

DiversityInc.com Launches New E-Accessibility Feature for People With Disabilities

By the DiversityInc staff

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As we approach the 19th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), legislation that mandated employers provide adequate accommodations for people with disabilities, changes to the workplace have been made. But in the marketplace, a substantial amount of work remains to be done, especially when it comes to web accessibility.

For the nearly 54 million Americans with disabilities, web surfing can be extremely difficult. And although equal access to online content is a requirement under the ADA, many web-site publishers still aren't sensitive to this trillion-dollar market.

"Over 20 million Americans have difficulty typing, moving a mouse, or reading a screen," says Simon Dermer, managing director for eSSENTIAL Accessibility. "They can't get online without expensive assistive technology. By featuring eSSENTIAL Accessibility, organizations can reach out to this underserved community and help eliminate the digital divide. It's all part of an Online Social ResponsAbility Initiative to make the web accessible to all. By fulfilling a commitment to building an inclusive society, progressive organizations can tap into this growing market in a cause-related, social marketing context."

DiversityInc, in partnership with eSSENTIAL Accessibility, is making our online content more accessible for people with vision impairments, dexterity limitations and reading difficulties. A new E-Accessibility feature has recently been added to the upper-right-hand corner of our homepage.

But does the technology deliver? To find out, DiversityInc asked Suzanne Robitaille, founder of Ablebody.com, a web site covering disability news and assistive technology, to test our new feature and offer feedback. Here is her review:

The concept is simple: By clicking on the icon at the top right-hand corner of DiversityInc.com's homepage, users are redirected to www.essentialaccessibility.com, where they can download assistive technology free of charge. The software is easily downloadable and is installed on any standard PC for people who have difficulty typing, moving a mouse or reading a web page.

This new feature also helps visitors input information using an on-screen keyboard with word prediction. It offers different cursor options to help those with dexterity impairments, such as arthritis, fine-motor limitations and age-related factors.

The site now includes a page-reader system for people who have difficulty reading, such as those with dyslexia. This feature can be set to read any headline, blurb or link on the page aloud and is compatible with screen readers and voice-recognition systems, including ScanSoft Dragon Naturally Speaking and Microsoft Speech Recognition. I found the read-aloud option to be an easy, helpful addition to the site, and I think other users will, too.

eSSENTIAL Accessibility is popular with retailers, but DiversityInc.com is the only media site to offer this service. In fact, media sites in general don't do a good job with accessibility, and it's great that DiversityInc is helping to make news and knowledge more accessible to people with disabilities.

Suzanne Robitaille is the author of the upcoming book "The Illustrated Guide to Assistive Technology."