How to make your content more accessible to the visually impaired

Globally, it’s estimated that approximately 1.3 billion people live with some form of distance or near vision impairment. In the past, vision impairment may have hampered their online screen experience, but thanks to the tech advancements of today, virtually anyone can jump online and search up the latest news, new restaurant reviews, or their next vacation destination.

Making sure businesses and marketers develop online content that is accessible to anyone and everyone is the big idea behind inclusive marketing. This form of marketing takes into account factors such as gender, race, language, income, sexuality, age, religion, ethnicity and ability, recognizing that marketers can no longer forge ahead assuming that one brand is designed for customers from all walks of life. Rather, marketers need to intelligently engage with individuals, taking into account their personalities, eccentricities and necessary accommodations.

Part of inclusive marketing is making your online media more accessible for your clients and customers with visual impairments. By maximizing the accessibility of your organic search presence, you’re making your products and services available to an otherwise untapped market of potential consumers. And c’mon, it’s just the right thing to do.

Online search engines don’t wave a magic wand and make your images and videos accessible, but there are a few things you can easily incorporate into your content development and online advertising routine to make sure everyone understands what’s on their screen. You can also utilize features in

applications such as accessibility checker, to make all of your marketing materials as accessible as possible.

Optimize your images using strong alt text descriptions

Alternative text (alt text) provides a textual alternative to non-text content online, such as images, graphics, infographics and the like. Complete alt text descriptions increase the accessibility of the internet to those with vision impairments. As a screen reader encounters images on a web page, it reads the alt text provided aloud, allowing the content and/or function of the image to be understood by the user.

Beyond accessibility, alt text also gives your SEO ranking a good boost by providing search engines such as Bing and Google with more information about what's on specific web pages. The more info their web crawlers can scan and understand, the better chances you have to relevantly rank in SERPs (search engine result pages).

After all, web crawlers (and screen readers) can't analyze an image and determine its value, they can only understand text. So, that text had better accurately describe the image or media. Otherwise, it's like it doesn't exist at all.

Here are a few tips to writing a good alt text description:

- Be accurate and present the content and function of the image.
- Be concise. Generally no more than a few words are needed.
- Avoid redundancies, do not provide information already present in the surrounding text.
- Do not use the phrases "image of …" or "graphic of…" in your alt text description.

- When the image is only text, the text within the image can serve as the alt text.
- If the image is functional, for example, the image is a link to something else, include that in the alt text.

Optimize and create friendly URLs, image titles and file names

Your file name will help search engines and screen readers understand what the image is and if it's relevant. Before you upload the image to your CMS, make sure the file name is simple and describes the subject matter of the media, and use it as an opportunity to include target keywords if appropriate.

Here are two examples of file names, which one is more understandable?

orange-rainboots-children-toddlers.jpg

IMG22402A.JPG

I rest my case.

It's the same idea with URLs and image titles. Take the time to not only include them but write good ones that make sense and properly describe the image. It can only help!

Use schema markup data for images/media

Schema Markup data is used by Bing, Google, etc. to provide better search results. A type of HTML coding or structured data markup, it provides additional context to the search engines and will improve the knowledge pane, which can be read aloud as the featured snippet.

Schema can be used to mark up just about anything and is used by Bing and other leading search engines. By employing structured data markups, search engines can better read the contents on a webpage, changing how they may display the search results.

Carry accessibility principles over to videos, PowerPoints and PDFs

As the use of video marketing continues to rise, consider these accessibility tips to make them more available to the visually impaired:

- Create and provide accurate video transcripts on the page.
- Increase engagement by using both open and closed captions for video content. Note, the text tile attached for closed captions is readable by search engines.

For PowerPoints and PDF documents:

- As with images, create search-friendly file names and optimize your titles with keywords.
- Add alt-tags for images and charts within the document or PowerPoint.
- Complete the description field – this will serve as the meta descriptions within search results.
- Include your company name in the author field.
- In Adobe Acrobat, there are additional metadata fields, sure to complete them.
- Write protect your documents to make it hard for others to edit and add their links to your content.
- Link to the document internally and include backlinks with your target keywords.

Modern marketing is accessible marketing

Inclusive marketing is all about creating information and content that is more representative of everyone, including the visually impaired. Following the measures described above will help you make your content more universally accessible and improve not only the quality of the content but the experience for the user.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

About The Author

Christi Olson is a Search Evangelist at Microsoft in Seattle, Washington. For over a decade Christi has been a student and practitioner of SEM. Prior to joining the Bing Ads team within Microsoft, Christi worked in marketing both in-house and at agencies at Point It, Expedia, Harry & David, and Microsoft (MSN, Bing, Windows). When she's not geeking out about search and digital marketing she can be found with her husband at ACUO crossfit and running races across the PacificNW, brewing and trying to find the perfect beer, and going for lots of walks with their two schnauzers and pug.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/l0Z_iC0tfgI/how-to-make-your-content-more-accessible-to-the-visually-impaired-310660