

Website Accessibility & ADA Compliance

Contributed by VinterActive Research

Disclaimer

VinterActive LLC does not offer legal advice and strongly encourages anyone seeking an opinion on compliance matters to consult with a qualified attorney. The information provided here is intended only to help interested readers learn more about some of the significant issues facing wineries and wine retailers on the internet.

Summary

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was written before the Web was created, the U.S. District Court has recently ruled that equal access rights granted under the ADA now apply to websites.

If your winery deals with the public and is subject to the ADA at its physical location, chances are your website will now need to be accessible too, or risk potential lawsuits.

In practice, this means your website(s) must now comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines published by the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) in 1999. You can easily check the technical compliance of your winery website online by visiting <http://validator.w3c.org>.

New websites can be made compliant with W3C guidelines at no additional cost, but older websites can often require significant changes at substantial expense. In many cases, it may be more cost effective to build a new W3C compliant website than attempt to retrofit an older design.

How to Comply

Complying with the W3C guidelines often requires changes in how websites are built and how web content is entered so that it is available to people with disabilities and those using non-traditional web browsers such as mobile phones, voice browsers and automobile-based personal computers.

The complete guidelines are available for inspection at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/> and a checklist for reviewing accessibility of your website is located at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/full-checklist.html>

Conceptually, the basic requirements are that:

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HTML code used to build your website meets W3C standards

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Type elements on your website are large enough to read by those with less-than-perfect eyesight, and

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Information conveyed through pictures, video or audio tracks must also have a text equivalent for the hearing or visually impaired.

A good place to begin evaluating your website for compliance is at <http://validator.w3c.org> where you will receive a detailed report on the HTML compliance of any web page you enter. Next, you should complete the web accessibility checklist, paying special attention to Priority 1 & Priority 2 checkpoints.

Based on the results of your compliance audit, you may need to make minor changes to your existing website or it may make more sense to build an entirely new site based on the latest generation of W3C compliant technology.

The VinterActive Solution

VinterActive supports online accessibility by offering winery websites and online stores that fully validate against W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Our wine marketing experts can help move your existing web content to a W3C compliant environment with advanced web 2.0 features that's easier than ever to manage and maintain.

Learning More

U.S. District Court Decision -- <http://www.dmnews.com/cms/dm-news/internet-marketing/38283.html>

Check your website for W3C valid code -- <http://validator.w3c.org>

W3C Accessibility Checklist -- <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/full-checklist.html>