

Leading with Inclusivity and Accessibility: A Guide for Retailers & B2C

It's not just best practice and good business, in many cases, it's the law.

People With Disabilities Represent a Multi-Billion Opportunity. Are You Prepared?

Consumers with disabilities represent a massive market opportunity for retailers. This group has more than **\$175 billion** in discretionary spending, more than four times the size of other coveted markets. In the United States alone, there are more than **61 million** people who have disabilities — that's one in four individuals.

However, for such an enormous market opportunity, most websites do not meet industry consensus digital accessibility standards that are typically used to benchmark digital accessibility

under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In fact, in a **2022 study** of the world's top one million website homepages, **96.8%** did not offer full accessibility. These organizations are not only losing out on a transformative business opportunity, but they are opening themselves up to lawsuits, negative public perception, and a disappointing user experience.

The good news: forward-looking retailers can proactively invest in a more inclusive, compliant consumer experience. This is an opportunity to center your online presence around the customer — driving accessibility, brand reputation, and sales. Successful companies have made the investment in resources to help them scale, from accessibility audits to improving website experience to a long-term commitment to inclusion. They understand that accessibility is not something that can be achieved through a one-time a checklist, but an ongoing process in which they must invest ongoing resources to succeed. Investment in accessibility requires deep domain expertise and an ongoing strategy.



Digital accessibility for B2C: what you need to know

For retailers, digital accessibility means that every visitor to your mobile app or website has equal access to the same information. We live in a digital world, where shopping, delivery services, reservation booking and so much more all begins online. Just like we need to ensure physical spaces are accessible to everyone, digital properties are held to the same standard and need to accommodate people with a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive abilities.

Here are just a few examples of gaps that are prevalent across many retail websites:

- **Limited color contrast.** Low contrast between foreground text and background colors can cause eye or cognitive strain for users as they try to decipher the words. Even worse, when a user scans a page, they may not be able to perceive elements such as buttons or CTAs and thus, cannot use them.
- **Missing alt-text.** Alternative text ("alt-text") improves accessibility for people who can't see images on web pages, including users who use screen readers or have low-bandwidth connections. Without Alt text, users don't have the critical visual details that enable them to evaluate products and
- **Missing captions on videos.** Video captions and transcripts can increase online sales on your ecommerce website by making your videos accessible and engaging for the hard of hearing and those with cognitive and learning disabilities who need to see and hear the content to better understand it. Making audio and video media accessible ensures users understand your product and can make an informed purchasing decision.
- **Vague instructions.** Content, forms, menus, links, and other site components need to be easily understood by users. If required fields on forms are not labeled with clear and explicit instructions (such as formatting requirements for dates, phone numbers, etc.), it can create a frustrating user experience or cause abandonment resulting in lost conversions and revenue.
- **Mouse-only navigation.** Blind and low-vision users, as well as those with mobility disabilities that impair fine motor control, rely on keyboards — not a mouse — to navigate websites. Form elements, drop-down menus, buttons, dialog boxes, and other widgets all have to be accessible by tabbing through the interface. Without keyboard accessibility in place, users may be prevented from navigating further on a page or forced to perform workarounds to access information.



*These are just a few examples of what happens when customers with disabilities attempt to access sites with gaps such as these. The reality is that **72%** of your prospective customers are likely to **click away** from your website if it's too difficult to use. **82%** are willing to pay more to a competitor if the company delivers a great buying experience.*

Lawsuits: retailers are a vulnerable target

Lawsuits related to online accessibility are increasing at an explosive pace. In 2021, there were **2,895 lawsuits** — up **14%** from 2020. Lawsuits can eventually be settled — but it may be to the tune of millions of dollars — and they can leave a lasting impact on your brand reputation. And, it's important to note that settling one lawsuit does nothing to protect you from future lawsuits. Things become even more complex in the crossover between brick-and-mortar locations and online presence. As retailers and B2C companies react to lawsuits, they can easily slip into a draining cycle of bad press and strained resources.

Company leaders are starting to pay attention: web accessibility was just ranked as one of the **top priorities for Chief Information Officers (CIOs)**, magnified by the surge in online shopping since the Covid-19 pandemic — 1 in 5 dollars is now spent online.

Today's customers value diversity and inclusion

In parallel with the rise in online spending in just the last few years, there's a rise in stakeholder (consumers, partners, investors, board directors, and media) expectations that companies raise the bar in their diversity and inclusion strategies. Company strategies are shifting from simply aiming for compliance to making a concerted, strategic, and committed effort to be inclusive, aware, and accountable.

It pays to do the right thing. Customers reflect their values with their wallet: **More than 72%** of customers want the stores they shop at to reflect their own values.

Accessibility is good for your brand and good for business

Brand reputation is an intangible, critical driver of sales. A good reputation can win the hearts and minds of customers, close deals, improve public sentiment and perception, and extend your ability to take risks and drive product innovation. According to a survey by **Deloitte**, **87%** of executives consider reputation to be in line with other critical strategic risks.

Furthermore, the stakes have risen for the retail ecosystem. Retail partners are increasingly being held to a higher standard, demonstrating

the chain-effect of brand reputation. Quality, inclusive brands want to partner with like brands — and they expect their retail partners to meet accessibility standards.

"Persons with disabilities present business and industry with unique opportunities in labor-force diversity and corporate culture, and they're a large consumer market eager to know which businesses authentically support their goals and dreams. Leading companies are accelerating disability inclusion as the next frontier of corporate social responsibility and mission-driven investing."

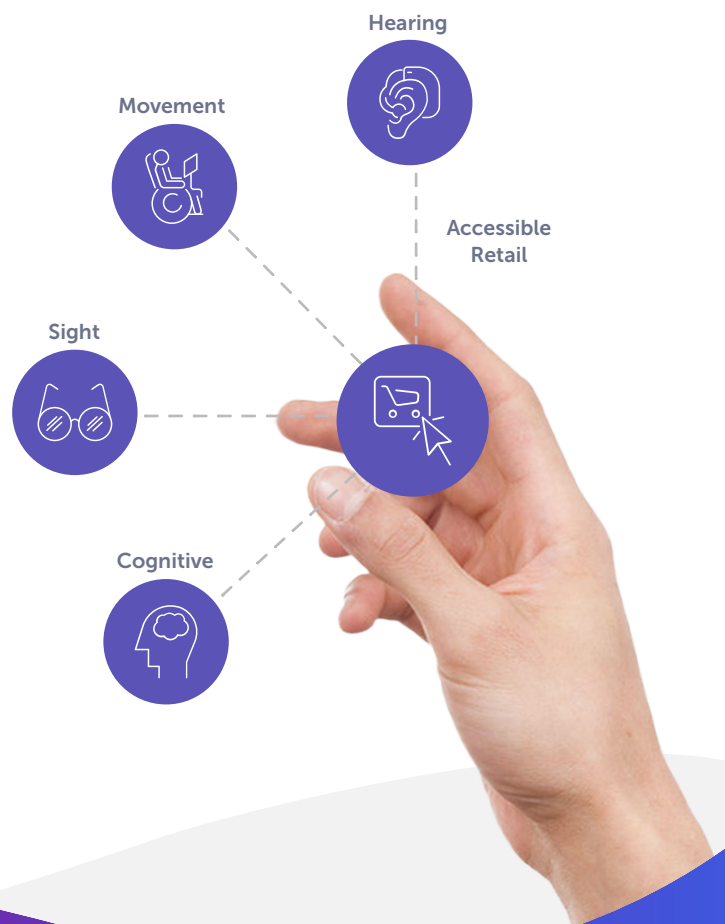
Ted Kennedy, Jr., Attorney, former Connecticut General Assembly State Senator; current Member of the Board of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

Your partner in inclusive, accessible retail

The landscape of ADA compliance is complex and vast. Far from a one-time project — it's a journey. Digital accessibility calls for an ongoing layer of strategy and management to ensure that content can easily be viewed and interacted with regardless of the device it is being rendered on. Just like cybersecurity requires functional expertise, online accessibility requires the same level of persistent and thoughtful planning and execution. Companies that take it seriously will benefit from efficiencies in their website design and development process.

It starts with organizations who are committed to doing the right thing and creating a best-in-class customer experience. It's amplified by choosing the right partner who can serve as your guide and advisor — helping you navigate the ever-changing consumer expectations, laws, solutions, and products.

Level Access is your partner for a sustainable, integrated approach to digital accessibility as an ever-evolving pioneer in the space with some of the nation's largest retailers as customers. From auditing systems to integrating accessibility into what you're building today, we can support you each step of the way.



LEVEL
access

1.866.599.0328

info@levelaccess.com

As the pioneer of digital accessibility, **Level Access** empowers organizations to achieve accessibility compliance on websites, apps, and digital products through best-in-class software, consultative services and expert-led training.

How accessible is your website? Get started with a free risk assessment to identify accessibility issues.