

Web access for disabled persons is a fundamental issue of equality

The Internet is arguably the most significant development in communications since Johannes Gutenberg designed his movable type printing press in 1440. The subsequent revolution in the mass production and dissemination of information through printed books transformed society. Books related to the arts, scientific texts, political treatises, and religious works became commonplace.

Email, browsers, Google, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and more, are familiar and have been transformative. The Internet is information at our fingertips and is accessed anywhere, anytime, from portable pads and laptops to cell phones. Canadians are fond of their devices and are highly "connected".

This is why web access has become a fundamental issue of equality. Everyone is using it: government, Institutions, the public, and business. How are disabled persons accessing what is otherwise an everyday experience for most? Blind persons, deaf persons or persons with mobility impairments who cannot manipulate a mouse, all have specific accessibility concerns.

Hardware and software technologies such as modified keyboards, pointing devices, screen readers, and large print displays allow access to computers. It is the

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design of the websites themselves that presents barriers. Sites such as Twitter and Facebook are problematic. Some are better than others. Few are truly accessible. In Ontario, public and private sector website have to be accessible by 2020.

What are the standards of web accessibility. Who set them?

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international community comprised of member organizations and the public that work to develop Web standards for access to people with diverse abilities. These standards or recommendations are developed through consensus and cover all aspects of web design. A website may conform to W3C standards and still have access issues. Therefore, disabled users should be involved in the design process, as a resource for advice and, especially, in testing design elements for accessibility.

—Andrew Tutty is a member of the Halton Hills Accessibility Advisory Committee (HHAAC).



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