



Accessible Communication

There are more ways to communicate with your audience as a business, charity or organisation than ever before. However, this comes with a responsibility to ensure that all the different types of communication you use are as accessible as possible.

This means making sure your emails can be read easily, videos are accessible for example, to visually impaired people or that neurodivergent people can read your documents. By not doing this, you are excluding disabled people who could be a huge part of your audience and in turn, your sales!

While it can feel overwhelming to get started, our resource can help you introduce changes that will in turn not just benefit disabled, D/deaf or neurodivergent people but your audience as a whole, as it will improve your reach and provide easily accessible information.

Getting started

Consider your communication

It's easy to forget all the different ways we communicate with each other and our audience. This means auditing your existing communication - both internally and externally. There is no point in sending staff-only newsletters that not all of your team members can read.

Some of the most common will include:

- Emails
- Social media
- Newsletters

- PDFs
- Video
- Word Documents

General rules

These are the general rules that apply across all formats of communication.

Headings

- Descriptive semantic headings

These can break up the content of the email making it easier to read. Especially if someone has a neurodivergent condition such as dyslexia or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Headings can help readers scan the email easily for areas they may want to read if they are using assistive technology.

- Headings

You need to make sure that not only do headings visually look like headings but that they are tagged as headings too. This allows someone who uses a screen reader to navigate your document quickly by accessing a list of the headings and clicking on the section they want.

- Avoid the 'click here' call to action

It's always tempting to just pop a click here or shop here on an email, document or web page. Links should have as much detail about where the link will take you as possible for people using screen readers. A link title will also help if someone is holding their cursor above the link by letting them know where the button will take them. Keep the title as short as possible, avoid repetition and keep it informative

Text

Regardless of where your text is going, it should be made as accessible as possible before being added to your newsletters, emails or socials.

Here are some points to consider:

- Consider the font

While there are many lovely fonts out there that look great in emails, some of them just aren't accessible. They could mean the reader has to enlarge the text or copy and paste into another document to change the font themselves because they just can't read it. Using Serif fonts such as Times New Roman can be difficult for someone to read, for example, if they are visually impaired, so switch to sans serif fonts such as Arial instead.

- Font size matters

It's not just about the font type but the size too. Using a size 12 or 14 at a minimum can make content easier to read.

- Font colour matters

Avoid using colours to denote meaning. Red text can be jarring for neurodivergent people or those with learning difficulties. Brighter font colours against a white background can also be difficult. Some colour contrasts won't be seen by those with colour blindness or if they are visually impaired, making your text difficult to understand. Check that your colour combination passes current accessibility guidelines.

- Dark text

Using dark text on a pale background can sometimes be best for readers who have learning difficulties or neurodivergent conditions such as dyslexia. A pale font on a darker background can be easier for people with visual impairments.

- Avoid using all capital letters

Lowercase letters are easier to read

- **White space**
Avoid overcrowding the space so allow white space as much as possible as it makes information easier to read. Consider adding paragraphs or increasing the space between sentences to make text easier to read.
- **Align to the left**
As well as adding in the white space, aligning your text to the left means it is easier to find the start and follow the sentence. Avoid justifying your text as it can make it harder to read.
- **Numbers**
Numbers from one to nine are easier to read as text (e.g. - five or eight) but numbers from ten onwards should be written in numerical form. (e.g. - 11 or 45)
- **Consider the content**
Have a read through all content to see if any blocks of text could read better as a list, do some need to be broken up or could others be presented in a different format such as slideshows or videos?
- **Bold points**
For those with dyslexia, consider highlighting the important part of a sentence in bold so that they can find the essential information easily. Avoid underlining or italics.
- **Summary**
Could you provide a summary, contents page or index to make long documents easier to navigate?
- **Space**
If part of your document contains a form, allow extra white space for people to write in. This is helpful if someone has poor dexterity and writes slightly larger. Alternatively, consider tick boxes where possible to also help reduce the time someone must write.

Images

- Placement

The placement of an image on a page needs to be carefully examined. An image placed in the wrong place can interrupt the flow of information and make a document seem confusing or hard to read. Avoid the temptation to make text fit around the image for this reason. Placing an image at the end of a paragraph with as much white space as possible between the above text makes it easier to understand.

- Alt text

Alt text can be added to different platforms and documents to allow those who are using screen readers to understand what an image is telling them. It needs to be short, yet, ideally under 150 characters and descriptive so a viewer knows why the image is there and what is happening in it. You also don't need to say things like 'the image shows' because a screen will automatically announce that it is an image. Check that the image you have selected fits the purpose and adds to the context of the text.

- Relevant image

Choose your main images carefully. Consider if it is the best possible choice to help communicate what you are trying to say. It needs to make sense to everyone and not just be decorative.

- Decorative images

That doesn't mean you can't use decorative images but remember to mark it in the alt text that this is why these are here. This will tell screen readers that they can ignore that particular image. However, consider if the page or email looks overcrowded as a result of too many decorative images. Sometimes, less is more when it comes to images!

- Visible text

Sometimes you may need to include text on platforms where there is no option for alt text or for people who do not use screen readers.

Depending on the platform, this could be written underneath or in a comment below.

Multimedia

It isn't just Word documents that need to be accessible. We use a range of multimedia in our daily communication that also would need to be checked.

- Flashing content

This could be using GIFs, videos or text that starts flashing as someone opens an email. Avoid this as it could trigger photo-sensitive seizures for readers with epilepsy. It may also be difficult for neurodivergent people. This includes audio that may start suddenly, loudly or as a pop-up.

Video content

Video is a great way of presenting information, but it also needs to be made accessible. Video can be a great alternative to presenting information as text.

- Closed captions and subtitles

A must for videos to make them accessible. Closed captions provide a text alternative similar to subtitles, but they include relevant sounds. This could be car horns or door slamming.

Subtitles offer a text alternative for spoken word only. Some social media platforms have a feature to auto-generate captions. However, these need to be checked to make sure they are accurate

Lining a video up to play the second that someone views your website or email can be distracting for some people with disabilities particularly neurodivergent people. Sometimes, the video may be difficult for those with epilepsy. Ensure that a video can only be played when it is clicked on.

- Contrast colours

When you are providing captions or subtitles on your video, make sure that there is enough contrast so that they can be seen against

the background. Video editing software should give you a few options to choose from.

- Reduce background music

It can be really difficult for people with hearing loss to hear what is being said over loud background music. Keep the volume of the music as low as possible allowing someone to focus on what information there is instead.

- Additional text

When adding additional text to the video, remember that there will be subtitles or captions there. This may mean that you need to consider what you add, if it is necessary or how long it appears on screen.

- Disability representation

This is a great way to show that your organisation or business is inclusive by including disabled people in your videos.

Social Media

Social media has become a huge part of the way that brands communicate with their audience.

While there are numerous platforms to choose from, we've focused our resources on the most commonly used ones: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Alt text

It's easy to add alt text manually to posts and content management systems (CMS). Most offer a way to do this relatively easily although some CMS struggle with Instagram. This may mean that you have to log in manually to the app to add the alt text and include an image description either in the comments or the main text.

It may be beneficial to have both so that those with and without a screen reader can see what the image means and why you have chosen it.

Hashtags

A lot of people struggle to read hashtags when they are all in lowercase, especially longer ones. People who use screen readers may struggle to understand what these mean in relation to the text as the tech will not know the difference between the words and will read it as one word. Capitalising the letter at the start of each word makes a big difference. However, the fewer hashtags the better, to avoid confusion or cluttered text.

Captions

Some videos may not have any words but use music instead, choosing to add captions over the top. This is slightly more accessible for someone with a hearing impairment however not so much for visually impaired people. Consider adding captions to your video (but having a plain background behind them rather than just over the top of the video so that they stand out more), make transcripts available, audio describe videos or add comments that have the written description of the video.

Infographics

These are usually shared as a flat image so a screen reader will not be able to read the words or information contained within it. Adding this information in alt text or in an additional comment is a great way of making it accessible to everyone. If the information is complex, you could link to a data table that can be easily read by a screen reader.

GIFs

GIFs are one of the easiest ways to post content, start interactions and reply to comments. There are plenty to choose from too! However, sometimes these are not accessible as they may have colour contrast issues and not be read by screen readers. There may be no way of adding

in alt text other than to manually add it into the comments or contain flashing lights.

If you are considering making a GIF, then here is what you need to consider:

- They shouldn't have flashing lights
- Alt text needs to be added somewhere
- Colour contrast needs to be checked (you can use online colour contrast checkers for this)

Avoid acronyms

Shorter forms of certain words are frequently used online. They can change constantly, and some become part of off-line speech too. This could include words like IRL (in real life) or Yolo (you only live once). Many people find them hard to understand.

Decorative fonts

You may see accounts with italic or different lettering that someone has had to specially download for inclusion on social media. Dyslexic or visually impaired people may struggle to read the different lettering as it can be really difficult with certain fonts.

Stylised text

Thanks to different algorithms and content bots who monitor social media, certain words can trigger your content being shadow banned. While this is understandable for accounts that use rude words or have sexual content, you may be surprised to know that some common words are often added, and removed, from banned lists. This could be words like alone, brains or beauty blogger which are all thought to be on the 2024 list.

There is plenty of debate about whether or not shadow banning exists, but it is the reason that a lot of social media accounts now write their content with different letters like @lone or 8rains or b€auty 8logg€r as they believe it throws off the bots. The way to combat this is to provide a translation if someone needs it, be transparent about your need to change the lettering and ask readers to get in touch if they need clarification.

Emojis

Emojis can be fun to add to a text, but they may also add a bit of confusion for people using screen readers or others. Also, be aware that sometimes the meaning of the emoji you choose may differ from what you are trying to say. Case in point: the peach emoji can sometimes mean bum! Certainly, platforms will allow you to check the description for each emoji before you commit to them. Sometimes, using an emoji dictionary can help you to decipher what they mean.

Simplify text

Keep any text used both on the image and in the main body of the text as simple as possible so that is not confusing for neurodivergent readers. If you need to use text in the images, keep it short and simple and spread it across a carousel if you can. Keep in mind that you need to check the colour contrast. A carousel is more than one image on a post that readers need to scroll through.

Slideshows

Consider the font

Keep in mind the colour contrast and text size need to be larger so that people can read it from further back. The average size for slides should be around 22. Keep to the sans serif fonts to make them easier to read.

Email slides

If possible, could you make slides available before or after a presentation? This can help audience members who may need extra time to study and read the work in their own time. It allows time for people to prepare or to catch up on things they may have missed.

Slide titles

Titles can help to create a flow making the document more accessible. This could be that you number them, title them or provide a breakdown at the start of the presentation that showcases what someone can expect to find. The titles can help people to find which slide they need quickly.

Layout options

Use the layout options in PowerPoint rather than adding text boxes. This allows screen readers to recognise titles and numerical order. Numbering each slide and using titles mean that readers can navigate the presentation more easily

Checking charts

If you use charts, graphs or images in your slides then you need to make them accessible to people who are neurodivergent or visually impaired. Use different colours, texts or patterns throughout to break up blocks of text, consider highlighting important words and using larger fonts and add alt text where needed. Could you consider adding video explainers for slides with statistics or instructions?

- How to create an accessible table:

- 1 - Select the insert tab on the top program options bar then scroll down and select the table option

- 2 - Scroll down the table menu then select 'insert table' option which will open the menu box

- 3 - Use this box to create the new table

4 - Indicate if your table has headers. Go to the table format tab and check the header row box if the top row is headers. If the left row is row headers, then select the 'first column' box instead.

5 - Avoid using merged cells. Split your table into multiple tables and if a cell is empty then add a dash (-) there so screen readers know there is no data there.

- How to create an accessible chart:

1 - Select the insert tab on the top option bar and select the chart option

2 - Select the chart style you want to use then wait for it to load. A pop-up window should open above or below the chart.

3 - Avoid area and surface style charts as they can be difficult to read.

4 - In the Excel window you can add your data. Once you've done this, close the window.

5 - Label the series and categories so that the data is represented properly.

6 - Enter the chart title and provide any units you need to the Y-axis of your chart.

7 - Add your alt text

8 - Select contrasting appropriate colours.

Emails

If your subscribers can't read your email content, interact with it or see where to subscribe then they won't add themselves to your list. This will reduce your reach while increasing your unsubscribe rate.

Here are some rules to follow:

Relevant subject matter

Keep the subject lines as relevant to the email content as possible. This is usually the first part of the email that someone interacts with so it can tell them if an email is worth opening or not.

Clear call to action

Readers who are neurodivergent and people who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language, may need clear instructions on what to do with the information. This could mean having simple, easy-to-use buttons in your marketing emails that show where someone needs to click and where they will go if they do. Simple forms to fill in that have clear, short and precise instructions or easy-to-follow instructions for further information. For longer instructions on things like tasks or projects, numbering the instructions while also highlighting the exact part of the instruction that someone needs to follow could make it simpler to follow.

Plain text versions

This is a great idea for marketing emails which are usually much more colourful and image-heavy than regular emails. Plain text versions will not have any images or links in them but simply show the text contained in the email. Assistive technology may work better with plain text versions, but it can give the reader, the option to select which they prefer to access. It doesn't have to be hard to do as many marketing tools now allow you to make a plain text version or generate one for you. Just check, if you are using AI, that the text is correct before you send.

Tech support

Microsoft accessibility checker

Many Microsoft 365 apps include an accessibility checker. It can find accessibility problems and make suggestions on how you can fix them. It also suggests tips for improving your content.

Grammarly

Grammarly is great for checking your grammar and spelling but also shortening and simplifying sentences. You can use the app to shorten your writing making it easier to read. Not to mention, it can find those spelling mistakes you may have missed!

Otter

Otter can help to record meetings and then can turn the audio into a transcript for you. This transcript can be easily emailed. It also helps to summarise the meeting and gives a clear breakdown of action points which can be helpful. However, one drawback is that it uses AI to create the transcript, so you do need to check that the text is correct.

WebAIM

WebAIM can be used online for free to check the contrast in colours. Select the hex colour code for the two colours you are testing, and the page will tell you if they are contrasting enough to be used.

PDFs

Making a PDF accessible can be really tricky but not impossible. Here are some things to consider when making a PDF.

Consider the copy

Does the information need to be a PDF? Could it be an email or video instead and would this be more accessible?

Accessibility settings

To keep the accessibility settings, when converting a document to a PDF, use settings that allow you to retain tags and any formatting. Avoid the print-to-PDF setting as it can remove all your hard work!

Online forms

If your PDF is a form, why not use an online version instead? This can make it easier for someone to also fill some sections and use tick boxes instead of filling in larger sections by hand.

Keep it simple:

Keep the layout of a PDF as simple and easy to use as possible so it doesn't interfere with a screen reader or make it harder for neurodivergent people to read. Also, it's worth checking that this can be read on mobile too.

Use software that can check your PDF

Using software such as Adobe Acrobat Pro, you can check your PDF to make sure it is accessible or if there are things that you may have missed.