Web accessibility

What is web accessibility? The term ‘web accessibility’ is fairly self-explanatory, but officially, it is the idea of creating a website that is accessible to all kinds of users. Most of the formal definitions I found for web accessibility specifically had to do with websites that are accessible to people who have disabilities of some kind--people who have trouble understanding or navigating the web because of auditory, cognitive, physical or neurological—but web accessibility is also applicable to people who are using different kinds of devices, older people or just people in general who are not super familiar with how to navigate the web, temporary limitations such as a broken arm or lost glasses, and situational limitations such as being in bright sunlight, a dark room, or somewhere where they can’t listen to audio.

This is heavily applicable to the chamber of commerce website project we’re doing as well because all kinds of people use Chamber of commerce websites to learn more about their city and how to contribute to local businesses, not just business owners themselves. Utilizing web accessibility generates more traffic to your website and an overall enhanced experience for users that will make them want to return to your site.

There’s lots of ways that websites can be more accessible, but here’s four general rules, put into the acronym “POUR”. Perceivable is the first part of the acronym which means that users must be able to perceive the information that is being shown, or in other words, can appeal to most senses like sight, sound, and touch. Some examples are text alternatives like changing text to larger print, different fonts, or simpler language, distinguishable content where users can more easily see and hear content.

The next letter of the acronym is operable which means that the site can’t require interaction from a user that they can’t perform. This can be executed in ways such as allowing parts of the site to be accessible from just a keyboard—I had a job once where we were having problems with the computer’s keyboard. Luckily, the desktop that I was using was touchscreen, and the software of the desktop allowed me to pin a touchscreen keyboard to the monitor, so I was able to get some things done that way. Another example is that I use accounts payable software at my job that uses a lot of keyboard shortcuts which is great for people who may not be able to move their arms back and forth from the mouse to the keyboard very easily, not to mention it’s much quicker. Some other ways a website can be operable is allowing a user enough time to read content, doesn’t cause any sort of physical reactions such as if the user has epilepsy, and is generally easy to navigate.

U is for understandable which means that the user can understand the content of the site as well as how to operate the site. The content should be readable and understandable, web pages should appear and operate predictable ways, and users may even be able to get help, like in chat rooms with customer service on shopping sites.

Lastly, robust means that the content of a site can be interpreted easily by someone like IT where it is easy to assist someone with. It means that as technology evolves, content should still remain accessible.

A great example of web accessibility is Duolingo. Duolingo appeals to a couple of the POUR components, specifically understandability and perceivability. When I read that sites should be adaptable to when you have to keep your audio silent, I thought of the duolingo “Can’t listen now” feature. This allows users to continue learning a new language without having to turn their volume up or having to use their microphone.