

Accessibility

Alternate Formats



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Everyone has the right to access public information. If a person cannot access a public document because of a disability, they are being denied their right to access.

What are alternate formats?

Alternate formats are simply other ways of publishing information beyond traditional printing. Some of these formats can be used by everyone while others are designed to address specific user needs.

Why do we need to provide information in other formats?

Some people cannot read or use regular print because of their disability. This can include people who are blind, people who have low vision, an intellectual or other cognitive disability, and some people with physical disabilities who cannot hold publications or turn pages.

Other people cannot access or have difficulties accessing the Internet. Still others have difficulties watching or hearing video presentations.

Providing alternate formats will ensure that all clients can access your information. It's not only good for your business, it's required by law. The Ontario Human Rights Code establishes, in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the principle of access by persons with disabilities to goods, services, facilities and employment.

The Code prohibits not only overt discrimination, but also practices that are discriminatory in their effect. Under the Code, to refuse a request for information in an accessible format could be considered a discriminatory practice and could make you liable

for complaint.

Accessibility requirements are a component of good communications planning. It is important to consider the communication needs of your whole audience when preparing your materials. Advanced planning and preparation of materials in multiple formats can greatly reduce the time required to respond to individual requests. This results in improved customer service, and makes particular sense when producing print or multimedia materials that are targeted at a population that is likely to have multiple format needs, such as seniors. Many seniors favour material in large print, and people with a hearing loss benefit from captioning on video presentations or video streaming.

Think about all the forms that sending and receiving information can take. There's electronic, verbal, audio, or written to name a few. How can you improve accessibility in communicating with clients, suppliers and the public?

Here are some of the alternatives available to help make information more accessible:

Alternative Formats

Large Print

An alternative format for people who have low vision. Large print materials should be prepared with a font (print) size that is 16 to 20 points or larger. This can be created in-house by using word processing software, or can be outsourced to a vendor.

Electronic Text

Used with computer synthetic voice technology (screen reading software) that enables people who are blind, have low vision (such as seniors) or who have learning disabilities to hear a spoken translation of what others see on the monitor. When an electronic form of a document is placed on a CD, it should

be labelled in large, high-contrast print and Braille.

Braille

An alternative format for people who are blind or deaf-blind. It is a tactile system of raised dots representing letters or a combination of letters of the alphabet. Braille is produced using Braille transcription software.

Audio Format

An alternative format for people with a vision, intellectual or developmental, or learning disability, and are unable to read print. Labels should be prepared in large, high-contrast print and Braille.

Captioning

Captioning translates the audio portion of a video presentation by way of subtitles, or captions, which usually appear on the bottom of the screen. Captioning may be closed or open. Closed captions can only be seen on a television screen that is equipped with a device called a closed caption decoder. Open captions are “burned on” a video and appear whenever the video is shown. Captioning makes television programs, films and other visual media with sound accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Windowing

Windowing enables people who are deaf to read by means of a sign language interpreter what others hear in a video presentation or broadcast. The interpreter appears in a corner or “window” in the screen translating spoken word to sign language. Windowing may include open or closed captioning.

Descriptive Video Service (DVS)

DVS provides descriptive narration of key visual elements

- such as the action, characters, locations, costumes and sets
- without interfering with dialog or sound effects, making

television programs, films, home videos and other visual media accessible for people with vision disabilities.

Assistive Technologies

People with disabilities may use one or more of the following assistive technologies in communicating with others or in getting information:

- speech input and synthesized speech output;
- screen readers, screen magnifiers, screen projectors;
- audio recorded information;
- text telephones;
- adjustable signal level and tone on audio devices;
- volume control;
- hands-free data entry and response selection;
- intelligent word prediction software;
- alternative pointing devices, such as mouth sticks;
- keyboard controllers;
- book holders and page turners;
- touchscreens; and
- standardized icons.

Telecommunications

Although many people who are deaf or hard of hearing use e-mail and pagers to give and receive information, TTY (teletypewriter), is still widely used. Those who use wireless messaging pager systems can send and receive e-mail, TTY messages, faxes, text-to-speech and speech-to-text messages, and a text message to any one-way alphanumeric pager. More cellular phones are now compatible with TTY and hearing aids, and as they become less expensive and easier to use, their use will be more widespread.

Bell Canada Relay Service (BCRS) lets TTY users and hearing

people talk to one another by phone with the help of specially trained BCRS operators. Users dictate to the operator the conversation, which is then relayed to the TTY phone. TTY conversation is then relayed to the regular phone user. This service is confidential and the only cost is any long-distance charges that would regularly apply. Local calls using this service are free.

The World Wide Web

Providing easy access to information through accessible websites benefits everyone, including:

- people with disabilities;
- seniors;
- consumers living in areas that do not have access to high-speed Internet;
- people who have difficulty reading and writing;
- people who speak English as a Second Language; and
- tourists and people living in multilingual societies.

When you are designing your website, remember that some people use assistive technology to help them use the Internet. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international organization. One of its primary goals is to develop standards, protocols and guidelines to ensure that the benefits of web-based information are accessible to all people, whatever their hardware, software, network infrastructure, native language, culture, geographical location, or physical or mental ability.

More information on guidelines and suggestions for making websites accessible, appears on the ***World Wide Web Consortium's (WC3) website***.

Website Testing

Is your website accessible? You can find out by contacting a company that specializes in creating websites that meet accessibility

guidelines, or that sell software that can maintain a website's accessibility. These companies often let organizations test a few sample pages of their website free of charge. If you would like to better understand the difficulties that an inaccessible website can pose, visit the website of **WebAIM** for various simulations.