ACCESSIBILITY

We spend a lot of time looking at usability because it is probably the most important issue for the majority of your users. Although accessibility issues may only affect a small proportion of your users it is important that you understand what impedes access. Some attention to these areas will inevitably benefit all users.

Accessibility addresses the needs of people that may not have access to all the trappings that most users have at their disposal. It also addresses the very special needs of disabled people who may want to access the information on your website as well as the needs of people who can only access your site through non-standard computer equipment.

Some Internet users are unable to see, hear or move and use specialised computer equipment. Others may have intellectual disabilities that limit the user's ability to read or comprehend the information provided on the web.

As a small business owner you are not obliged to cater to the needs of these users, but if you make your website user friendly for all users you may be able to reach more people than your competitors. We list some simple initiatives to make your website accessible to a broader audience.

PLAIN TEXT IS BEST

If you present all your written information as plain text, print handicapped users will be able to adjust the colour and font of the text to make the information readable. If your user is unable to see, they can use screen readers that read your text to them. Images of text are not accessible to these users.

CAPTIONS

Descriptive image, audio and hypertext link captions significantly improve the accessibility of your site. As a small business owner you may want to improve the current caption of a multimedia presentation from "Click Here to view an interactive demo" to "Click Here to view an interactive presentation demonstrating how to assemble your new kitchen pantry."

KEEPING NAVIGATION IN ONE PLACE

Some people have limited mobility and it is much easier for these users if navigation through your site can be done with as little mouse movement as possible. Users may prefer to navigate as far as possible without using a mouse and some may not be able to use a mouse at all. Placing navigation in tables in a consistent position on your site will be of significant help to these users.

USING STRAIGHTFORWARD LANGUAGE

English is not easy to pick-up as a second language. We have so many words that have two or more meanings and often it is very hard to pick-up on the meaning of a word without reading it in context. The complexity of English is not just difficult for people used to communicating in another language, it is also an obstacle to people who have an intellectual disability.

To make your website more attractive to these users keep your language simple. Try to use short sentences and unambiguous words. Use lists and bullet points to present your text in user friendly ways.

SUMMARY

The above points are just a brief outline of the issues that can aid accessibility for all users. It is by no means complete, and should not be used as a definitive guide for website owners or developers, rather our aim is to draw your attention to the needs of a minority of users who could be **your** users.

For more information on website accessibility please visit http://www.w3.org/WAI/