

Website Accessibility: Practices and Standards in the Face of HTML5

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Abstract

In 2006 a United Nations commissioned study showed that 97% of content on the Internet is inaccessible. This paper addresses what is meant by accessibility, and examines the groups affected by poorly designed content who are effectively excluded from using the web. It explores ways in which these issues are currently being dealt with, and investigates some proposed advances in web technology that will assist in making the web more accessible.

The issue of accessibility is addressed from a developers perspective in relation to currently available standards. This leads into a section that tries to identify common causes of problems on the web for users of assistive technologies.

To better illustrate the accessibility problem, a site that has failed to employ best practices is examined. Here the most commonly occurring inaccessibility problems that were found on this site and others, that are often found across the rest of the web, are dissected in a case study. This is followed by some example solutions showing how these problems could be dealt with using today's technologies. This is followed by an examination of the proposed HTML5 recommendation and how, in parallel with WAI-ARIA, the issue of accessibility is being addressed.

The goal of this paper is to show that a reasonable level of accessibility can be achieved simply using standards and planning. Although current practices may be time consuming when developing accessible content, with HTML5 on the horizon this will change and in the future the web should become more inclusive towards the needs of people requiring accessible content.