

Access Changes Everything

Quick Start Guide to Digital Accessibility For Manitoba Businesses

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Introduction

Almost 25% of Manitobans, over the age of 15, identify as having at least one disability (Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017, Statistics Canada). It is **vital** that business online digital materials and media be made more accessible, for Manitobans with different disabilities.

Lisa Snider, from [Access Changes Everything](#), conducted a survey, Business Online Accessibility for People with Disabilities in Manitoba, from December 2022 to January 2023. This 'First Voice' survey asked Manitobans with disabilities, and organizations or individuals who support us, to share lived experiences with online interactions, with Manitoba businesses.

The survey charted the overall accessibility of Manitoba businesses online, in terms of what businesses did well, and what needed improvement. The survey results were used to form this Quick Start Guide, offered for free to [Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce](#) members. The goal of this guide is to help businesses in Manitoba start to identify, and lower, barriers in the digital realm. It will also support compliance with the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, [Customer Service and Accessible Information and Communication Standards](#).

Full access to Manitoba businesses online, without barriers, is crucial. With more awareness of lived experiences, and knowledge of how to lower barriers, Manitoba businesses can become accessible for all.

Thank You

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Impact of Barriers

Survey respondents were asked how barriers impacted them, when accessing Manitoba businesses online. Most noted that barriers could be frustrating, increase anxiety, cause disengagement, and be time consuming. Many felt that barriers could also lead to a loss of independence, increased reliance on others, and feeling of being left out, left behind, and excluded from society.

“Increases time to navigate and use website, or find required information, increases frustration, sometimes to the point of not being able to find the information needed, sometimes completely inaccessible.”

“Too much text causes individuals to become disengaged with the content.”

“They've needed to rely on family or friends to make purchases and then pay them back. Which is a big ask depending on what it is their looking to do, it also requires permission and does not support full dignity or independence.”

“They cannot read all of the content. They also cannot complete a task independently and it can take them much longer when the information is not clear or the direction to get the information.”

“Unable to enjoy financial services and not included in a growing technology-driven society.”

“I get very anxious when looking for information online due to my ADHD. My mind tends to jump around, and a busy, cluttered, unfocused website makes this much harder. I often leave that page and try to find what I want on another page.”

Others shared that barriers can greatly impact a person’s mental health, and their sense of belonging and well-being. Plus, some wrote that barriers could cause lost opportunity, loss in income, and negatively impact financial status.

“Cause excess frustration for the individual I support, which impacts their mental health and overall well-being.”

“The barriers impacted me and the people I support in a variety of ways. The most immediate and direct impact was the financial strain caused by the loss of income due to the inability to work. This had a ripple effect, causing people to struggle to pay for basic necessities, such as food and rent. Additionally, the barriers caused stress, anxiety, and fear as people were uncertain of the future and how they were going to make ends meet. The barriers also created a sense of isolation, as people were unable to engage in activities outside of their homes.”

The survey results made it very clear that barriers **must** be taken seriously, and offline human support was **crucial**, especially when barriers blocked access. People shared that they would go to another business, if major barriers hampered access, or support was lacking.

“Generally, I try to find another business to support - one that is more open, accommodating, and consistent with their online presence and in-person experiences.”

“It is frustrating and will cause me to look somewhere else for what I am looking for.”

“They could not benefit from the information, products, or services of that website.”

“Can't access information. Can't complete business. Can't make purchases.”

Digital Accessibility Tips

The following tips are taken directly from the results of the Business Online Accessibility for People with Disabilities in Manitoba survey. They will help identify, and lower barriers for Manitobans with disabilities, in business online digital materials and media.

Tip: Online Digital Material Accessibility

Businesses need to ensure that their online digital materials, such as websites, social media pages, PDF documents, videos, etc., are accessible. Survey respondents noted seven areas to focus on to start lowering barriers.

Digital Material Tip 1: Font Type and Size

- Use a regular sans serif font, such as Arial, Calibri, or Verdana.
- Use a minimum font size for text of 12 point, or 100%, and above.
- Allow users to change font type and size on small screens or magnified screens.

“Not providing fonts or visuals that are accommodating.”

“Website not accessible, because will not zoom, if zoomed, page moves and is not readable.”

Digital Material Tip 2: Layout, Navigation and Search

- Use a clean and uncluttered layout for content.
- Keep navigation simple, consistent, and easy to use.
- Provide a search function.
- Ensure that layout, content, and search areas, are as consistent as possible, on mobile, desktop, and other devices.
- Information needs to be up to date.

- Information must be found quickly and easily on all devices.
- Spell check all content.

“Difficulty finding information. Lack of clarity of information. Navigation issues. Lack of accessibility features.”

“Web pages that are difficult to navigate, don't transfer information well between desktop and mobile versions, incompatible with screen reading technology or confusing with screen reading tech (e.g., can read the content, but reads it in a non-logical sense/order), color contrasts that are not in-line with WCAG, links that say, "click here".”

“Businesses should focus on their websites and making them accessible and up to date. Social media is nice for sharing the links but if the website hasn't been updated in months that is not helpful, even if it is accessible.”

Digital Material Tip 3: Video and Audio

- Ensure that video and audio are accessible for people who are blind, Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or have low vision.
- Many others, with or without disabilities, also use these features.
- Provide captions for video.
- YouTube provides free captioning, but it must be checked for errors.
- Provide text transcripts for video and audio.
- Provide audio description for video and audio, to describe what isn't in the dialogue, such as emotions, off screen events, etc.
- Add sign language to videos, whenever possible.

“Some are starting to be more consistent with captioning video or audio content...”

“No clear Accessibility Page for accommodations. 2. websites are very busy and information about services, products and contact info is usually not clearly laid out. 3. sometimes videos don't have captions. I don't have a hearing disability but usually want to watch videos without the sound to avoid interrupting others (I don't like wearing headphones).”

“I would like to see who [has] made video, as an access[ible] sign language vlog with businesses, and we will understand what they say about information or buying things. I have not seen any...”

“I get very anxious when looking for information online due to my ADHD...I will not bother watching videos if they do not have captions.”

Digital Material Tip 4: Images

- Images can be photographs, memes, animated gifs, graphs, maps, icons, etc.
- Images can also have text, and it is important to describe it.
- Provide a ‘text alternative’ (‘alt text’ or ‘alt attribute’) for important images.
- Describe important images in a concise, yet descriptive, manner.
- Non-important images must be marked for screen reader users, who may be blind, Deaf-Blind, or have low vision.
- A generic phrase can be used, such as “decorative.”, “Math building.”, or in the HTML, use the null alt (alt=””).

“Many businesses are trying to improve how they share info online. I am finding that there are more with described images on their website, so I am not having to guess what is going on. I am starting to find also that some are working at making their sites less cluttered, which makes them easier to navigate.”

“Some businesses are great with inclusivity in their social media - they include alt text and advocate as safe spaces in their online presence, as well as in person services.”

“The main problem I have had is when businesses use photos to convey information. My accessibility software does not always recognize the text in such images. Or if there is a video, and there is no sound, so you don't know what is going on.”

“Sometimes websites of small businesses are built by people who do not know about accessibility. For example, no alt text, nonstandard controls, or graphical things that are easy to set up and click but not accessible.”

“...While I don't personally need it, I find things like alt text descriptions helpful as well.”

Digital Material Tip 5: Colour Contrast

- Use strong colour contrast for text and background, in images with text, text, buttons, links, icons, etc.
- Check the colour contrast with colour checkers, using ratios from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- Pass WCAG Level AA compliance, but aim for AAA compliance.

- WebAIM Color Contrast Checker (Online)
<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>
- Colour Contrast Analyser (Download)
<https://developer.paciellogroup.com/color-contrast-checker/>

“I have a visual impairment, I can't tell colors apart, and I need help choosing some important things.”

“...limited lengthy text/broke text into sections or separate webpages (easier to read and navigate), used color themes with contrasts that followed WCAG, ensured layout/design was consistent across desktop and mobile versions (allowing for easier access for those regularly using both devices), allowed for web extensions to fully access content (e.g. web extensions to change font - not including text as a part of images).”

Digital Material Tip 6: PDF and Online Forms

- PDF forms need to be made accessible in a PDF editor program.
- HTML based online website forms need to be made accessible.
- HTML based website forms are preferable, as they usually meet the needs of more users.
- Provide help information, access to human support, and other communication options, such as sign language interpretation.

“Website print, unable to sign forms on PDFs, forms sent online to sign.”

“PDF forms can be very small when using a mobile device.”

Digital Material Tip 7: Time Limit and Time Outs

- Time limits and time outs can be used on online forms, log ins, sign ins, live support features, etc.
- Ensure the time limit is clearly stated, and that there is a way to lengthen it.
- Many people need more time to accomplish tasks, for various reasons.

“I am 87 years of age my dexterity is not as sharp as a 20 or 30 year old, especially when using the computer on banking, filling out forms, [and] on line purchasing, if you hesitate too long the systems are designed to perceive you as a threat and you find yourself locked out of the system.”

Tip: Provide Online and Offline Options and Human Support

Businesses should provide online and offline options for information, support, and to buy goods and services.

“Manitoba businesses in general are still very much in the early 2000s of business models with bare minimum of information online, and the expectation that you will call or physically come in rather than do business online.”

“Technology does become a barrier and without non-tech options, then the situation excludes some people with disabilities. In those situations, then someone else must 'stand-in' for the person rather than being independent. It is no different than the situation of a single step at the front of the corner grocery store. Sadly, governments are moving to this exclusionary technology for more and more public services.”

“Some businesses will reply to emails, when asked for a person to speak to directly, and have explained, and helped navigate or assigned a person to talk to.”

Human support is critical to access, especially when major barriers are present. This includes a sign language communication option, such as a [Video Relay Service](#), or a local interpreter.

“All businesses should provide a name and number of the person or department that one can speak to if having difficulty navigating an online process. Businesses can offer an area/room where people can have free access to technology i.e., computer/printers if a requirement to place an order/receive a coupon or complete an application. This area should have a staff person on site to answer questions or help if there is an issue. (Same idea as self-checkouts with a staff available to assist and support).”

“There should just be more people present to take our calls and our inquiry, that way we are not in a long queue.”

“The unstated barrier that seems to go unnoticed with the wonderful convenience of online processes is that there is a complete loss of human contact which does have a cost; a cost that most Canadians have felt (maybe not recognized) in the past 3 years. Human contact is vital to a complete life.”

“This depends on the situation, as what I need, received from Reaching Equal Employment Service and Calvary Temple Church, as they provided American Sign Language interpreter on the Online, as they help me through it. The people support is awesome.”

Human support is also crucial, because many people with disabilities are not tech savvy, or they cannot afford, or lack access to, Wi-Fi, computers, devices with data, etc.

“Lack of resources to access i.e., Computer, phone with data, access to Wi-Fi. No person or phone number to defer to if having difficulty with information provided.”

“For many of our clients, having to deal with services and questions online is very difficult. Many have no access to computers, may not know how to operate them and have a problem with not talking to a person one on one.”

When business support people communicate with customers, awareness and understanding of different needs, including the need for sign language interpretation, is essential for successful interactions. Otherwise, additional barriers may occur in the communication process itself.

“Refusal to provide interpreters, refusal to provide captions. many businesses still only have phone lines instead of email access which often ends up with them hanging up on my interpreters or refusing to discuss any details.”

“Sometimes it not easy access what I want. I find the people on chat are not patient in helping me. They end the chat.”

Tip: Highlight Accessibility Features

Businesses need to provide easy to find, detailed, physical (and digital) accessibility information on websites, social media business pages, etc. This information is crucial for confirmed access.

“Not a lot of information if places are accessible for wheelchairs or other walking aids.”

“No to little information detailed to those with disabilities that they can use, or be able to take part in, and/or to access that is designed for them.”

“Some have parking and seating on their websites, makes attending easy and fun.”

Tip: Accessibility Helps Business

From the survey results, it was clear that people with disabilities would come back to a business, if their online digital materials and media were made more accessible, and informed human support was provided.

“We have experienced some small businesses that once they were aware of the barriers they had created online, they did take the time and took extraordinary steps to accommodate the individual. But it took us explaining the situation, but the final result was a one-up solution. Hopefully these businesses have learned something they can implement with their online presence. “

“Some businesses have very accessible websites, and I was able to find info and place orders online.”

Using these Quick Start Guide tips is just the start of the journey, of making Manitoba business online digital materials and media more accessible, for Manitobans with disabilities. Start early, and keep striving to make the digital realm more accessible.

“Please don't just do the bare minimum, accessibility needs are always changing and being open to, and embracing accessibility and designing for accessibility will help reduce the barriers some experience, and pave the way for accessibility as the "normal", not an after-thought.”

“Most Manitoba businesses are doing quite well online, but a lot of them might benefit from knowing more about accessibility issues when starting up a business. I'm not sure how that can be done since every second person seems to have some sort of side hustle they refer to as a business, but if people are going to do that and take it seriously, and BE taken seriously, they need to know about being inclusive.”

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