

Summary Finding



A 3-YEAR ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS IN DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Assistive technologies and innovations have gained more prominence and attention since 2019 for a number of reasons. COVID-19 accelerated digital access to content, which demonstrated the lack of accessible resources. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are becoming more pervasive, along with updated accessibility laws and regulations worldwide. Another progress relates to wider recognition regarding the importance of digital accessibility, to ensure broader reach for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

Traditionally, accessibility has focused on supporting individuals who require special accommodations for physical, cognitive, or other reasons, such as vision impairments, speech or hearing limitations, or other challenges. While Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and other best practices lay the foundation for equitable access, many organizations, educational institutions, associations, and government bodies are starting to embrace accessibility initiatives and adopting technology to reach people in more productive and meaningful ways than ever before.

With assistive technologies like automated closed captioning systems, screen readers, document remediation tools, image alternate text (alt text) automation, and more, individuals worldwide can access online content more easily. Equity in access is a first step toward building a more diverse and inclusive workforce, which positively impacts communities and organizations, bringing in more perspectives, skills, and capabilities.

Let us take a closer look at select accessibility advancements in 2022 and what we can expect in the next few years.



Looking Back at 2022

Accessibility Extending To Internal Communications

2022



Individuals in organizations predominantly use a unique set of tools that enable them to communicate with their teams and function in their roles. While organizations were able to succeed in the early 2000s and 2010s with basic documents, email communications, and defined job responsibilities, today's digital generation requires access to several tools, systems, applications, and more, which highlights the criticality of inclusion for collaboration like never before.

With the growth of digital and content-driven communication to connect and exchange ideas across the board, companies realize the importance of accepting diversity and equity as core cultural principles. In fact, in 2021 alone, 26% of companies created diversity and inclusion programs for the first time, according to [McKinsey & Co.](#) Moreover, the report, *Diversity Wins* by McKinsey & Co. also showcased that diverse companies are more likely to outperform their less diverse peers in profitability.

Backed by the following insights and acceptance of work from anywhere (beyond the confines of localized office space), organizations are adopting tools to ensure documents, primarily PDFs, PowerPoint presentations, and emails are more corporate in communication and remain accessible by all employees. In addition to providing equal access to opportunities and information for all employees within the system, this practice simplifies communication and improves alignment to a shared vision, reduces turnover rates, and allows people from a variety of backgrounds to remain productive and bring in their unique perspectives.

This basic practice also sets the brand tone that the organization cares to be impartial and equitable to all its stakeholders, regardless of their abilities. With the incoming workforce generation (Gen Z), current and potential employees are expected to have better alignment and commitment to the organization.

EAA Across Europe

2022



Per their European Commission guidelines, by 2025, all privately owned companies must be compliant and offer equal access to consumers of all abilities.

The EAA has set the expectation for European organizations to be born accessible to “improve the operation of the European Union (EU) market for accessible products and services by removing barriers created by divergent rules in the member states” ([Forbes](#)).

The decision to move to a consistent structure and theme on accessibility aims to achieve the following points, which will serve as the foundation for cross-border success in the following ways:

1. Bring equity in the labor market for people with disabilities
2. Spearhead the inclusiveness of the European Union (EU)
3. Improve overall quality of life for employees and customers
4. Reduce costs for businesses due to gaps in communication
5. Spur more efficient cross-border trading
6. Reach a larger consumer market of 135 million people that struggle with disabilities across the continent

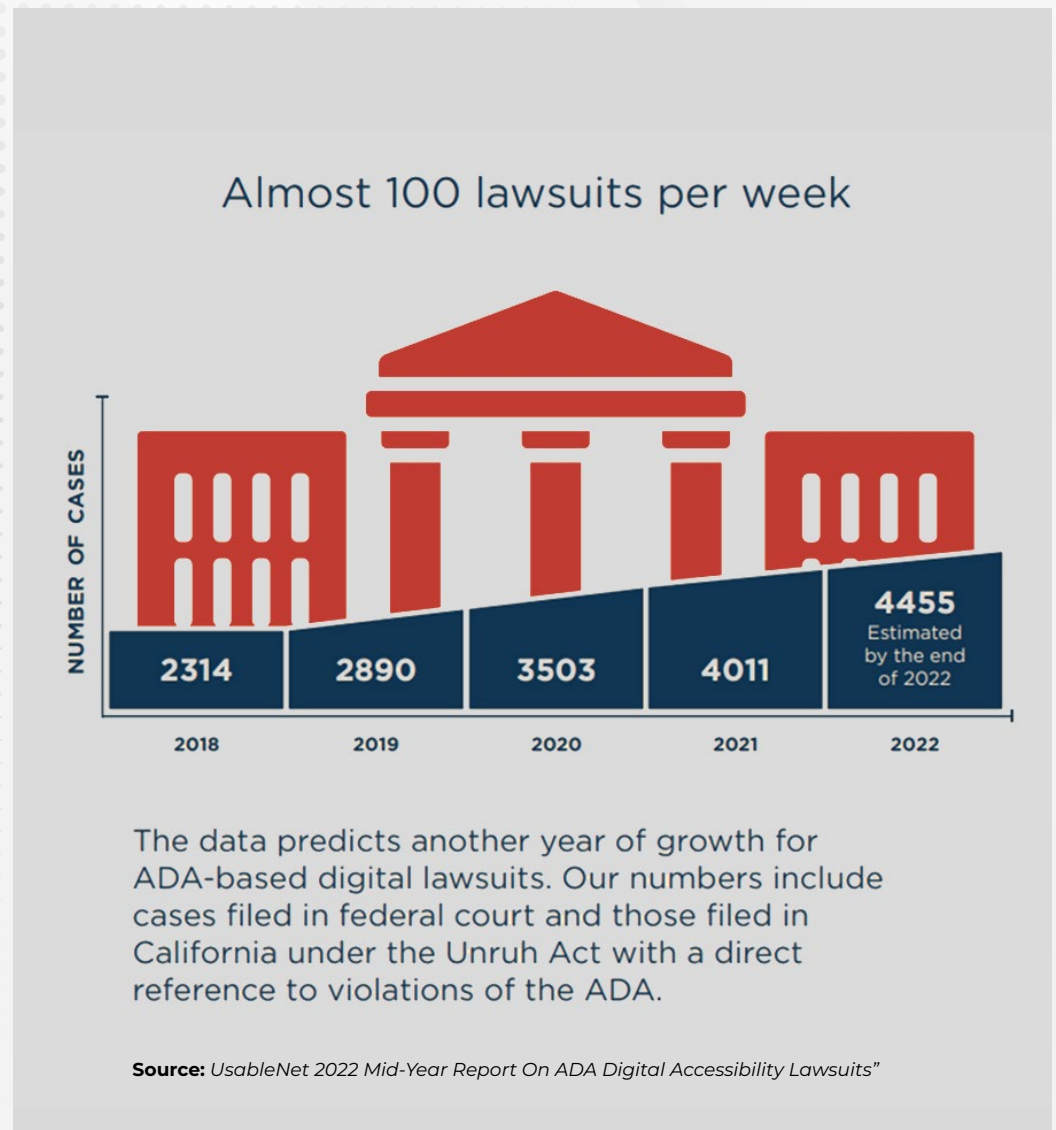
This directive has a direct impact on over 27 countries to follow best practices in web accessibility as the world becomes more digital and global.

2022



Web Accessibility Lawsuits: Mid-Year Report By [UsableNet](#)

Based on the average filing rate at the end of June 2022, there may be as many as 4,455 ADA-based cases filed for websites and mobile applications this year. E-commerce retailers have most widely felt this movement: 10% of the top 500 e-commerce websites received an accessibility lawsuit in 2022, according to our Mid-Year 2022 Digital Accessibility Lawsuit Report.



While this number is only the beginning, this number demonstrates the changing expectations of the consumer in the twenty-first century that demands equality in the digital world across shopping, bookings, interactions, and more.

What Can We Expect in 2023 and Beyond

Document Accessibility And Professionalism

2023



Currently, approximately 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, which is only expected to grow in the future. This means one in every seven employees in an organization may face some challenges requiring special accommodations.

Moreover, with research and data showing work from home increases productivity by up to 13% ([Stanford Study](#)) due to a quieter and more convenient working environment, organizations are going to be increasingly dependent on digital forms of communication. This could include more reliance on online content and communication, including PDF documents for reports or formal communication, PowerPoint presentations for collaborations and presentations, emails for business and day-to-day operational tasks, and other communication tools and technologies.

Consistently adopting an accessibility-first approach and “born accessible” formats will allow for a more seamless transfer of knowledge and information for all. In fact, even abled individuals often benefit from accessible documents as they will be able to rely on screen readers, as well as, gain deeper insights into images with descriptions (alternate text or alt text). Moreover, it is significantly cheaper and more effective to make documents accessible in the early stages than to troubleshoot or revise documents after.

WCAG 3.0: Next Generation Web Accessibility Guidelines Take Shape In January 2023

2023



Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is a digital accessibility framework supported by in-depth documentation for implementation and remediation. It delivers techniques that website owners or administrators need to incorporate, to ensure compliance that can be used by anyone involved in building and maintaining a website.

According to the working group's draft, the updated WCAG 3.0 should yield robust design and testing of web-accessibility technology with the following guidelines:

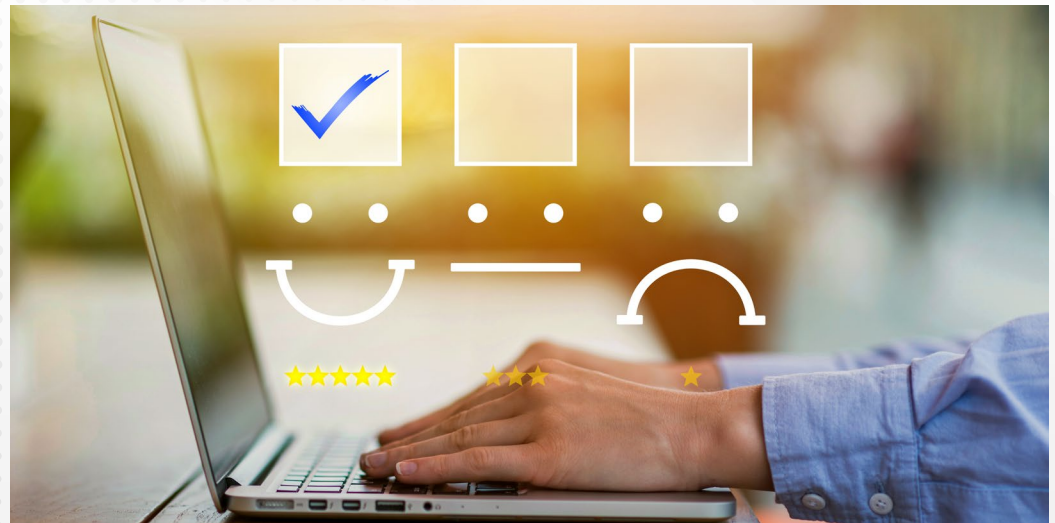
- Supporting the needs of people with disabilities is flexible and keeps up with emerging technologies.
- Content must be written in simple language for ease of understanding.
- Assist with automated testing and provide a procedure for repeatable tests when manual testing is appropriate.
- Treat the needs of all disabilities equitably and support a conformance structure that includes guidance for a broad range of disabilities, including low vision and cognitive accessibility.
- Consider the needs of more organizations and be user-oriented instead of page-oriented.

In the post-COVID era, full web accessibility is essential for people working remotely, e-commerce, financial services, and entertainment, and these guidelines will serve as the foundation for the coming years.

2023



New Rating Scale for Accessibility Conformance



With WCAG 2.0, businesses chose to meet minimal accessibility standards on their website due to vague standards and no definitive means to evaluate complaints. In fact, in most cases, it is clear that accessibility standards were often integrated as an afterthought. A website that just about meets accessibility standards would gather an “A” ranking. On the other hand, a website that brings in some scope of design and development adherence to the guidelines will receive an AA rating.

To spur site owners to exceed accessibility minimums with more objective and automated conformance testing, WCAG 3.0 substitutes letters with bronze, silver, and gold rankings. This revised strategy will allow users with disabilities to interact with websites with accommodating features and access content quickly. We also believe this will become the yardstick for most private sector companies to determine whether or not their content and websites are accessible.

Final Thoughts

With the changing digital environment, we expect to see a greater number of organizations adopt universal design practices, and support diversity, inclusion, and equity to create accessible experiences for private and public sectors. If you are interested in evaluating accessibility solutions for your organization, whether it is document accessibility (PDFs, PowerPoints, Word documents, or other formats), image descriptions (alternate text or alt text), video closed captioning and extended audio descriptions, and more, please send us an email at contact@continualengine.com.

Sources:

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