

Expert Group

Opportunities of e-Accessibility

The Benefits of Digital Accessibility

Takeaways

1. 15% of all Dutch consumers have an impairment. With a website that is accessible to people with a disability, it will be much easier for you to reach this group of loyal customers.
2. Implementing accessibility requirements will also contribute to the overall findability, speed and quality of your website.
3. The expert group has developed a self-scan to increase awareness and help businesses on their way.

Hosts



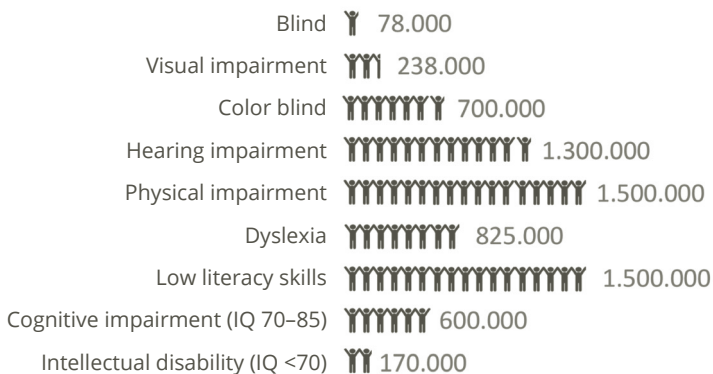
Chair



Loyal Customers: The Unreached 15%

Investing in digital accessibility, also known as *e-accessibility*, offers enormous opportunities to the online retail sector, broadening the potential customer base and benefiting the findability, quality, and conversion rate of retailers' websites. However, many entrepreneurs currently fail to reach a large group of potential customers: research has shown that the Netherlands is lagging behind in terms of the digital accessibility of products and services. According to one study, commercial websites, such as online stores and the homepages of travel organizations and energy companies, only meet half of all tested criteria.¹ For consumers with a disability (over two million people in the Netherlands, as shown in the image below), online shopping can be a major challenge, or even an impossible one, in some cases. Considering the meteoric growth of online retail, entrepreneurs can score significant wins by tapping into this market.

E-accessibility is about digital services being usable for everyone, including people with an auditory or visual impairment, for instance. Accessible websites are designed logically for easy navigation, feature easy-to-understand texts, appropriate use of color and well-designed code.



Dutch consumers with a disability²

¹ STUDY CARRIED OUT BY THE NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: WWW.MENSENRECHTEN.NL/NL/NIEUWS/COMMERCIELE-WEBSITES-NOG-STEEDS-ONVOLDOENDE-TOEGANKELIJK-VOOR-MENSEN-MET-BEPERKING-0.

² FIGURES FROM: STATISTICS NETHERLANDS, NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, ASSOCIATION OF NETHERLANDS MUNICIPALITIES, NATIONAL REFERENCE CENTRE FOR DYSLEXIA

More Customers and Higher Quality

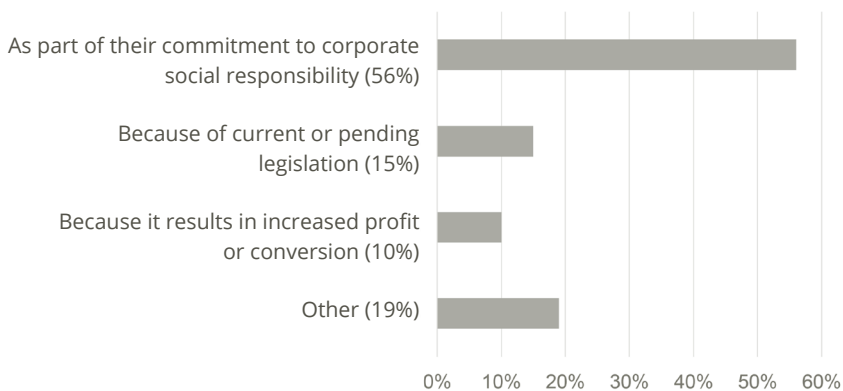
An accessible website or app can boost the reach of an online retailer by at least 15%, representing a significant number of loyal customers. Accessible online stores, however, offer even more growth potential, as internet users without disabilities, too, prefer websites that meet accessibility requirements, such as a user-friendly interface and logical navigation. For example, 69% of all consumers stated that they considered subtitles on videos to be either pleasant or necessary.³ Furthermore, over 50% of the adjustments required for people with a disability will also contribute to the overall findability (SEO), speed and quality of your website. Investing in accessibility, then, may yield even better and more sustainable results than a large-scale marketing project.

1. Purpose of the Survey

1.1 Awareness, Knowledge Exchange and Activation

For this survey, the expert group used abbi insights' research chatbot to share a questionnaire with participants in the ShoppingTomorrow panel. The majority (65%) of the e-commerce professionals who participated in the survey stated that they aren't currently making an effort to ensure their website is accessible. This is mainly due to a lack of familiarity with the topic (41%) or because it is not one of the organization's priorities (38%).

Why 32% of businesses already prioritize accessibility



In failing to address this issue, these entrepreneurs are leaving a sizeable market untapped. The Opportunities of E-Accessibility Expert Group strives to create greater awareness on this subject and encourage organizations to take action. This blue paper will outline the various advantages of having an accessible website or app. In addition, a special tool has been developed to help encourage companies to take action and get started with e-accessibility. Finally, the expert group will make several recommendations to industry associations, interest groups, commercial organizations and policy-makers to contribute to increased awareness and activation.

1.2 The Flywheel Effect: Supply and Demand

Web designers play a major role in making websites accessible. However, they depend on demand from entrepreneurs and companies, who are not yet sufficiently familiar with the concept of e-accessibility. The expert group has decided to start by increasing awareness among retailers and other organizations with commercial or non-commercial websites. Stimulating retailers' demand for accessible websites will also have the effect of boosting supply from web designers.

2. The Benefits of Digital Accessibility – Three Perspectives

A good, accessible website offers many opportunities, increasing customer satisfaction, for instance, and making a positive contribution to your organization's reputation and brand. eBay agrees:

"eBay's purpose is and always has been to connect buyers and sellers around the world. Global technology-enabled cross-border trade should be inclusive. That is why inclusive accessibility of our platform and services is a top priority."
Stefan Krawczyk, Head of Government Relations, eBay International

of the surveyed e-commerce professionals, 32% said they were already aware of and working on this issue. Commitment to corporate social responsibility is the key driver here, but there are many additional benefits to making your website more accessible.

2.1 Business Economics Perspective: Lowering Costs and Increasing Returns

Augmenting the Customer Base with Loyal Visitors

Approximately 15% of the Dutch population has a disability. If your website is not designed with these people in mind, you will be excluding a large number of potential customers from your services. A missed opportunity, for sure, especially because people with a disability tend to be very loyal customers. A positive experience on an accessible website will, unsurprisingly, inspire trust and make it more convenient for these consumers to return to your website and make another purchase. A readily findable, accessible website can bring in more visitors and higher revenues, both online and offline. You can specify goals for each individual phase of the customer journey, such as the number of likes, followers, visitors (online and offline), quotations, orders, order value, retention and reviews. Optimizing accessibility in each phase will ultimately lead to increased revenues.

Accessibility Is Also SEO

Optimizing a website's user-friendliness for people with a disability also boosts the general quality and reach of that website. After all, there is a lot of overlap between accessibility and *search engine optimization* (SEO). You could see Google as a blind user. An accessible website is a lot easier for Google to find, understand and index. One accessibility requirement, for instance, is that images have descriptive captions. This is not only useful for people who are visiting your website using *screen reader software*; it will also make it a lot easier for Google to read and find the images. The better Google understands what information a website contains, the higher its ranking will be in relevant search results.

Higher Returns on Marketing Expenses

The cost of specific online marketing programs aimed at improving results in each phase of the customer journey (such as Google Adwords) is often many times higher than how much it would cost to improve the website. Investing in accessibility will enable you to increase your returns on these online marketing expenses.

Greater Reach with Subtitling

Many online stores use video on their websites or in their advertising material, for example on social media. This medium, however, is not accessible for everyone, as people with a hearing impairment (1.3 million people in the Netherlands), as well as other shoppers who do not have access to sound for any number of reasons, will be unable to hear the audio. Studies have shown that no fewer than 80% of all videos on Facebook are played on mute. That may be because the user is in the quiet car of a train, in a library or in a loud environment where they wouldn't be able to hear the audio anyway. That's why subtitles are a must for videos posted on websites and social media. An additional advantage of subtitles is that they are indexed by Google, which means that videos with subtitles are easier to find.

Low-Cost Service

The internet is still the cheapest sales and information channel: it is up to twenty times cheaper than communicating by phone and up to fifty times cheaper than face-to-face communication. Ensuring that customers are able to navigate your website without requiring remote or physical assistance generates cost savings.

High Quality Leads to Lower Maintenance Costs

Accessible websites are built and designed in line with international standards. A technically sound website has many advantages: its structure is logical and the site itself is quick; it can be scaled to fit various screen sizes and has optimum findability. On top of that, a good website will help you save considerably on maintenance costs, especially if you include accessibility as a criterion during the design phase.

However, having your website built according to these standards has yet another advantage: it makes it easier to check the quality of your web designer's work. After all, the standards and intended results have been clearly specified and are easy to test.

2.2 Social Factors

CSR Policy: A Positive Reputation and Satisfied Customers

Equal access to products and services is a human right. This means that companies have the responsibility to make sure that everyone can access the products and services they offer, making digital accessibility a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In addition to reducing an organization's environmental footprint, reducing carbon emissions and implementing sustainable packaging, offering accessible products and services should, therefore, be an integral component of any CSR policy. For many companies, CSR policy is an explicit part of their corporate strategy, as they may want to comply with certain quality standards, for instance, or with the INK management model (an integrated model to evaluate, develop and govern organizations). CSR has a positive effect on customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and your reputation in society.

The Aging Population: Older People Are More Active Online

Due to our aging population, the percentage of older people who use the internet is on the rise. Currently, half of all Dutch people between the ages of 65 and 75 use the internet, representing a 10% increase over the past four years alone. Online activity among people over the age of 75 is also increasing. In addition to personal assistance in brick and mortar shops, they are also looking for an accessible, user-friendly online shopping experience.

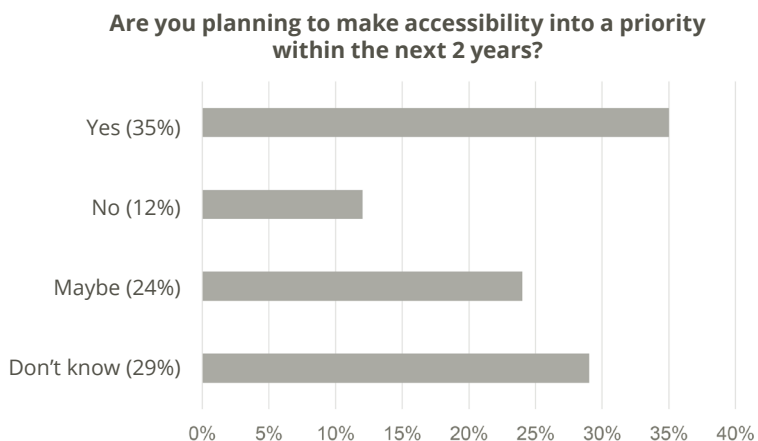
2.3 Legal Factors

The Dutch Act on Equal Treatment on the Grounds of Handicap or Chronic Illness (Wghb/cz) came into effect in January 2017, forbidding businesses from distinguishing between customers when providing access to goods and services. Companies must treat all customers equally, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. They are even obliged to make simple changes to ensure the "general accessibility of their products and services." This obligation applies even if customers haven't explicitly asked them to do so.

In addition, an agreement was recently reached in Brussels with regard to a new EU Directive (the European Accessibility Act), which obliges banks, passenger traffic services and e-commerce businesses to make their websites accessible. This requirement will take effect following an initial six-year transitional period. It is therefore advisable to already start including accessibility in policy plans now and gradually begin to implement the relevant requirements. After all, rushing to make the changes required by law only after the transitional period has ended will be considerably more expensive and time-consuming, and time pressure will probably result in businesses settling for less-than-ideal solutions. The rush to the finish line before the General Data Protection Regulation came into effect in 2018 is a good example of the type of situation you want to avoid.

3. Become Accessible Too – Test Your Website and Learn More

59% of the ShoppingTomorrow experts stated that they will definitely or possibly start working on developing an accessible website in the next two years. This section seeks to provide support in this process by offering a self-test and various practical tips.



3.1 Test Your Own Website

Does your organization want to get started with accessibility? In that case, you will probably have to make a number of technical and organizational changes. You can use several easy self-tests to get more insight into where you are at now.

Placing Orders Using the Keyboard Alone

Can your website be navigated solely by using a keyboard? People with a visual impairment do not use a mouse to navigate a website, but are reliant on the Tab key and other keyboard shortcuts. Try ordering something on your website using only your keyboard. Can you click the order button? Can you successfully create an account?

Video Subtitles: Useful or Necessary for 69% of Consumers

Do you use videos to convey information on your website or other channels? Do these videos have subtitles? The 2018 GfK Consumer Survey shows that 11% of the 455 respondents consider the use of subtitles a necessity. For people over the age of 65, it's a whopping 27%. In addition, 48% of all respondents indicated that subtitles were important for them, as they make it possible to watch videos even when listening to audio is not an option. This even applies to 53% of young people.

Write Easy-to-Read Texts

Use short sentences, avoid jargon and technical terms and write in the active voice. Rather than: "A party will be held," write: "De Vries Bakery is throwing a party!" An easy-to-read style will enable you to reach low-literacy readers (1.5 million people in the Netherlands) and people with dyslexia (825,000 people in the Netherlands), but it will also appeal to other readers, as everyone likes texts to be easy to understand. The average reading level in the Netherlands is B1. To test the language level of your website, you can use the Reading Level Test Tool, which can be found on the website of the Dutch Accessibility Foundation.



The Reading Level Test Tool

Never Communicate Using Color Alone

Do you ever use color alone to convey a message? That can be a problem for many consumers. What happens, for instance, if your customer accidentally skips a field when creating an account? If the field in question is only marked with a striking color, it will be impossible for people with a visual impairment to proceed, as the Narrator feature used by blind internet users (78,000 people in the Netherlands) cannot detect this kind of information. On top of that, there are 700,000 color-blind people in the Netherlands, who will also struggle to recognize certain colors. That's why it is best to use both color and text to indicate errors and mistakes.

3.2 Tips for Creating an Accessible Website

Accessible websites are designed logically for easy navigation, feature easy-to-understand texts and have a well-designed layout with appropriate use of color. There is also a dedicated international standard (the Web Guidelines, or WCAG 2.0) with exact specifications for accessible websites. For government organizations, applying these standards is mandatory, which is why many web designers are already familiar with these guidelines.

Visit www.mkbtoegankelijk.nl for more practical tips to make your website accessible. These tips help organizations and their web designers with:

1. accessible website technology or development;
2. accessible design;
3. accessible content (images, audio and accessible copy) on their own and other channels;
4. embedding accessibility in the organization (accessibility as organizational policy).

Implementing all of the recommendations can sometimes be rather expensive, depending on which stage of the development process you are in or what content you use. To keep costs as low as possible while still reaching the most sustainable solutions, it is best to phase in the various changes gradually. You can choose to make simple adjustments first, for instance, before drawing up a long-term plan for a fully accessible website in the future. Ultimately, buying or developing an accessible online store is cheaper than 'fixing' an existing one. Since many websites are redeveloped every three to four years, it is best to include accessibility as a design requirement for the next iteration of your site.

4. Activating the Business Community – Means of Communication or Tools

The expert group has looked into which means of communication and tools would be best suited to facilitate knowledge sharing, while activating and supporting the business community in developing accessible websites. The ideal result of any tool would be for all online stores to become accessible. As such, it should:

- create awareness;
- highlight benefits;
- share knowledge;
- encourage businesses to get started;
- offer support.

4.1 Target Audience

The target audience consists of small, medium-sized and large e-commerce companies that are completely lacking in expertise on accessibility or that need to be encouraged to take action in this field. In larger organizations in particular, it is possible to distinguish between various positions and roles, all of which respond differently to different arguments and consume information from various sources in different ways. By exploring all the various roles that exist within the organization, you can get a good sense of which tools and means of communication would increase the chances of success. We distinguish between the following roles: Product Owner, Marketeer, Business Manager, UX Designer, Board Member/Management, Software Developer and Compliance Officer.

4.2 Potential Resources

The table below contains an overview of the various resources and tools that could contribute to awareness, knowledge sharing, activation and support in developing accessible websites. The ● specifies which resources may have an impact on which roles within the organization.

Resources	Role	Product Owner	Marketeer	Business Manager	UX Designer	Board Member/ Management	Software Developer	Compliance Officer
Interview: market leaders, Minister of Health, Welfare & Sport								●
Video: consumer with a visual impairment places an online order			●		●			
Infographic / factsheet			●		●			
Website self-scan via domain name		●	●		●		●	●
Outcome of self-scan: benchmark, missed customers, tips and solutions		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Browser plug-in: experience it yourself		●	●	●	●			
WCAG 2.0 summary (technical or management)							●	
Template: convince management/colleagues				●		●		●
Calculation tool: increasing reach			●					
Workshop for/by UX-ers					●			
E-learning/webinar			●		●		●	●
Tech hacks (open-access code available)							●	
Handbook for visual designers with color codes					●			

4.3 Choosing the Most Suitable Tool: Domain-Based Self-Scan

A domain-based self-scan is a user-friendly tool that yields all the types of results necessary to meet the requirements. A benchmark can spur on activation and offer tips and solutions for knowledge and support. If this tool is distributed properly (by industry organizations, for instance), it can also lead to increased awareness throughout the business community. The simplicity of the tool and the variety of the results it produces ensure that it can be useful and effective for anyone in the organization, regardless of their role.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Research has shown that 65% of e-commerce professionals have yet to begin working on making their website more accessible. This means they could be missing out on up to 15% of their potential customer base, as well as many other commercial, legal and social benefits.

A tool can be used to foster greater awareness and facilitate knowledge sharing, support and activation within the business community. Research carried out by the expert group shows that a domain-based self-scan, with detailed results, is the most effective option.

The expert group has already drawn up a detailed list of the prerequisites and desired outcomes of this self-scan. A first demo version of the tool was presented in January 2019 during the Webwinkel Vakdagen e-commerce trade event. The final version will be launched at www.zelfscantoegankelijkheid.thuiswinkel.org in the course of 2019.



Do the self-scan

5.2 Recommendations

- Interest groups for online retail such as Thuiswinkel.org, and other organizations focusing on fields such as travel and insurance, can play a role in creating immediate awareness among a large group of retailers.
- Web designers and providers of turnkey online-store packages have to be approached separately and encouraged to incorporate accessibility requirements in their products and services. With a view to sustainability, cost savings and boosting conversion, demand for accessible webshops is increasing. This presents a great opportunity for CMS and online-store package providers, integrators and web designers to gain a competitive edge.
- The government can play a more active role in creating awareness.
- Different means of communication, resources and tools are needed to address and activate different roles within different organizations. For an overview, please refer to section 4.2.

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