Top 10 Takeaways
Introduction to Section 508

1 **What is Section 508?**

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act in 1998 requires information and communications technology procured, used, maintained, and developed by the Federal Government to be accessible to people with disabilities. While Section 508 itself does not impose requirements outside of federal agencies, in practice, many federal departments including HHS and the Department of Education have required that all content created using federal money be 508 compliant. Organizations selling into the Federal Government or public sector organizations with Section 508-like policies will want to make their offered systems and services accessible as well. US Federal government agencies are instructed to purchase the most compliant information and communications technology (ICT) that meets an agency's business needs, unless a valid exception applies.

2 **Section 508 Standards**

The standards are divided into four subparts: A through D. Subpart A defines the purpose of Section 508, its application, its exceptions, and a list of definitions. Subpart B contains the technical standards. Subpart C contains the functional performance criteria. Subpart D defines the information, documentation, and support standards that vendors must provide.

3 **Technical Applications and Operating Systems**

One of the standards required for software and operating systems is keyboard accessibility. Section 508 requires every software feature to be keyboard enabled. Section 508 has 12 standards which must be met for software and operating systems. Some of the other standards involve text alternatives for images, color coding limitations, and restrictions on blinking elements.

4 Web Information and Applications

Web information and applications must meet Section 508 standards described under 1194.22. This includes public websites, intranet sites and applications, as well as web interfaces found embedded in other products such as printers. Standards for web information and applications involve multimedia alternatives, an ability to skip links on a page, and the provision to allow alternative pages when content cannot be made accessible.

5 Telecommunications Products

Under Section 508, 1194.23, telecommunications products must be compatible with communication devices used by people who are deaf, hard of hearing, visually impaired, or speech impaired to communicate over networks designed to carry voice. Standards for telecommunications products involve hearing aid compatibility, the ability to extend the time for action that has a timeout, and caller identification for users who cannot see displays.

6 Video and Multimedia Products

Under 1194.24, video and multimedia products must meet Section 508 standards. For example, widescreen digital television displays measuring at least 7.8 inches vertically must be equipped with caption decoder circuitry.

7 Self-Contained Products

The standards for self-contained products are described under 1194.25. A self-contained product is a device unto itself, and It is expected to provide all required accessibility as a standalone unit without the support of an external device including assistive technology. Standards for self-contained products involve adjustable color settings, and operable controls within reach.

8 Personal Computers

Section 508 technical requirements apply to personal computers and their displays, under 1194.26. These requirements also apply to mobile devices, tablet computers, workstations, and servers. Standards for personal computers include the amount of physical force needed to use them, mechanical control accessibility, and expansion port accessibility to assist users in connecting assistive technology such as Braille displays and switches.

9 Functional Performance Criteria

The Section 508 functional performance criteria are described under 1194.31. There are 6 standards for functional performance criteria. These criteria are outcome based standards that can be used when the technical standards do not address a particular feature. Their goal is to make sure that people with disabilities have access to and can operate ICT.

10 Section 508 Refresh

Section 508 is scheduled to be refreshed in 2015 or 2016. The proposed updates include re-organizing the standards to address product features, rather than product type. The standards will also be harmonized with international voluntary consensus standards such as WCAG 2.0 single A and double A guidelines.