
CRAVEN, J. (ed.) Web Accessibility: practical advice for the library and information professional. London: Facet Publishing, 2008. 168 pages. ISBN: 978-1-85604-625-1. £44.95 (hbk)

The provision of accessible web services is about delivering online information that is useful, informative, quality-assured and does not present unnecessary barriers.

This edited collection is a “practical introduction to web accessibility” (p.1) and is primarily aimed at library and information professionals, students and lecturers of library and information studies. Editor Jenny Craven is Research Associate at the Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM) and has worked on a number of research projects associated with web accessibility and the provision of library services for visually impaired people. Craven is therefore ideally placed to bring together a highly practical and timely collection of advice and guidance from a range of experts and experienced practitioners. Craven contributes to a number of chapters within the book and this gives the collection an authoritative and cohesive ‘voice’ on the subject of web accessibility.

At the beginning of the book, Craven provides a straightforward discussion and overview of the term accessibility and briefly discusses consideration of accessible and inclusive practice to the technological aspects of library work including computer use within the library, the provision and use of e-resources and website design.

All featured authors provide excellent, straightforward advice and guidance regarding issues of web accessibility. Draffan (Chapter 2) takes us through some of the tools available to customise the web experience for users as well as considering wider impact. Ball (Chapter 3) argues for the inclusive learning approach and takes a look at website design from this diverse perspective. Eskins and Craven usefully highlight the importance (and difficulties) of implementing Design for All principles when referring to the proposed Design for All knowledge and skills sets as advocated by Velasco *et al.* (p.116).

Sloan and Howell’s chapters on the importance of accessibility, accessibility advice and guidance, and the ongoing evaluation that needs to take place when developing web accessibility (Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively) provide some key pointers and the legislative requirements.

Each chapter follows with references to further reading and URLs to websites of direct relevance to the topic covered within the chapter. However, in some chapters the URLs refer to documents from the same organisation a number of times which does make for a lengthy list of references. Many of the URL references are “deep links”, that is, referring to documents embedded within organisational pages and my concern is that these deep links may change as organisations develop their sites. It may have been preferable to refer to an organisation’s home page and then to encourage the use of the search page once the home page is located to find the relevant documents. Despite this reservation, care has been taken to ensure that each URL is clearly marked within the body of the text and this certainly helps the reader to easily refer to and follow up any particular lines of enquiry or interest.

Particularly important threads running throughout the book are the pivotal role that library and information professionals should play in developing accessible systems and working closely with IT developers to ensure that web accessibility is an integral part of any technological development, and the important role of stakeholders in determining what needs to be done. Peter Brophy, in his chapter on issues for library and information services, advocates the iterative approach to ensuring accessibility (p.106) and this is a model that is clearly reflected throughout the book. Brian Kelly's chapter effectively highlights the obligation on all library and information professionals to continually re-visit the web accessibility agenda.

There are a number of case studies included, most notably the chapter highlighting how Design for All principles have been fully embedded into the library and information science curricula. Other case studies mentioned throughout the book include public libraries and FE Colleges and this helps broaden the appeal of the book and demonstrates that web accessibility is an issue that all library and information services professionals need to address irrespective of the communities which they support. This is demonstrated in Craven's own chapter on best practice examples of web accessibility (Chapter 9) and how during her own research and that of others the lack of compliance to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) in terms of web accessibility was evident by a number of organisations.

I would have liked to have seen an appendix highlighting some of the principal organisations that are working within the fields of inclusive learning and web accessibility such as Ability Net and JISC TechDis. This would be of use to students and professionals new to this important aspect of library and information work.

It might also have been useful for a glossary of terms to be included in the book; there is some assumption that the reader will understand the terminology associated with web accessibility and at times this book can be a little technical.

As a practical, easy-to-read compendium of advice and guidance, this book is a perfect addition to a library and information services student's reading list and for the staff development library and should be required reading for anyone considering technological developments within their library. Indeed it is well worth sharing with external colleagues involved in website development to ensure that the good practice advocated by the information professionals and accessibility experts within this book is embedded within website design principles, thereby striving to achieve inclusive and comprehensive web accessibility.

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