**Is Your Website ADA Compliant?**

This question has recently become the talk of the industry. Golf operators, like most small businesses, rely on their website as the primary tool to communicate with customers about their products and services. For many businesses, their website was deployed years ago with little change since other than updated content.

**Are you sure your site is accessible to everyone? Can sight-impaired users and others with disabilities view and receive all content on your site?**

**Why is this important?** The Department of Labor’s published [Americans with Disability Act](https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/disability/ada) guidelines do not explicitly define website accessibility as a protected service. One of the requirements under [Title III](https://www.ada.gov/ada_title_III.htm) does address the “*denial of participation* requirement. A public accommodation shall not subject an individual or class of individuals on the basis of a disability or disabilities of such individual or class, directly, or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements, to a denial of the opportunity of the individual or class to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations of a place of public accommodation.”

The Department of Justice (DOJ) was expected to release a new rule clarifying the policy, but in December 2017 they withdrew their proposal. Lack of clear guidance has prompted a number of lawsuits being filed against golf courses claiming they violate Title III of the ADA under the Denial of Participation.

NGCOA recognizes many of our owners and operators outsource the development and management of their websites, but they should be reminded they are still accountable for ADA compliance of not only their facility, but also all of their product and services, including websites.

To help owners and operators better understand this requirement we have assembled the following resources to help educate and guide you andyour website designer to ensure your site is both accessible and ADA compliant.

**How to Evaluate Your Website**

You can paste your site’s URL into the WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool:

[https://wave.webaim.org](https://wave.webaim.org/).

WAVE returns a report with errors and alerts tied to specific elements on the pages of your site. Please note that some of these messages may only make sense to someone who is a web developer/designer. However, it is a useful tool to give you an idea of what accessibility issues may be hiding on your specific site.

**A Checklist for Website Accessibility**

The WebAIM website is a great resource for information and guidelines on accessibility. Their checklist (derived from [W3C’s Website Content Accessibility Guidelines](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/)) is a useful guide. You can access it here:<https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>

Guideline 1.1 on the checklist should be a priority for your website and easy to implement. Every image that is uploaded to your website needs alternative text or “alt text.” This is a brief description of that image. An example that applies to all websites is alt text for the site logo. Instead of no text or ambiguous text, like “logo reversed,” the alt text should read “your business name logo.”

The checklist also is a good conversation starter with your web developer/designer. Discuss each guideline on the list with them and ask if they are implementing those standards in the structure of your site.

**Accessibility is Good for SEO**

The more descriptive keywords you can add to your site, the more you can enhance organic search. In addition to adding alt text to all images, you can name those image files with descriptive names before you upload them to your website platform or host.

Instead of uploading files with names like IMG59382750.jpg, name them with keywords for what they describe like scenic-ocean-views-hole-7-your-golf-course-name.jpg.

**Other Must-Haves on Your Website**

Here is a list of functions that your website host can provide. Some may be included in your hosting plan or may be available for an additional charge. You should ask your host if the following are implemented on your site.

**1. SSL Certificate**

This puts the https in the site URL. Previously, this was a requirement only for sites that offered e-commerce, but now Google is marking sites without SSLs as “insecure” by placing an “i” in a circle in the URL field. Google also gives preference in search engines results to sites that have SSLs.

**2. Malware Scanning and Automatic Removal**

Websites, particularly WordPress sites, are vulnerable to hacking. It’s not a question of if, but when. Having your site go offline, display inappropriate content or be held for ransom are stressful situations that you can avoid. There are different levels of protection you can add to your site. Daily scanning and automatic removal of malware is the most basic and necessary of these levels.

**3. Automatic Backups**

Your site needs automatic backup at the server level so the site can be restored immediately.

For additional information and assistance, contact Ronnie Miles rmiles@ngcoa.org or Beth Bast bbast@ngcoa.org.