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How to Make Sure Your Law Firm's Website is ADA Compliant

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We'll state it simply: making your legal website compliant with the requirements of The Americans with Disabilities Act (the ADA) is critical. It's important for actual accessibility, it's important for human dignity, and it's important for legal reasons. You care about your law firm's clients and potential clients. Ensuring that your law firm's website is ADA compliant is another way to show that you care.

In this blog, we'll cover the basics of the ADA and ADA compliance. We'll also dive into how to make your law firm website accessible and why, above all, accessibility matters and should be strived for. Let's get moving!

What is the ADA? What is ADA compliance?

The ADA is a federal law enacted in 1990. Its chief aim is to end discrimination based on differing abilities and it requires organizations to provide certain "reasonable accommodations" to folks with disabilities. For the physical world, this means wheelchair-accessible ramps and entryways, elevators, and other equal-access accommodations. For the world of the internet, it means something else, and that meaning is still evolving and changing.

The text of the ADA (even as amended) does not explicitly address website or online compliance. Because of this, it has fallen to the courts to determine how the ADA applies to websites. The courts have looked to Title III of the ADA, which requires that every owner, lessor, or operator of a "place of public accommodation" provide equal access to users who meet the ADA's standards for disability. Many courts have ruled that commercial websites (like your law firm's) are "places of public accommodation" and therefore are subject to the requirements of the ADA. Other courts have ruled using different reasoning, but have arrived at the same conclusion: websites must be accessible. The Department of Justice (the DOJ) [supports the reading that websites are "places of public accommodation" and thus websites must be ADA compliant.](#)

What this means is that your law firm's website must achieve certain levels of accessibility as defined under the ADA. We'll get into the nitty-gritty of accessibility and accommodation under the ADA below, but we also want to note that absent legal enforcement, ensuring that your law firm's website is accessible is important. It shows clients and prospective clients that you treat everyone with dignity, that your law firm is committed to equity, and that all are welcome. Making your law firm's website ADA compliant is good for everyone.

What makes a website ADA compliant?

In guidance on web accessibility and the ADA published in 2022, the DOJ states that it requires public accommodations to ensure websites are accessible per the ADA requirement of “general nondiscrimination and effective communication provisions.” The DOJ does not specify any explicit website accessibility standard; however, the DOJ does and has made it clear that Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are helpful guidance for companies to reference when making their own websites ADA compliant. The current golden standard is WCAG 2.0.

What is the WCAG?

Good question! At its most basic, WCAG is a series of guidelines that provide information about website accessibility. The guidelines give website owners clear instructions on how to make their website accessible to folks of all abilities. The WCAG standards have over ten guidelines and those guidelines are organized into four major principles which lay the foundation necessary for anyone to access and use web content.

Let’s get into the details! When thinking about your law firm’s website and the WCAG guidelines, think about the following:

- **Perceivable.** The information presented on your law firm’s website and the user interface components must be presentable to users in ways that they can actually perceive. What this means is that users should be able to perceive the information being presented—it can’t be invisible to all of their senses. For this, think of providing audio descriptions for video content; or captions for audio content.
- **Operable.** All user interface components and navigations must be operable. What this means is that all users should have the capability to navigate your law firm’s website and use all of its features. For this, think about ensuring that all website functions and navigations can be operated via keyboard-only commands.
- **Understandable.** All information and the operation of the user interface must be understandable. What this means is that users should be able to understand your website’s text, images, videos, and tools. For this, think of composing error messages that include clear explanations of the user error and the directions for correcting it; or step-by-step instructions on how to use certain plug-ins.
- **Robust.** Your website content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of users, including those using assistive technologies. What this means is that users must be able to access the content as technologies advance. For this, think about testing compatibility with screen readers or auditory aids and making sure that those capabilities can be updated as technology advances.

In sum, your law firm has some flexibility in how it complies with the nondiscrimination and accessibility requirements of the ADA. What’s important is ensuring that your law firm’s website offers actual accessibility.

What are some tips for making my legal website ADA compliant?

Achieving ADA compliance for your law firm’s website means taking a step back and looking at what real accessibility looks like. Start by taking stock of your current website and reviewing the WCAG’s guidance. The WCAG guidelines seem complex at first, but when broken down into

digestible bits, they are easily implemented. We recommend beginning by considering the following:

Written content. When creating written content for your law firm's website, think about how that content can be made accessible for folks with disabilities. To help those users who use screen readers or other visual aids, focus on structure and be sure to use proper heading tags—meaning, use the H1 function in lieu of just making the font larger and follow the H1, H2, H3, etc. hierarchy. It's also just best practice to use bulleted lists, shorter paragraphs, and summary sections for easy scanning. By enhancing readability, you enhance accessibility.

Visual and audio content. Making your legal website accessible means making your design better for everyone. If your content creation and marketing strategies involve video webinars, be sure to include subtitles, provide transcripts, and also provide audio descriptions (e.g., a speech version of a descriptive transcript). Visually impaired users oftentimes use screen readers to engage with online content.

For screen readers to work, the images on your website must have alt text, which is a short text that describes the image. By doing this, you'll give all users the ability to fully engage with your law firm's website (and the excellent content you've created). Similarly, avoid using charts or graphs that rely solely on color as the differentiator and instead opt for patterns, fills, or borders to communicate. Pay attention to color contrast and font choice on your website, too.

Website design. Website design accessibility means different things, but it all comes down to thoughtfulness and real accessibility. It's important to evaluate your law firm's website design and navigation functionality. Keyboard navigation is important for those folks with visual and motor disabilities. People who use screen readers or cannot use a mouse should still be able to access your website, so make sure that users can tab through all navigational elements using keyboard navigation. For example, consider using specific keyboard keys such as Shift+Tab and the Enter key for specific purposes on your website to provide ease of navigation. Be sure that your website's navigation menu is consistent across all pages!

Form and table labels are also important. Make sure that each form field has a clear label. Additionally, consider adding an accessibility interface to your website, which will allow visitors to adjust your site's design and user elements to fit their individual needs. You can find an example of what that looks like [here](#) by clicking the tab that appears on the right side of the website. By providing an easy option for larger text, contrast, and thoughtful use of colors, you allow everyone to engage with your law firm's website (and get what makes your firm so unique).

Lastly, for website design, make sure that your call to action (CTA) buttons are accessible. The CTAs featured on your law firm's website should have an accessible name, which is usually the text on the button itself. We recommend using an aria-label for each CTA to give screen readers the right information.

To ensure real accessibility (and to take some pressure off of your internal team), we highly recommend [working with an expert](#) who can help your law firm create a website that is ADA compliant and accessible for all.

How can you avoid legal measures being taken against your law firm's website?

This one is simple—make sure that your law firm’s website is ADA compliant. If it isn’t, you might find yourself party to a lawsuit. Since 2013, the employment law-focused law firm Seyfarth Shaw has tracked the number of lawsuits filed under the ADA each year. [Their data](#) is striking and indicates that more than 11,400 people filed an ADA Title III lawsuit in 2021—a 320 percent increase since 2013. In the year 2020, more than 2,500 lawsuits were filed in federal court claiming online websites were not designed to be accessible to folks with disabilities, in violation of Title III of the ADA. More than 11,400 people filed an ADA website-related lawsuit in 2021, a 320% increase from previous years. This year, hundreds of thousands of business owners will receive demand letters for inaccessible websites. 93% of those demand letters will be settled for \$20,000 - \$150,000.

What all of this data means is that people are paying attention, and rightfully so. Equal access to the internet is a major concern and is likely to remain that way. So, make sure that your law firm abides by WCAG accessibility standards. We’ll reiterate that you should start by addressing the following (which the DOJ lists as examples of common accessibility barriers):

- Poor color contrast
- Use of color alone to give information
- Lack of text alternatives, or alt-text, on images
- No captions on videos
- Inaccessible online forms (think your call-to-action buttons)
- Mouse-only navigation rather than keyboard navigation

Getting your law firm’s website in tip-top shape and ADA compliant is the only way to avoid accessibility lawsuits, negative publicity, and most importantly, provide an accessible user experience to everyone. Start by [working with the right experts](#) who can help your law firm build an accessible (and interesting) website.

Why is having an accessible lawyer website important?

It’s important because everyone is important. First and foremost is the issue of equal access and human integrity. By designing, maintaining, and updating your law firm’s website to be accessible, you put your money where your mouth is as a lawyer dedicated to justice. You also show prospective and current clients that you pay attention and care.

Second is that, as discussed throughout this article, it’s required by law and enforced by the DOJ. Without an ADA compliant website, your law firm may be subject to a lawsuit and hefty fines (and the accompanying bad publicity).

Last is that it’s just good for business. By having an ADA compliant website, you’ll have more traffic. It’s estimated that nearly a quarter of the U.S. population has a disability. By providing a website and user experience that supports all abilities, your law firm will be seen by more people and have [greater odds of landing leads](#). This is especially true if your law firm specializes in a practice area that supports those with disabilities. Good business sense dictates that you have an accessible website; and human decency does the same.

Design an ADA-compliant website today

Your law firm’s website should and must be ADA compliant. Getting there is a journey, but we promise you that it’s worth it—both to avoid lawsuits and help as many people as possible.

Before you begin designing or re-vamping your law firm's website, consider the basics outlined in this article. And, if you have any questions or decide that you're in over your head, [website design experts](#) are ready to assist you.

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