



Accessibility:

The law demands it. We deliver it.

What to Look for in a Digital Accessibility Vendor

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Getting Started

You need an accessibility vendor to test your website and/or mobile apps to make sure they are accessible to people with disabilities. Where do you start? We're betting you asked Google. (Don't ask Siri; she'll just open the Accessibility menu on your iPhone.)

A quick search would reveal that the accessibility consulting market has a variety of options available to you:

- Small sole-proprietor operations
- Large companies
- Companies that solely focus on accessibility
- Companies that do other types of testing (like for privacy or security)

It can be challenging to compare vendors when you're vetting such diverse organizations. Do you go with the smaller organization with a laser focus on accessibility? Or the larger one that offers a variety of other testing services? Making the right choice can be critical to avoiding huge compliance or legal problems in the future, not to mention getting the best return on your investment.

Let's look at the most important things you will want to know about a potential accessibility testing vendor.

Experience and Accessibility Focus

Can they do the work well?

The right accessibility services vendor for your organization must know and understand accessibility from multiple levels, for example:

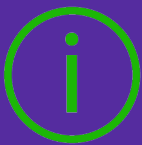
- Identifying how and when issues occur in your product or solution
- Understanding which violations are most likely to result in a lawsuit
- Knowing how to fix the problems (and in what order)
- Providing a deep level of knowledge on platform-specific accessibility issues

Automated testing results are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ensuring a website or mobile app is accessible.

Automated testing results are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ensuring a website

or mobile app is accessible. Anyone can push a button and run a test. You want someone who has the knowledge and experience to take you all the way down the path to compliance.

The following criteria are important:



- Minimum of seven (7) years of experience auditing Information Technology (IT) systems for accessibility
- Minimum experience working with at least thirty-five (35) enterprise class organizations to support accessibility initiatives
- Staffing mix of at least thirty (30) percent employees with disabilities
- Demonstrated institutional knowledge and experience base with Section 508 and WCAG requirements
- Minimum of 50% consulting staff with direct professional experience in web or software development

Organization Stability and Continuity

Will they be there when you need them?

You've narrowed down your list of potential accessibility testing vendors down to those with the right stuff when it comes to staffing and experience. Next up is considering whether the vendor has the stability and continuity to handle the work. You want to know that this vendor is going to be around if you need them, even if it's years down the road when you're looking to revamp your site. Starting over with a new vendor eats up valuable time.

In addition to stability, the vendor must also have enough full-time staff to handle your organization's workload (plus the workloads of their other clients). For example, some smaller firms will employ the use of sub-contractors to handle increased workload. While this is a cost-effective approach from the vendor's end of the deal, it's much better for you if your organization deals with the same people from start to finish, and again when you start a new project. You'll know exactly what to expect from your accessibility vendor and they'll know exactly what to expect from you.

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That being said, a strong accessibility vendor with a solid methodology will provide consistent, reliable, and verifiable information and guidance no matter

who you talk to in the vendor's firm. Strongly consider the following criteria:

- ✓ **Minimum of ten (10) full-time employees**
- ✓ **Minimum of ten (10) years of continuous operations**

Demonstration of a firm capital base and stable operations; and

- ✓ **Majority of services are performed by in-house (W2) employees**

Audit and Reporting Capabilities

Will their reports be easy to read and useful?



The big ticket item for accessibility consulting firms is the review or audit of your organization's information and communication technology (ICT) systems to determine compliance against defined industry standards such as Section 508 or WCAG 2.0. Surprisingly, this is the area where the greatest differences lie between accessibility companies. The depth, level of detail, accuracy, and quality of guidance delivered can vary significantly.

Here are some criteria you should consider:

- 1.** Reports can be customized to show a level of detail appropriate to the person reading the report. Your CEO needs a birds-eye view; your development teams need the nitty-gritty details.
- 2.** The reporting system can track and compare your level of compliance over time. Being able to show your progress in creating an accessible system goes a long way if you do get a demand letter before you're done remediating.
- 3.** The accessibility audit process should include automated, manual, and assistive technology (AT) validation. AT validation should include testing by individuals with disabilities.
- 4.** Staff should be able to audit against a unified set of conformance criteria for the industry and/or internal standards relevant to your organization's compliance needs. Accessibility testing is not one-size-fits-all.
- 5.** Reports should include:
 - › a description of accessibility issues,
 - › media types,
 - › non-compliant source code examples,
 - › compliant source code examples,
 - › recommended approach and options for addressing issues,
 - › unit tests allowing for validation of the issues, and
 - › source public standards associated with the rule.

Asking the Right Questions

Making the right decision when it comes to choosing an accessibility vendor can be critical to ensuring regulatory compliance, legal risk mitigation, and profitability of a company, agency, or educational institution. Making the wrong choice can turn out to be costly, time consuming, and risky while needlessly adding to project delivery timeline. To help you make the right decision, we've included a checklist of questions to run through when searching for vendor to ensure they are the right match for you.

Digital Accessibility Vendor Checklist

Experience	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been in business? • What standards do you have experience working with? • What other clients do you have that are a similar size/ business to ours? • What's the average length of time you've been doing business with your customer base? 	
Accessibility Focus	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working in accessibility? • How many accessibility audits have you completed? • How many individuals with disabilities do you have on your team? • What types of assistive technology do these individuals use? 	
Organizational Structure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many direct employees do you have? • How long has the average employee been with the firm? • Will the person doing the work for me be an employee or a sub-contractor? 	

Digital Accessibility Vendor Checklist

Implementation Focus

- Do the people who will do the work on my project have direct professional experience doing development?
- What experience does the firm have in working with enterprise class firms?
- Does the firm provide specific, code level guidance on addressing compliance issues?

Notes

Auditing Process

- Does the firm have a standard, published process in place to validate accessibility?
- Does the proposed audit cover both your technical and functional auditing requirements?

Technology Coverage

- Does the firm have experience auditing applications for compliance across all development platforms your firm has in place?
- Does the firm have experience providing recommendations for addressing compliance issues across all the development platforms you have in place?
- Can the firm readily produce detailed examples of the audit reports that will be provided across such platforms?

Standards and Technology Agnostic

- How does the firm provide coverage for new accessibility standards or new versions of current standards?
- How does the firm provide coverage for new development technologies or updated versions of current development technologies?
- Does the firm have experience across all accessibility standards targeted?

Digital Accessibility Vendor Checklist

Solutions That Reduce Legal Risk

- Does the audit test for the full scope of manual and global issues?
- Does the vendor readily recognize the limits of automatic testing?

Notes

Support Capabilities

- Does the firm have a clear, published support policy?
- Is the response time reasonable in the context of your organization?
- Does the firm have enough staff available to support your needs?
- Does the firm provide free training on the product's use?
- Is the support for the product provided as part of the overall license fee or is it charged as a separate fee?