

Considering different-abled people in digital design

by Eddie Kihara

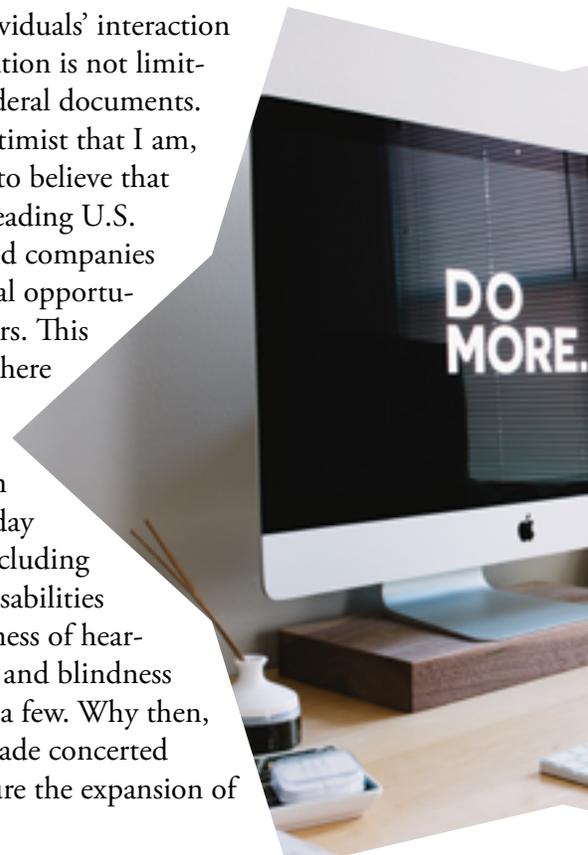
When was the last time you considered how your creative work would be perceived in the public discourse which is inclusive of disabled individuals? Hard of hearing, deaf, partially blind, blind, color blind and so on. Haven't we come pretty far as a race? Doesn't being our brothers' keeper involve a lot more than; fighting for equality and integration of all people? Equal voting rights, equal opportunities for employment, and most recently, marriage equality. How about equal access of information in digital spaces?

The law of the land

Perhaps you are aware of a U.S. law which mandates that, individuals with disabilities must have access to Federal agencies information and data that is comparable to that provided to the public who are not individuals with disabilities. The law is known as Section 508 – of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Yes, 1973 as in 42 years ago! For almost half a decade, Federal agencies and institutions of learning are the

only entities in strict observance of this statute. Well, therein lies the problem.

The pink elephant in the room is the fact that, disabled individuals' interaction with information is not limited to just Federal documents. Being the optimist that I am, I'm inclined to believe that majority of leading U.S. businesses and companies are truly equal opportunity employers. This means that, there exists diverse groups of individuals in the modern day workplace including those with disabilities such as hardness of hearing, deafness and blindness just to name a few. Why then, haven't we made concerted effort to ensure the expansion of section 508?



The good news is that considering disability has come to the limelight in recent years. In fact, all organizations will be required by law to produce Electronic and Information Technology compliant with Section 508 by 2017.

Hope for the future

By and large, all web based information and applications, video and multimedia products must include the following:

- Real time captioning with 90% or above narration accuracy
- Audio Program (Commonly known as SAP, provides audio descriptions or foreign language translations of dialogue)
- Verbatim transcript of every dialogue as well as relevant background noise such as a cough or dog barking
- Web based non-text elements such as images must include a text equivalent by means of short/alternate description
 - Images in videos, training and instructional material must be captioned and audio described

These are just a few of the requirements under Section 508.

For the full technical assistance document used to ensure successful implementation of Section 508 compliance, please visit the United States Access Board website [here](#).

These are all great strides in the direction of equal access for all but please, hold your applause! Because there is still much work to do.

manner in which disabled individuals are congratulated for 'getting out of our beds and remembering our own names in the morning'. Surely, we ought to have much, much higher expectations of ourselves. After all, aren't we the most cultured, educated, socially conscious, emotionally intelligent denizens planet Earth so far? Let's act like it.

Pro tip

Having spent countless hours reading section 508 rules and regulations (and there are many to consider) as a web developer, I began to wonder whether anyone had done us all a solid and created an app that quickly checks the level of Section 508 compliance per webpage.

It exists! The Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE) allows one to check for accessibility issues directly within Chrome. It is a free plugin that makes accessibility checks a breeze.

Security concerns? Rest assured that the plugin is safe because the extension runs entirely within the web browser, no information is sent to the WAVE server. Dear fellow designer, do humanity a solid and install it as soon as possible.

“These are all great strides in the right direction but please, hold your applause!”

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