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eBooks and eJournals Accessibility: The Current Legal Framework in Europe and the USA

Did you know that around 1.3 billion people, which makes up 16% of the global population, face some kind of disability? This number is a reminder that many individuals face barriers in accessing basic content. To address these inequities, there's a strong legal accessibility framework in Europe and the USA that promotes the availability of products, services, and content to the disabled. Let's find out more about this!



What is the European Accessibility Act?

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is a directive of the European Union that was originally published in 2019 and is expected to come into full effect in 2025. The aim of EAA is to improve trade between member states and the internal market functioning to make products and services accessible for people with disabilities. Here are the products and services that this act targets:

- Digital products and services, including ebooks, ejournals, digital textbooks, and digital apps
- Banking services - ATMs and payment terminals
- Transport such as ticketing and check-in machines
- Audiovisual media services
- E-commerce platforms

What Does Complying with EAA Look Like for Publishers?

Complying with the legal accessibility framework in Europe or EAA requires publishers to ensure the following things:

Accessible Digital Content

All ebooks, ejournals, and other digital content must comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. For instance, you should create text that is easy to read by screen readers and the table of contents is structured. In addition, all images need to have alternative texts so people with low vision and cognitive impairment can grasp the theme or the topic.

Detailed Metadata

To adhere to the legal accessibility framework in Europe, publishers should provide detailed metadata about their digital publications. This involves sharing information whether the content supports text-to-speech functionality or has alternative texts. Search engines then understand, index, and rank the digital content based on the metadata.

Accessibility Tools

For authors, editors, and reviewers with special needs, submission platforms and peer review systems must develop proper accessibility tools. These can include assistive technology like screen readers, text-to-speech software, and magnifiers. Clear instructions without any jargon and diverse communication methods are also necessary.

Adaptations to Different Formats

Publishers should also offer different content formats, such as EPUB. It has a reflowable nature, which means the content adjusts to different screen sizes without any quality issues. On top of this, people with challenges can set the font size and change background colours to suit their liking and needs while confirming to WCAG.

What is the Current Legal Accessibility Framework in the USA?

Now that you are aware of the legal accessibility framework regarding journals and digital content in Europe let's see the regulations in the USA:

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

It's a Federal law that prohibits discrimination related to disability in programs conducted by Federal agencies. It has multiple sections ranging from 501 to 508. Section 504 protects the civil rights of people with disabilities from being excluded, denied, or discriminated against.

However, this act was then amended in 1986 to include section 508. It mandated the federal government to provide accessible electronics and information technology to the public with disabilities. It includes all the technology produced, developed, and maintained by the federal government.

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Publishers can comply with the legal accessibility framework in the USA by following the WCAG standards:

- Create and provide documents in accessible formats like PDF/UA/EPUB that are also editable for unique needs.
- Add alternative texts to images so screen readers can communicate the theme to visually impaired employees or the public.
- The text should be large, and there must be contrast for easy readability.
- Use proper headings, subheadings, and other interactive elements so people with assistive technology can navigate the journals and other digital content.

American Disabilities Act (ADA) is another civil law that came into existence in 1990 and focuses on protecting the rights of people with disabilities. It aims to provide disabled people with the same employment opportunities as others and qualify them for public entities' programs, activities, and services.

In addition, the ADA requires telephone and internet companies to have a nationwide interstate and intrastate relay services system. This ensures people with hearing disabilities can communicate over the telephone.

What are the Consequences of not Complying with the Legal Accessibility Framework in Europe and the USA?

Here are a few consequences that publishers have to face if they fail to comply with legal accessibility framework in either the USA or Europe:

- Penalties and Fines: Depending upon the extent of the breach, each state can impose different penalties or fines that harm the publisher financially.
- Product Removal: Authorities can order to take down digital and other products from the market if non-compliant, ruining the massive investments made.
- Loss of Customer Base: Non-compliance can position the publisher as non-inclusive, damaging the reputation and eroding consumer trust.

FAQs

What are the benefits of complying with the legal accessibility framework for publishers?

The benefits of complying with the legal accessibility framework for publishers include reaching a broader audience and improving overall user experience. Most importantly, it gives publishers a competitive edge, making them stand out and reinforcing positive brand recognition.

Which countries does the EAA apply to?

The EAA applies to all countries and economic providers that offer or plan to offer products and services in the European Union.

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How can publishers comply with the legal accessibility framework in Europe and the USA?

To comply with the legal accessibility framework in Europe and the USA, publishers must conduct an accessibility audit and update digital content accordingly. In addition, make sure that all staff members, including developers, designers, and editors, understand accessibility requirements.

Conclusion

In today’s rapidly evolving landscape, the importance of adhering to the legal accessibility frameworks in the USA and Europe cannot be overstated. Whether you're an established publisher or embarking on a new venture, understanding and implementing these guidelines is not just a legal requirement—it's a commitment to inclusivity that resonates with a diverse audience. By prioritizing accessibility, you not only enhance the consumer experience but also unlock greater sales potential and elevate your brand’s reputation in a competitive market. If you’re searching for a publishing solution that seamlessly integrates compliance with innovative tools, look no further than CloudPublish. With its robust features and dedication to industry standards, CloudPublish stands ready to empower your journey toward accessible and impactful publishing. Don't just adapt; thrive in a landscape where everyone can engage with your content!

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