAIM** colour contrast checker is a free and easy-to-use tool to check this.

Review your internal brand guidelines with accessibility in mind

Are your logos, colour palettes, fonts, and styles accessible?

Keep logos simple, avoid text over busy images and use alt text wherever possible.

Colour contrast is equally crucial for brand colours. While we understand the importance of brand colours that complement one another, a high colour contrast improves readability.

Don't forget your fonts! General rules are as follows:

- Fonts should be sans serif and for most body text ideally a minimum of size 14 (bigger for web content and PowerPoints).
- Avoid italics and underlining.
- Avoid justifying or right-aligning text when possible.
- Inter-letter spacing should be 35% of the average letter width and inter-word spacing at least 3.5 times the inter-letter spacing.

Does your language and style guide include expectations on readability?

This determines how easy or difficult it is to read a text. Higher readability allows the reader to easily process information, boosts reader engagement, and lessens the chances of misunderstanding. Our top tips for readability are as follows:

- Use simple, active sentences.
- Be straightforward, precise, and clear.
- Remove unnecessary words and avoid abbreviations.
- Break up content with subheadings and bullet points.

- Consider your word choices, is there a simpler word you can use? If not, consider explaining it.

Mix up your media use

Using a mix of media enables people to access information in the way that best suits them, improving the likelihood of reaching and engaging with a larger number of employees.

For any media content you do make, ensure your show-stopping visuals are accessible to everyone by making use of the following:

Alt text

Alt text should be used wherever possible to describe any imagery in your content.

- **Alt text descriptions should be concise and to the point.** Think about which details are most important for the user to know and avoid excessively long superfluous detail that might affect the engagement of anyone using a screen reader.
- **Keep descriptions in keeping with the tone of the rest of your content.** It is equally valuable for your alt text to convey your brand tone of voice as much as the rest of the content.
- **Type up any text included in the image.** Screen readers cannot read text in images.

Video accessibility

- **Make closed captions (or subtitles) standard practice.** Kapwing is a free and easy to use captioning platform.

- **Leave space for closed captions when filming or creating your own video content.** This will ensure your closed captions don't obscure any of the video graphics and vice versa.
- **Include audio descriptions.** Audio descriptions should be clear and depict only what is occurring on screen without interpretation or comment.
- **Know your transcripts.** A regular transcript is a text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand a video. Descriptive transcripts include this information in addition to a text description of any visual content. The latter is particularly helpful for assisting people with some deaf-blind disabilities.

Inclusive imagery

It's important to include disabled people in any imagery you use depicting your workforce or consumer base for example.

- **Remember disabled people are not a monolith!** When using images of disabled people be sure to represent a range of disabilities and disabled people of different ethnicities, genders, religions, and ages.
- **Avoid stereotypes in your imagery.** A common cliché is portraying disabled people as inspirational and/or with little agency, rather than representing them in a genuine and empowered way. Show disabled people in everyday situations such as at work, home or in social situations - just like real life!

Content compatibility with screen readers

A screen reader is a technology that helps people with difficulties seeing to access and interact with digital content, most commonly used by the blind and visually impaired. You can make your content compatible with screen readers by adhering to the following:

Heading tags

Heading tags (also called H tags) are a semantic tool for providing structure to web content. Many people use headings to scan long-form web content for information, but for screen reader users in particular, it's important to use headers correctly to ensure information is easy to navigate and digest.

- **Keep headings descriptive and concise.** It can be tempting to pack your headings and subheadings full of keywords for SEO purposes, but bear in mind screen-readers will read each heading tag in its entirety before moving on to the next. Therefore, it's best to avoid unnecessarily long and complicated headings that could reduce readability and engagement for screen reader users.
- **Keep headings in sequential reading order.** Screen readers enable the user to scan the web page by moving from heading to heading. This enables the user to skim read the page and experience the content in a digestible manner. The screen reader will therefore rely on your headings being in sequential order to effectively navigate the page and not unintentionally skip past key information.

Accessible links

- **Make sure links can be accessed without using a mouse.** Keyboard-only users may not be able to use a mouse to click links but use a keyboard's tab button instead.

- **Don't rely on visual indicators to display links.** When choosing your link text, endeavour to make your hyperlinks clear without relying on visual indicators such as colour cues (colour cues alone can also be inaccessible for colour blind users, so it's important to consider non-colour cues throughout).
- **Choose clear and concise wording.** Avoid link text like "Click Here", "More" and "Read More" without context as this can be confusing for screen reader users. It is ok to link a full sentence but avoid linking anything longer. It is also best practice to use unique link text where possible for seamless use of speech recognition software which may cause confusion when link text is duplicated.

Tables

Tables can be particularly tricky for screen readers to navigate effectively without the right accessibility measures in place.

- **Use HTML markup to indicate header cells and data cells.** Screen readers are able to use this information to provide context to what's in the table. For more in-depth guidelines for HTML markup for tables, refer to the **WCAG tables tutorial**.
- **Avoid merging cells.** Merging cells can distort the layout of the table for screen readers that anticipate one row or column header for each cell.
- **Test the reading order of your table.** You can do so by placing your cursor in the first cell of the table and pressing the tab key to navigate through. This will demonstrate the order in which the screen reader will navigate the information in the table, so you can be sure it makes sense.

Make use of Microsoft's accessibility tools

Microsoft provides accessible templates, and guidance on how to make your own.

You can also use the **Microsoft accessibility checker** before sending emails or sharing Word documents, Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations to make extra sure your content is easier for disabled people to read.

Keep accessibility on the agenda at the forefront of everyone's mind!

The best way to ensure accessibility is to educate staff and establish an understanding of key accessibility principles so that the above guidelines become second nature and front of mind.

Whether sharing good practice examples of accessible communications your teams have done or circulating a summary of top tips in your company-wide newsletter, you can demonstrate your organisation's commitment to accessibility and inspire your workforce to follow suit.