Five Common Accessibility Errors in Software Design and Development

Digital products start as a great idea and make their way through analysis, design, implementation, and testing. But all too often accessibility considerations are overlooked, which can impact RFPs and existing contracts.

When it comes to accessibility, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines—or WCAG—are the standard. Based on WCAG, here are five of the most commonly made accessibility mistakes in product and software development.

Accessible software is human-centered. It's designed, created for, and usable by everyone–including people with vision, hearing, dexterity, mobility, cognitive, and learning disabilities.

1 Insufficient color contrast

Low color contrast is the most common accessibility issue in design, and one of the easiest to avoid or to fix. Contrast is the difference in color between something in the foreground and its background.

WCAG Level AA guidelines require a color contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 to make most text legible (with a 3:1 ratio for large text).

High contrast
#003865   #FFFFFF

Low contrast
#CCCCCC   #FFFFFF
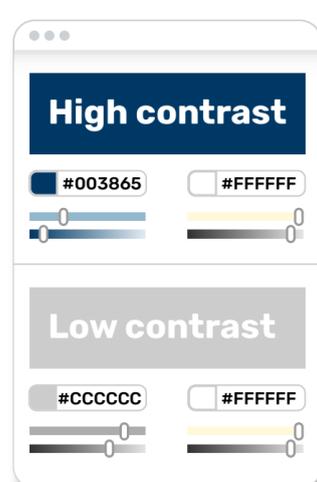
2 Lack of keyboard access

Keyboard access ensures that a user can operate the experience using just the keyboard or a keyboard interface.

WCAG guidelines require that functionality is operable through a keyboard without requiring specific timings for individual keystrokes. A user should be able to "tab" to an element, such as a field in a form or a section of content, in a logical flow with the ability to select or activate a feature at any time.

Common keyboard interaction and corresponding keystrokes:

- Navigate to an element: tab (shift + tab to navigate backward)
- Activate a link: enter
- Activate a button: enter or spacebar
- Checkbox: spacebar
- Radio buttons: up, down, left, right arrows (tab to move to the next element)

3 Lack of visible or obvious focus

Visible, or obvious, focus helps a user understand which element has the keyboard focus, ensuring the user knows exactly where they are at any time when tabbing through interactive content. Visible focus is another WCAG accessibility requirement.

Well-designed focus indicators should be high contrast, the same throughout an interface, and consistent regardless of the browser.

4 Lack of image descriptions or alt text

Alternative text–or alt text–is an accurate description of a non-decorative image. Lack of this description means that users who rely on assistive technology such as screen readers won't be aware of the images or how they enhance the accompanying content.

Missing alt text is another common WCAG accessibility issue that is easy to fix.

When clear and concise alt text and image descriptions are provided, screen readers can read the image description when the user hovers over it or interacts with it, and the user has a better understanding of the full meaning of the content.
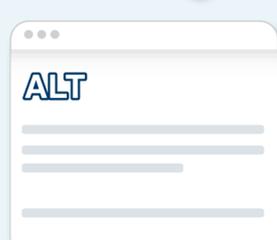
5 Improperly labeled controls

Software form controls include objects that users interact with, such as buttons, checkboxes, and text fields. Form controls must be properly labeled so that users understand the purpose of the control.

Typically, most labels are placed to the right of radio buttons and checkboxes and to the left, or directly above, other types of form fields. Maintaining consistency helps ensure that your product is logical, understandable, and intuitive for your users.

Level up your product and software accessibility

Creating software and digital products that are accessible is an ongoing process. Content changes, features are updated, and accessibility standards and regulations evolve. Level Access offers a comprehensive solution that combines advanced technology with access to expert support services, supporting a sustainable approach.

If you're ready to get started, request a demo of our solution.