

A report by Reason Digital
Supported by Microsoft
July 2020

www.reasondigital.com



Radical Accessibility: Research and Recommendations

A deep dive into how accessible charities are
during Covid-19 and beyond

**REASON
DIGITAL**

Table of contents

Executive summary	01
-------------------	----

Introduction	03
--------------	----

Findings

• Our digital world is less accessible than our physical world	05
• Accessibility is not binary	07
• Coronavirus disproportionately affects disabled people	08
• There is an unmet demand for charity services	09
• Proactive charities are benefitting	11

Recommendations

• Open a dialogue	13
• Help the few to help the many	18
• Innovate through disability	20
• Be accessible by default	21

Thank you	24
-----------	----



Executive Summary

We've heard it a thousand times: what we're living through is unprecedented. Every experience, pattern and data point in 2020 is an anomaly... and what charities and their beneficiaries are contending with is no exception to this. Coronavirus has resulted in a massive, global shock to the system: in terms of health, society and the environment. As a result, there is a greater need for support, at a time when charities are more stretched than ever.

With offline services largely out-of-bounds, there is a renewed need for – and focus on – the extent to which charities have adapted to online outreach and delivery of those services. More specifically: can potential service users access online charity services, regardless of their accessibility needs? Coronavirus itself, as well as its numerous indirect effects, is hitting those with pre-existing health conditions (and, by proxy, those who may be relying on charities) disproportionately, so the need to make charity services both online and accessible has never been greater.

In this report, we share with you unique insights into the world of digital accessibility in the charity sector: the attitudes and behaviours of beneficiaries, the accessibility needs of those accessing your website, the impact of coronavirus and, ultimately, what you – as a forward-thinking charity – should do. We build on the knowledge gained from our 12 years in the digital charity sector, our annual research into digital charity trends, a brand-new, bespoke and nationally representative survey of the general public, and the cutting-edge insights from some of the industry's leading minds in making charities accessible.

In our findings, we show that:

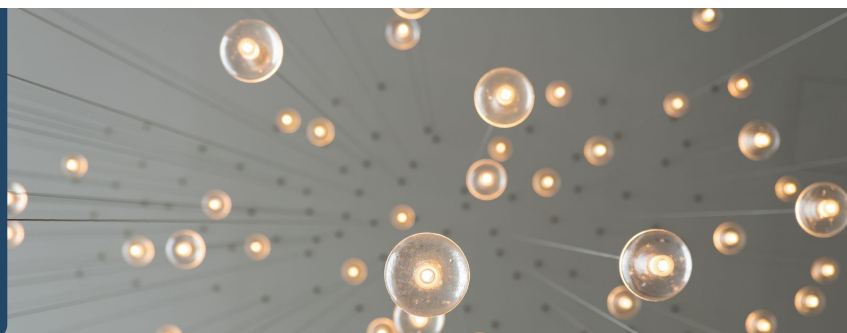
- Our digital world is less accessible than our physical world
- Accessibility is not binary
- Coronavirus is disproportionately affecting disabled people
- There is an unmet demand for charity services
- Proactive charities are benefitting



Executive Summary

We also provide to you a list of evidenced and sector-specific recommendations, to help you better meet the needs of your service users, and give your charity the best possible chance of future-proofing its online offering in an accessible and equitable way:

- Open a dialogue
- Help the few to help the many
- Innovate through disability
- Be accessible by default



We hope you enjoy reading this report, and more importantly, find it useful. What we do is more important now than it's ever been, and learning more about accessibility is fundamental to successfully helping those who need help the most.

Background to this research

The following research and report was formed as part of virtual event, *Radical Accessibility*, hosted by [Reason Digital](#), [Microsoft UK](#) and [Charity Digital](#) on July 9th 2020. The event featured the following speakers, from whom contributions have been included in this report:

Matt Haworth, Emma Lawton, Gavin Neate, Ivan Phelan, Vanessa Johnson-Burgess, Krissie Barrick, Elisabeth Ward, Kamran Mallick, Hector Minto, Vimla Appadoo, Liz Power and Mark Applin.

The team at Reason Digital would like to thank everyone for their expertise and insight, and their willingness to contribute to such an important topic at an important time.

Why Accessibility and why now?

In the midst of a pandemic, it may seem an unusual choice to prioritise research into the accessibility of UK charities. With a predicted £12.4 billion shortfall in charity income paired with a surge in demand for charities' services, surely this means there are bigger fish to fry? Surely, survival should be the priority for charities?

You'd rightly think that a sudden push in online service delivery due to a global pandemic creates a huge challenge for charities. As we all struggle to put out fires, how can charity professionals find the headspace to allow themselves to consider accessibility as well? Is it essential that they do so, right now?

The short answer is yes. We recently learnt that 59% of all Coronavirus deaths are people with a disability (despite this group accounting for only 17% of the population). While having a disability probably doesn't, by itself, put someone at higher risk from Coronavirus, many disabled people do have specific underlying conditions that make the disease more dangerous for them.

Ignoring this statistic, we are still left with the fact that disabled people represent a large group of specific support needs from charities. *Taking into consideration* this statistic, we also have a global pandemic that disproportionately affects those who require support the most. This is why accessibility is as important as ever right now. Supported by Microsoft, we commissioned research to help us uncover how accessible our charities services are and more specifically, how these services are experienced by disabled people during Covid-19, and beyond.





Disabled people are 50% more likely to face barriers to accessing digital and online services than non disabled people

In other words – despite all of the opportunities that digital offers in overcoming barriers to physical services – disabled people are still disproportionately excluded from accessing services. And now, during a pandemic and lockdown, people in this group rely on digital services more than ever.

Accessibility in digital should no longer just be a compliance issue. When we cannot leave our homes, it can mean the difference between life and death. Our research shows evidence that access to vital charity services for disabled people is a problem: this is not okay and it's not time for us to breathe out. Accessibility is not only an existential issue for your service users, but also for you as a charity – those who adapt fastest are most likely to succeed during Covid and beyond.

So how, specifically, are disabled people being overlooked? And what can we do about it?

Our digital world is less accessible than our physical world

Shockingly, our research showed that our online world is less inclusive and accessible than our physical world. This is alarming if we consider the fact that the very nature of visiting a physical service is fraught with physical challenges, and some of the buildings that charities inhabit were built when accessibility was barely a consideration for architects. The websites we build are new and malleable... and yet we've ended up building a digital world that, for disabled people, is harder to access than our physical world.

Disabled people generally have more health-care needs than others – both standard needs and needs linked to impairments – and are therefore more vulnerable to the impact of low quality or inaccessible health-care services. And yet, because of the way we're constructing services digitally, they're less likely to get the help they need.



Online support from charities presented barriers for 4 in 10 disabled people



Digital services are also 7% more likely to have provided an obstacle to engagement for this demographic, compared to offline services

Our research showed that even if a charity's service has been engaged with, the service won't provide the same degree of access to nearly half of disabled people as it does non-disabled people.

So, what are the three most common barriers preventing disabled people getting the access they need?

**13%**

The content itself, was not clear for 13% of people

**8%**

The information was not easy to see for 8% of people

**8%**

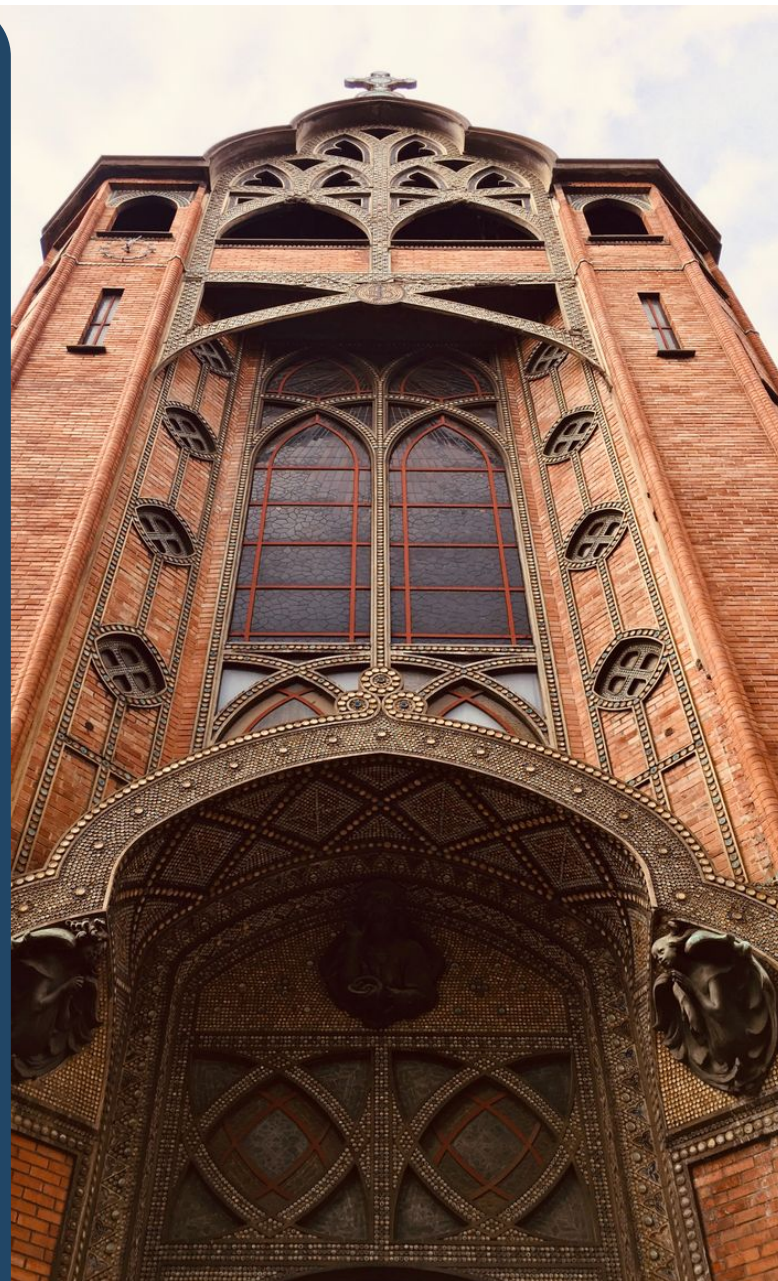
8% found that the website or app was not compatible with accessibility software

Digital accessibility: a matter of knowledge

What is stopping us?

We face fewer barriers to accessibility than in creating a physical service, given the malleable nature of website and digital design. There's no such thing as a listed website like there are listed buildings. The digital world doesn't have to deal with restrictions on constructing appropriate routes of access to all groups of people.

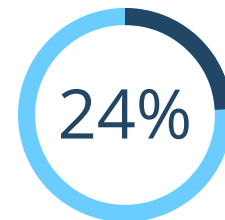
The [Equality Act](#) encompasses both the online and offline world. And yet, disabled people are still being left out in the cold when it comes to accessing services online: only [51% of charities](#) have accessibility procedures built into their websites. While time and resource obviously plays a part, much of it comes down to not knowing what the needs of service users are in a digital context, and then how to cater for these needs.



Accessibility is not binary

The revelation that our digital world is less accessible than our physical one is not just a challenge that's facing disabled people. This is an issue that cuts across those boundaries, and challenges the perception of accessibility as a binary experience. What we've found through our research is this concept of digital services causing a struggle for both disabled and non-disabled people rather than being completely inaccessible.

The digital service created some kind of barrier for 24% of people who did not identify as disabled, preventing them being able to fully engage



Although not considered disabled, almost a quarter of the public are limited by the way digital services are designed. So often within the world of e-commerce, or even digital fundraising, we emphasise the importance of making the online buying process as simple as possible – for all users. Avoid friction. Avoid excessive scrolling. Avoid any unnecessary extra steps. Avoid unclear language.

Why do we not apply the same logic in charity service design?

A struggle should not be something we want anyone to experience. So it is worth remembering that an investment of time, effort and resource in becoming accessible for users with defined accessibility needs is also an investment in the experience of *all* of your users.

“At Scope, we don’t make a condition or an impairment the disabling factor, it is the barriers in society that are disabling.

Accessibility is a way of removing those barriers.”

Elisabeth Ward, Content Designer at Scope

Coronavirus disproportionately affects disabled people

It's not every day that we have to turn on the television in order to learn from our government what we are and are not allowed to do for the next three weeks. From how many times we can leave our home per day, to who we are allowed to spend time with, Covid meant that the entire country was relying on a daily update from the Prime Minister, to understand how we protect ourselves and others from a potentially deadly virus.

It's important to see the big picture here. If you have underlying health conditions, these updates are even more important. And yet, as strategies were announced, it was left to disabled people (and the organisations that they rely upon) to understand and navigate a government response that many believe has failed them, and ultimately put lives at risk. Not only that, but with roughly 1 in 5 people in the UK being disabled, this is a huge issue that creates a break in momentum and a lack of trust within the disabled community.



Hector Minto, Senior Technology Evangelist at Microsoft, spoke passionately at the Radical Accessibility event about how a lack of inclusive design is apparent in the UK government's delivery of strategy during Covid, in particular at the press conferences. Unlike the Scottish government, who made it their own responsibility to incorporate a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter into the raw feed of press conferences, Number 10 decided to leave British Sign Language out of the daily broadcast of press conferences. This means that if you are deaf, or hard of hearing and rely upon BSL, you do not receive essential messaging.

With a shortfall in governmental appreciation of the diverse needs of its population, our charities' digital services are more crucial to disabled people than ever before. But how can charities learn from the events of 2020 to move into a more inclusive space?

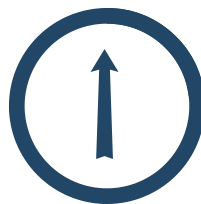
There is an unmet demand for charity services

Over the past two years, we have commissioned research that has created a benchmark for the percentage of UK adults accessing charity services digitally. It is consistently lower than access to charities *offline*, and the level of *support* of charities digitally. So how has Coronavirus affected this?



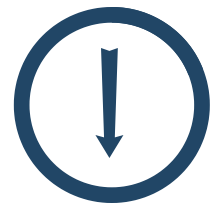
2%

Prior to lockdown, 2.2% of people had accessed a charity's service digitally



23%

Since lockdown, we've seen an increase of 23% accessing a charity's service *digitally*



19%

However, there has also been a 19% decrease in accessing charities' *offline* services

This means that the number of people accessing charity services as a whole has remained roughly consistent with pre-Covid levels. However, we could confidently assume there to be increased need at the moment: there have been massive job losses, financial uncertainty, a treatment backlog in NHS hospitals, the mental health implications of lockdown, increased isolation, bereavement... and not to mention the physical implications of Covid sufferers themselves.

Our assumption that the public need for access to charities has increased since Covid is showing signs of existing on a global scale. In the US, a federal emergency hotline set up for people in emotional distress, saw a 1000% increase in April 2020 compared to the previous year. Back here in the UK, the growth in demand is even putting pressure on the mental health of charity staff: 54% of charity CEOs were said to be highly anxious due to increased demand for services.

So, if demand for charities should be higher, but access to charities has remained the same, what's going on? The short answer is that demand is not being met.

In an ideal, inclusive, accessible, digital world, the services made unavailable by lockdown would be seamlessly substituted for online equivalents. However, we found that nearly a half (47%) of people who accessed *offline* charity services prior to lockdown were no longer accessing any charity services during lockdown. Those that are still doing so are fragmented between online and offline services, but more so in the latter (suggesting a difficulty in onboarding new digital users).



56%

of people accessing online services prior to lockdown are still doing so now (compared to just 33% of those who experienced continuity of access to offline services)

And, most notably, the only people accessing offline charity services now, are those who were already doing so prior to lockdown. In other words, from our nationally-representative 2,000-strong sample:

- There are *no new users* of offline charity services
- Only a small number of those accessing offline services prior to lockdown are now accessing online services
- This means there is a lot of offline service users no longer receiving the help that they need
- None of this takes into account the assumed increase in need during a pandemic and lockdown



Emma Lawton, Founder of [More Human](#), expanded further upon this societal challenge in her *Radical Accessibility* talk. Emma was shocked to learn that around 41% of councils have a housing benefits scheme and council tax reduction process which is only accessible online. Emma emphasised that this is not accessible. And the statistics back this up; [according to the Office for National Statistics](#), 'in 2018 there were still 5.3 million adults in the UK, or 10.0% of the adult UK population' who are non-internet users. People that need these services most (similar to the increased need for charity services for disabled people during lockdown) are less likely to have access to good internet, if at all. Therefore, this creates a gap in the people served versus the people who need to be served.

Proactive charities are benefitting

For some organisations, having the foresight to recognise accessibility as a moral and business imperative has resulted in the ability to implement quick adaptations and reduce disruption to services during the pandemic.

Krissie Barrick, Head of Digital Influencing at Scope, argues strongly in favour of doing more than the bare minimum required by the Equality Act when it comes to digital service design. In her Radical Accessibility panel discussion, Krissie outlined the disparity in experiences during Covid between organisations with robust digital accessibility policies and practices, and those who are playing catch-up.

Krissie explained how organisations that were innovating in accessibility prior to Covid, were really geared up to serve people's needs from home. On the flip side, organisations that hadn't given accessibility and inclusive design serious consideration, are the ones that have failed disabled people amidst Covid 19.

"We had huge numbers of calls to our helpline about grocery shopping and fears about how to access food, which shows that these organisations hadn't been thinking about disabled customers prior to lockdown.

Then you have companies like Microsoft, which has been innovating with accessibility features for some time, and therefore when we needed to work from home, the captioning was there and the accessibility checker was there. Those tools were really needed."



Krissie Barrick, Head of digital influencing at Scope

| Recommendations

12

The standout statistic of this report is that our digital world is less accessible than our physical world. Yet, with Covid making large swathes of our physical world off-limits, this mix of circumstances is something that charities need to address urgently.

However, there are actions we can be taking as digital and charity leaders to ensure we change things going forward. We are all capable of leading conversations, educating ourselves and, most importantly, implementing new practices that can make the digital world accessible to more people. Let's take this on together and write a different ending to this story – one that's inclusive not only of disabled people, but as many people as possible.



“Culturally, as a society, we’ve been pushed into thinking that the norm sets the standard, and therefore any challenge to that standard will decrease profit and productivity. It’s taken something as huge as a global pandemic for some business leaders to recognise that things can change.”

Vimla Appadoo, Co-founder of Honey Badger

Open a dialogue

"Your norm is the norm for you, not the norm for everyone."

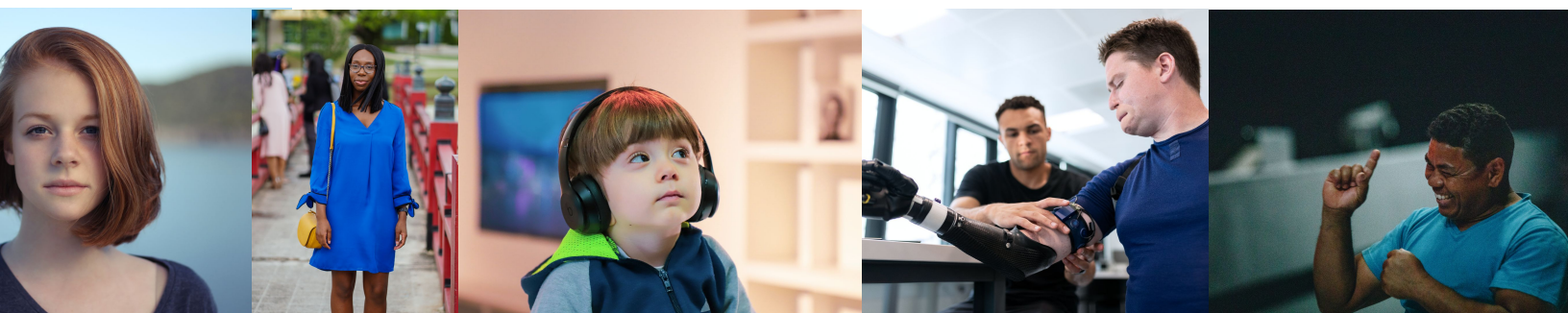
Vanessa Johnson-Burgess, Managing Director of Inclusive Recruiting

Diversity of disability

Each charity has a group of different audience profiles. It's true that we have a moral obligation to make sure that people who can benefit from our information and services, can also access it. But it is almost impossible to make everything accessible to everyone even with infinite resources, because it's just not possible for certain groups to be able to access certain types of content.

Instead we encourage charities to understand the diversity of your service users, and potential service users. If you do this you will start to better understand and empathise with the types of experiences you are designing for, and create services and content which are accessible to someone with those specific accessibility needs.

One exercise that generates a greater focus on accessibility is the surfacing of user needs. Creating personas is one way to do this, but often lacks sufficient depth. Consider how many people are embarking on digital projects without having lived experience of the accessibility needs of end users. This could result in your charity missing the diversity of needs present within your service users. Personas also often create a blindspot on intersectional prejudice and exclusion, with one persona representing just one identity or accessibility need.



Recommendations

14

Liz Power, an occupational therapist at Special Effect – a charity which has the goal of transforming lives of those who have profound and multiple disabilities by impacting them through video games and technology – shares how the individuality of each person they work with is what makes her role fascinating.

“Even if people are using the exact same type of adaptations, everybody positions it in a different way. They each have different ideas of where and how they’re going to use that technology. It’s phenomenal to me how differently everybody accesses things.”

Liz Power, Occupational Therapist at Special Effect

Emma Lawton, Founder of [More Human](#), was diagnosed with Parkinson’s at the age of 29. Emma explains why understanding the diversity of disability is so important...



“People don’t just have one challenge in life. I have Parkinson’s but it’s not my only challenge. I have this whole set of symptoms that come with my Parkinson’s which are so different to other people’s. You could line us up and each one would present completely differently. So suddenly, the ‘accessibility criteria’ for Parkinson’s isn’t suitable because everyone has this unique set of symptoms, making it almost impossible to design something for people with Parkinson’s.

I have a tremor. So facial recognition and voice control would appear to be useful technology for me. But because of the position my neck is in as a result of muscular problems, it means that I can’t use facial recognition. So everyday, when I turn my computer on, it says it cannot find my face, and although it makes me laugh, I also find it frustrating because those things were built in to help me.”

Emma Lawton, Founder of More Human

Empathy during design decisions

“You can see patterns in data, but actually, it’s when you talk to people and you get their experiences and real life situations, that’s when you start to see real patterns emerging.”

Emma Lawton, Founder of More Human

When we commissioned this research, we were expecting to find that the increase in people using digital services during lockdown has enabled organisations to reach more people. We thought this might lead us to conclude that our world has become more accessible and inclusive as a result.

We were wrong.

The fact that we were wrong emphasises the importance of not making assumptions around something we don’t fully understand as individuals. Let’s not assume our services are highly accessible or that we know what disabled people need. Empathy through listening and living alongside is essential. It’s not that we believe people are *not* empathetic – especially in the charity sector – but in our busy world we can be too quick to apply our own defaults, which in turn imply that other people think, work and behave as we do. Without lived experience of what your users think, feel and do, it is harder to design and build to meet those users’ needs.



“Talk to a variety of people and find out what they need. The genius of Signly does not come from us, it comes from the Deaf community who asked, “Can you use technology to add British Sign Language to a website?”. Then we went away and built that with help from Microsoft.

Spectate less and participate more. It’s time for an inclusion revolution.”

Mark Applin, Founder of Signly

Recommendations

16

People matter. The person that we're trying to help reach our product or service, or the person you're trying to encourage to consume our content, is important when designing. We want that person to be confident in using digital products, and this is something that we as charities and designers should support them with.

Ivan Phelan, a researcher at Sheffield Hallam University, is working with amputees who are learning to use a prosthetic arm with the help of VR. Whilst this method of assessing someone's potential for a prosthetic limb is more engaging for the amputee themselves, Ivan emphasised the importance of not just talking to the prosthetic user, but also the staff and healthcare professionals that support them and have come into contact with hundreds of other people during their work.

"All of this [progress] was due to talking to patients and staff to make sure that we're developing the right piece of software that was fit for what they required."



Ivan Phelan, Researcher at Sheffield Hallam University

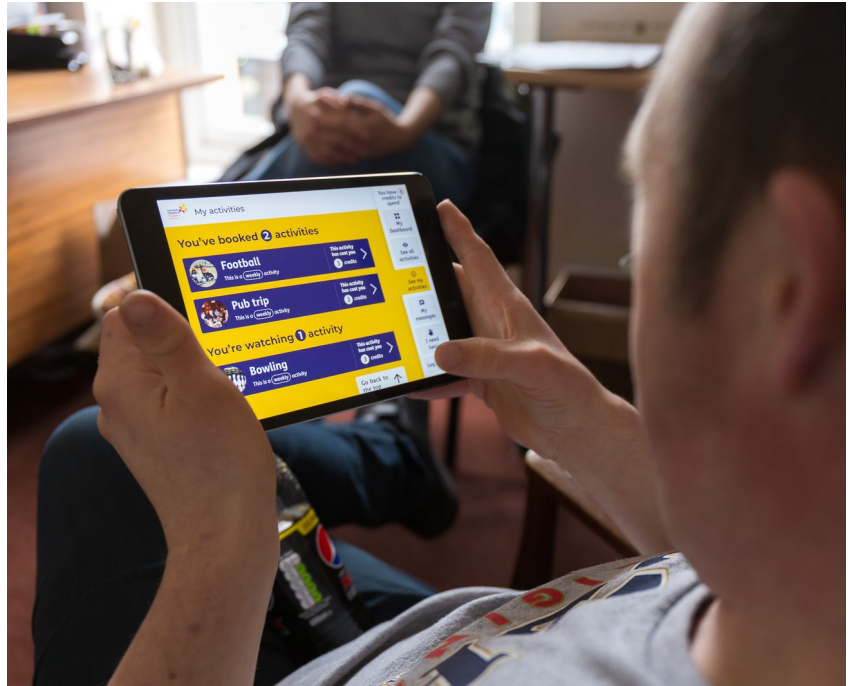
At Reason Digital, we work with disability charity Leonard Cheshire. On a visit to the charity, we sat down, made a brew, and talked to experts with lived experience. This included a young man called Shaun. Shaun helped us understand that accessibility is so much more than compliance. Of course, compliance in practice includes some of the work we delivered – for example, using clear, high contrast headings that are compatible with screen readers – but there were aspects that we would have missed without our conversations with Shaun.

For example, part of the digital service we were designing allowed Shaun to sign-up to leisure activities to attend. On each activity, our interface displayed a list of other service users and a separate list of staff that were also attending the activity that Shaun had selected.

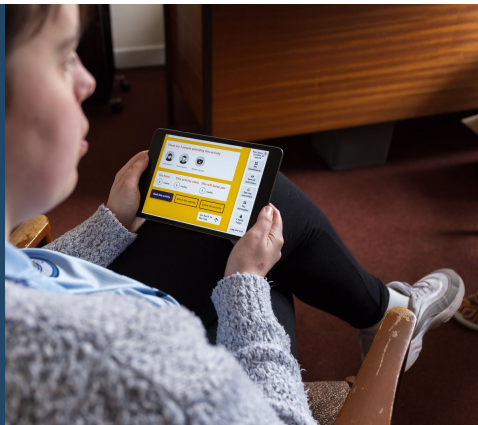
Recommendations

17

What that meant, is that the content became segmented but Shaun didn't understand the distinction between the groups of people. It wasn't a concern to him whether someone was a service user or a staff volunteer. To him, the people on the trip were "Paul who cheats at Bingo" or "Jane who shares my birthday". This meant that we were able to remove those distinctions, and move towards something that was actually less technically compliant, but more accessible to the service users using the product.



User testing at
Leonard Cheshire



Workshop and
activities at
Leonard Cheshire

Help the few to help the many

“Accessibility is usability. They’re the same thing. People need to stop seeing them as separate. It is going to make your product better for everybody. There are so many examples of organisations who have excelled and improved their services because they made accessibility a priority.”

Krissie Barrick, Head of Digital Influencing at Scope

Accessibility doesn't just serve disabled people

General good practice in the digital world can also be a catalyst for creating accessible digital services and information. Simple considerations such as clear and uncomplicated language when writing website content can make a website accessible to more people. Equally, a well-made website will allow the user to adjust the text size or use your site on a different device without modifications. These considerations will create a more inclusive experience regardless of your audience’s ways of browsing. We can, and should, commit to making things well. It doesn’t need to be more expensive, just different. Occasionally, it could potentially limit ‘elaborate’ or ‘innovative’ aspects of your site but the pay-off is greater this way round.

Hector Minto of Microsoft UK, shares how captions can also improve an experience for many. Although captions will obviously support the experience of someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, they also help someone who doesn't have strong English. Beyond this, captions impact literacy. People who turn subtitles on their televisions provide their children with stronger literacy skills as they're being exposed to the words alongside the sounds in real time.



You don't have to be disabled to appreciate good accessibility. There are many ways which, when accessibility is baked into a product or service, we all benefit. An example which must be shared, actually occurred purely by accident during the *Radical Accessibility* event which was hosted on Microsoft Teams. One of our speakers was about to begin their talk but was experiencing microphone challenges. It became difficult for the audience to hear them clearly and knowing what incredible content was going to be shared, we were anxious to fix it. A team member suggested that the audience individually enable live captions, and from that moment, we could all follow the fascinating talk in spite of technical problems. Captions became essential to *everyone*.

Another great example of building something that works for many and her developed appreciation for the impact of that, came from Emma Lawton of More Human. Emma told us about a Californian Covid-19 response site which was built for low bandwidth, meaning that it will load for people with slow internet.

"I thought how much I've grown, because previously to me, this would have been an ugly website - no imagery, and it's un-engaging - but actually if someone with low bandwidth can access this, that's the difference between someone getting support versus getting no support. That is what is important."

Emma Lawton, Founder of More Human

Our behaviour impacts many

During the *Radical Accessibility* event, we heard from Gavin Neate. Gavin is the founder of WelcoMe by Neatbox - an app which enables users to create a personalised accessibility profile and employ proximity-aware technology to inform venues of the imminent arrival of a disabled person, improving their experience of customer service. Gavin told us a story about a disabled gentleman called Ken. Ken walked into a House of Fraser, stopped, stood there and waited. Nobody came to assist Ken so he left the shop. After his experience, Ken requested that House of Fraser install WelcoMe and they agreed. Since then, the retailer has received nothing but 5 star reviews for customer service, as the reviews on Euan's Guide attest.

As one disabled person, making one request of a national retailer, Ken has improved so much for so many. The staff will be more educated on how to provide great customer service to disabled people, and anybody walking into that store with the same or different disabilities will receive an improved level of customer service. This demonstrates how a person's request for change can positively impact many and if we applied the same principles when designing digital services, our online world would suddenly become so much more inclusive.

Innovate through disability

“Whenever I start any presentation on accessibility, I turn my auto-captions on in Powerpoint. Just that small bit of modelling that we can all do, sparks attention.”



Hector Minto, Senior Technology Evangelist at Microsoft

So often in the digital world, when we consider disability in design, we innovate further than we would without that consideration. During *Radical Accessibility*, Hector Minto described how so many of the useful and fun digital features we use on a day to day basis were born from disability. From emojis, to word prediction – inclusive design works for us all.

Another example of this is the ‘Blur background’ feature within Microsoft Teams, which enables anyone who is on video, to blur their background, leaving just themselves in focus. This feature has become popular for many reasons; from a reduction in background distractions to ensuring you only share what you want to with your colleagues while we all work from home! However, the original purpose for creating this feature was to help the Deaf community to lipread. A colleague of Hector’s, shared how just having the person in focus enabled her to lipread confidently when juggling a video call with multiple people. A simple bit of technology that was created for disability actually improves the experience for many.

Be accessible by default

“Assistive technology is a Them and Us situation. Inclusive technology is about baking accessibility into products so that we all end up with the same thing.”

Kamran Mallick, CEO of Disability Rights UK

Content, not just product

As a professional in a charity, if you're creating a digital product or service then you'll be thinking a lot about exactly that – the product or service. This is usually where a lot of accessibility considerations and best practice was previously focused. But the conversation shouldn't stop there. The content that you choose to distribute via that product or service also needs to consider accessibility. Launching a new app or website and then filling it with inaccessible content over the lifetime of the product, regardless of how well-made the app or website is, will make that service inaccessible. Although this sounds obvious, often accessibility is only really talked about during development, and it isn't thought about as an ongoing process of good practice. This might be as much about training and culture interventions in the teams keeping the product content up to date as it is about technology and design considerations up front.

Disability charity Scope is going to great efforts to understand and ultimately change the less than perfect experiences of disabled people online by crowdsourcing real experiences. Importantly these experiences are being used to encourage businesses to improve the accessibility of digital assets and content going forward. There is a clear need for a tool like the Big Hack, because when our online world causes issues for disabled people, it can be difficult to report it or complain about the experience, particularly if the website is inaccessible in the first place.



The existence of reporting services such as the Big Hack support the concept of our digital world being less accessible than it needs to be. By gathering more input and understanding lived experience, we can learn and build empathy which is conducive to inclusive design in the future. For now, there is still much more listening and work to be done.

Workplace culture

“Accessibility is fundamentally creating better experiences for everyone. This isn’t just saying, I’ll think about blind people. It’s about having disability in the fabric of your organisation.”

Hector Minto, Senior Technology Evangelist at Microsoft (Accessibility)

When we increase the voice of disability in the workplace we are able to create a different type of culture – a culture where people are confident to talk about disability and give honest feedback which crucially, stems from personal experience. This feedback can help us build better products, create better services and as Hector Minto put it, “we’re then building inclusion by design.” To improve the level of accessibility that our digital world has to offer, we need to start with our own teams.

How many of us have disabled people in our digital, or wider teams? Have we created a culture of inclusivity that enables disabled people to join our organisation and to participate fully and equally?

Becoming an inclusive workplace is not just something you can switch on. Tick box exercises will not satisfy your desire to have a diverse workforce. Vanessa Johnson-Burgess of [Inclusive Recruiting](#) explained that in order to steer towards inclusion, we must understand equity, and think beyond equality. During *Radical Accessibility*, Vanessa described the concept of equality as ‘the assumption that everyone benefits from the same support.’ Whereas equity was described as ‘everybody getting the support they need. This is also the concept of ‘affirmative action’.’ The ideal scenario is one of justice. This is where nobody needs support or accommodations because the cause of inequity is addressed and the systemic barrier has been removed.

“You can build a diverse pipeline all you want, but if equity is not in your recruitment process or hiring managers don’t understand its value, then those underrepresented candidates will never get hired.”



Vanessa Johnson-Burgess, Managing Director at Inclusive Recruiting

Building inclusivity into the bones of your organisation and encouraging regular engagement between teams will help us all build more accessible tech. It will also help us go beyond accessibility, and understand preferences. Hector Minto spoke of how the ‘live captions’ feature in Microsoft Teams is an individual option for each user and personal to their preference because of an empathetic design decision that was made as a result of communication from colleagues. Initially during a meeting, captions would be turned on, but the Deaf community at Microsoft came forward to express that many people who are deaf, don’t necessarily want to ‘share’ their hearing loss without having a choice about it. Instead we must empower people to use these features on their own terms, and that’s what Microsoft did by changing the feature to be off by default.

Thank you

Thanks to Microsoft, Charity Digital and the leaders who shared their personal experiences, challenges and hopes for the future that featured in this report.

Covid has exposed the need for conversation and more importantly, action around accessibility, with the spotlight shining on our digital world. But we know that when we stop making the world inaccessible, amazing things can happen that enrich human lives. So accessibility can not be a compliance issue for a handful of people. Accessibility is a social justice issue for us all.

Thank you for reading.



The team at Reason Digital

Resources and tools

- [Microsoft's Accessibility Fundamentals free training](#)
- [The WebAIM Million: an annual accessibility analysis of the top 1,000,000 home pages](#)
- [5 digital accessibility myths busted](#)
- [How charities can meet the new digital accessibility standards](#)
- [Making your social media accessible](#)
- [How to design a website for someone affected by dementia](#)
- [How Scope built inclusion and accessibility into their new website](#)
- [Web Disability Simulator plugin for Chrome](#)
- [Google Lighthouse: tools for web developers](#)
- [Microsoft's Inclusive Design methodology](#)
- [New accessibility for Google and Apple users](#)



If you'd like to reach out about anything you've read in this report or tech for good in general, please [get in touch](#), or call us on 0161 6607949.