

GOOD WEBSITE DESIGN

This document is to help understand the current good practices of web design, all of which are employed by jgm web design.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to ensuring that Content is accessible, ie. ensuring that content can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used. Accessibility is most commonly discussed in relation to people with disabilities, because this group are most likely to be disadvantaged if the principles of accessible web design are not implemented. Failure to follow these principles can make it difficult or impossible for people with disabilities to access Content. The World Health Organisation (2005) estimates that between 750 million and one billion of the world's six billion population have disabilities, such as visual or cognitive impairments, that may make using web sites extremely difficult.

The Law

For a long time, when it came to websites, accessibility was overlooked despite it being a legal requirement since 1999 to make your website accessible, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)¹. Section 3 of the DDA, which refers to accessible websites, came into force on 1st October 1999. In 2002, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC)², published a Code of Practice to accompany Part 3 of the DDA. The code makes explicate references to websites as 'services' in accordance with the DDA's definition of the term. There is also the Disability Equality Duty (DED)³ which places a legal duty on all public sector organisations to promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Who's responsibility is it?

The United Nations conducted a Global Audit of Web Accessibility⁴, which was produced by Nomensa in November 2006. The audit investigated 100 leading websites from 20 countries from around the world. The homepage of each website was measured against the globally recognised benchmark for web accessibility: The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 1.0 (WCAG 1.0)⁵. Of the 100 homepages evaluated during the audit, only three achieved Single-A accessibility – the basic accessibility rating. Jgm web design strive to achieve Double-A standard as a minimum on all our websites.

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/9pste>

² <http://www.drc-gb.org>

³ <http://tinyurl.com/ftk2p>

⁴ <http://www.nomensa.com/unreport>

⁵ <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10>

Global Audit of Web Accessibility

Recently there has been a big push in the web design community to establish the importance of making a site accessible, putting the responsibility on the designers and developers to explain and encourage clients to take this matter seriously, demonstrating the number of potential benefits of doing so. Jgm web design are up to speed on web accessibility and have our very own accessibility expert who is a member of the Guild of Accessible Web Designers (GAWDS)⁶

We use the latest tools to test websites during development, these include screen readers and text based browsers.

Usability

Usability differs from accessibility in a number of ways. Accessibility, in short, is making sure that everything your company produces is accessible by everyone. When looking at usability for the web, you should think about things like spelling and grammar and how easy things are to read. We will work to ensure that you do not have large chunks of text and that all abbreviations are explained using the correct methods.

Semantic Web Design

Good web design practice is to separate content from design. This is achieved using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and Extensible HyperText Markup Language XHTML. The process is called Semantic Web Design. The goal is to wrap your content with tags that describes them as best as possible. This is the idea of semantic web design. This means that the source of a page, the pages content, is well structured and written with meaning. Cascading style sheets are then used for layout and design purposes. This enables small or large amendments to be made to the overall layout or design of a website template with minimal work. This also helps with accessibility and with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

CSS and XHTML validation

The XHTML and CSS is all written by our experienced developers who choose to hand write the code rather than let tools generate it meaning every line of code is exactly how it should be. Our developers have a great understanding of the XHTML document model which ties in nicely with Semantic Web Design, as covered above.

Validation of code first starts when the first line of code is written. At every stage the developer is using validation tools all focused around the W3C recommendations (you can even click here to check to see if this page validates yourself). At every stage of the build, different tools are used to test the page.

⁶ <http://www.gawds.org>