Digital Libraries and Web Design

The report states that “Our domain in this project is digital library services, and our concern is that all such services should, in their entirety, be as accessible to blind and visually impaired people as to anyone else. The rapid development of networked information and communications technologies provides opportunities for radical changes in the services which can be delivered to all information users, including those who need to use 'accessible' formats and systems in order to overcome visual or other disability. During experiments carried out as part of the REVIEL project in which blind people accessed a variety of online resources, it became apparent that navigation is a major problem within digital library systems.”


These guidelines update *Making Educational Software Accessible* (2000). “As in the original document, readers are given: a basic understanding of the needs of users with different disabilities, a summary of various approaches to serve users with different disabilities, specific solutions for designing more accessible software, guidelines with specific checkpoints and detailed techniques for implementation.” Additionally, the following can be found: “extensive information on making multimedia presentations accessible to deaf or blind students, examples of writing image descriptions for blind students, solutions for making forms and data tables accessible, information on making electronic and on-line textbooks accessible.” Although primarily geared to the education of students with disabilities, these guidelines provide an array of information on tools and software that is relevant to librarians.


This report completes the work of the LibPortal Project which has reviewed the development of library oriented portals in higher and further education. The Joint Information and Systems Committee (JISC) commissioned a series of case studies as part of this work reported here. The case studies cover three portal suppliers and five English university libraries. The case studies are intended to assist libraries in the decision making process of how to manage their electronic resources, and whether or not a portal meets the requirements of the library. Some refer to issues associated with accessibility.


The aim of this monograph is “to guide information providers in establishing accessible websites and acquiring the hardware and software needed by people with disabilities.” Examples of hardware and soft-
ware technologies for libraries are described, including screen readers, Braille screens, voice recognition systems, hearing assistance devices, and HTML coding for web pages. A listing of Library websites that are accessible to those using adaptive technologies is provided.


Originally created to document survey type research on web page accessibility in higher education, this site has recently expanded its scope to include "investigations into the accessibility of all web-based resources found in the educational environment, including online library databases and courseware."


This article looks at the accessibility of top-level distance-education web pages and provides some answers to the question "why are the web sites of distance-education providers so inaccessible?" Suggests that lack of awareness among the leadership is partially responsible for the many access barriers found at the majority of web sites of distance-education providers.


These guidelines were prepared by the web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), a sub-committee of the World Wide web Consortium. WAI is the internationally recognized leader in establishing accessibility guidelines for web page authoring.

Library Services


This paper asserts "the expectations, hopes and visions embodied in disability rights legislation such as the [Americans with Disabilities Act] go beyond compliance with legal statutes. To embrace the spirit of the law, we recommend that academic library staff cross borders to better understand the psychosocial needs of students with disabilities. Scenarios illustrating some non-physical barriers that frustrate information seeking and learning for students with disabilities in academic libraries are described. The paper concludes with recommendations for creating more socially inclusive library service environments."


Coonin states: "service to library users with disabilities has been the subject of numerous books, articles, and presentations, but it is useful to consider this issue specifically in the context of science libraries for several reasons. In the United States we acknowledge an established need for scientists, but have long overlooked the pool of scientific interest and talent among individuals with disabilities. Sci-tech librarians can play a significant role in the encouragement of scientific talent among library users with disabilities by making the library environment accessible and ensuring as much as possible the independent access to information that is so critical to scientific endeavor. Some of the specific ways librarians in sci-tech libraries can contribute to an accessible electronic library environment include developing basic familiarity with relevant assistive technologies, creating accessible web pages, monitoring accessibility of electronic databases purchased for the library, and by preparing accessible bibliographic instructional activities."

McKnight discusses a variety of issues that confront academic library services for those with disabilities and offers some brief recommendations.


This comprehensive guide (104 pages) provides guidelines and various service and facility specifications required to meet the needs of library users with disabilities. It also provides a resource list and an extensive bibliography for further information. Described as a workbook, it is "designed to help Canadian library staff evaluate how they are currently serving their clients with disabilities, and what they can improve."

**Policies and Position Papers**


This policy, drafted by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA), was approved by the American Library Association Council in 2001. It affirms ALA’s commitment to the issue of accessibility, and encourages the use of "strategies based upon the principles of universal design to ensure that library policy, resources and services meet the needs of all people."


The result of four years of work by a CLA Task Force, this policy provides library guidelines for serving persons with disabilities. The guidelines address planning, budgeting, marketing and promotion, human resources, public services, collections management, adaptive technology and a number of other areas.

**Links to Sites**


AXSLIB-L is an e-mail discussion group dedicated to accessibility issues in libraries, particularly how to accommodate patrons with disabilities. The group’s archives are searchable from January 1999 onwards.


This site was "created to promote awareness about the need for accessible web design and to steer those who wish to learn more about the topic into the right direction." It provides comprehensive listings of organizations, web design standards, accessibility guidelines and design tips. It lists assistive technology hardware and software tools currently used in libraries, with links to vendor sites. A timely bibliography on accessibility issues in universities and university libraries is also featured.

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