

508 XPress

Hop aboard!

The 508 XPress is rolling into your station now.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meet a Member of Our Staff	1
Avoiding Section 508 Violations	2
Quick Tip	3
100 Subscribers...and Counting!	3
In Her Own Words	4
Now Hear This: Audio Description	5
Get Onboard!	6

Meet a Member of Our Staff

Allen Hoffman joined the VHA Section 508 Office in December 2012. With more than a decade of experience working in all aspects of IT accessibility, Al is a very welcome addition to our team.

Q: How did you get involved with accessibility and Section 508?



I have been involved in IT accessibility for my entire life as a person who is blind, always looking for ways to access information, use computers, and enjoy the benefits of electronic information technology. I became a full time IT accessibility professional when working at the IRS Information Resources Accessibility program,

where I assisted them in implementing Section 508 into their large IT environment.

Q: Tell us a little about your experience with Section 508 programs?

I helped stand up the Section 508 Program at the Internal Revenue Service Information Resources Accessibility Program in 1999, and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Accessible Systems and Technology in 2005. I've worked with the U.S. Access Board, the World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility initiative, and the Federal Chief Information Officers Council Accessibility Best Practices sub-committee to encourage a consistent approach to making information technology accessible.

Q: Many of the people who read this newsletter are working on e-learning projects or creating

web content. What advice do you have for them?

Don't assume that the needs of people with disabilities were included in traditional web and e-learning instructional design patterns, because often they were not developed as such. Overuse of animation and multimedia without options for non-animated or text alternatives can create significant challenges for people with disabilities.

Q: If you could give just one piece of advice about Section 508 accessibility, what would it be?

Know your technology, know your standards. Make sure you understand the technology you are using, and how the Section 508 standards can be met. Without this knowledge, even early inclusion of accessibility requirements can fail due to lack of understanding.

Q: Are there resources to help people understand the Section 508 requirements and how to meet them?

Yes. There are a variety of resources on our [office's website](#).^{*} If you're a VA employee or contractor, you can find FAQs, a 508 starter toolkit, training and many other resources. Our training and newsletter are also available to people outside the VA firewall at <http://www.ehealth.va.gov/508>

^{*}Links designated with an asterisk are available to VA users only.



Avoiding Section 508 Violations

The overview of our top violations of the quarter has returned. Many of the top violations in the previous quarter are similar to those we've discussed here before. Rather than rehash them all here, we'll provide their names and links to the XPress issue(s) where they previously appeared at the end of this article. Among the old familiar names like Color Contrast and Reading Order, were a few newcomers to our list -- two in Web/HTML and one in PowerPoint.

WEB

Inform Assistive Technologies of Change in Content

The first newbie is not just new to the list but a relative newcomer to the world of Section 508.

It occurs on pages where content changes dynamically without loading a new page. Elements may appear or disappear from the page without alerting Assistive Technology (AT) that something has changed. Although the alert mechanisms are behind the scenes and not usually noticeable to the end user, their absence has a definite impact. If a screen reader does not recognize that content on a page has changed, it will read inaccurate information to the user – either speaking items that are no longer visible, or not reading things that are clear to somebody reading the page visually.

To address this violation, developers can make changes to:

- attributes, including innerHTML and innerText (for IE only), and the value set by setAttribute on form fields
- properties, including visibility and display

Changes in pertinent class names can also alert AT to changes in content.

Other techniques may also be used, but make sure they are supported by screen readers and browsers.

Ensure link text is meaningful when taken out of context

This violation is new to the list but is a more straightforward problem with a fairly direct solution. Frequently users may encounter links that say “**Click here*** to read about my hamster” or “**Read more*** about this fascinating story”. Where the bolded text (between stars) is what is included in the link text. As an example, somebody who is using a screen reader and tabbing through the page would only hear, “click here” or “read more”. There’s no information about where those links will take them. The problem gets worse when there are multiple “click here” and “read more” links on a page.

The solution is to provide specific information in the link text that will make it clear to everyone where the link will go, even if they don’t access the nearby text.

```
<!DOCTYPE
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>RA
<LINK REV:
<META NAM
```



POWERPOINT

Ensure images provide informative alternative text

This topic is familiar to anyone working with accessibility in most media types. Just as with web, Flash, PDFs and other media, images included in PowerPoint slides must also have alternative text.

To accomplish this in PowerPoint 2007 and 2010:

1. On the image or group, right click or press the applications key
2. Choose Size and Position
3. Activate the Alt Text Tab
4. Enter the alternative text and activate the close button

ITEMS COVERED IN PREVIOUS ISSUES:

- Ensure Logical Reading Order
([Fall 2012](#), [Spring 2012](#))
- Ensure Objects and Graphics Provide Textual Names, Descriptions, Role, State, and Value – Flash ([Summer 2012](#), [Spring 2012](#))
- Provide Sufficient Color Contrast
([Summer 2012](#), [Spring 2012](#))
- Indicate Headings Explicitly
([Summer 2012](#))
- Properly Tagged PDFs
([Winter 2012](#), and [our PDF tutorials](#))

One Hundred New Subscribers ... and counting!

We are excited to welcome our 100th newsletter subscriber - **Nicole Krause**! A very big thank you for subscribing and we hope you will find lots of useful information here in the 508 XPress.



Quick Tip

Creating Forms in Microsoft Word

This month's Quick Tip covers creating forms in Microsoft Word. Most of the time, when our office gives advice on making documents or applications Section 508 compliant, we stress using the built-in tools for creating those items. Forms in Word are the exception. Form elements in Word 2010 are not accessible, and should not be used. If you must create a form in Word, use more open formatting, where a user can put the information in the right place based on the text of the form – such as, “Name” and leaving plain blank space to be typed in instead of a form field.

Otherwise, use HTML or PDF forms.

This tip, as well as many others, is included in our new set of tutorials for Microsoft Word 2010, at www.ehealth.va.gov/508/tutorials/word/index.asp

In Her Own Words



In our last newsletter we had a chat with Steve Baumgartner who, at the time, had just gotten his first e-learning course certified by our office. In this issue we're delighted to introduce you to Carole Bagley, who has been working with our office for several years.

Q: What is your position within VA?

E-Learning Producer

Q: How did you come to be in your position and how long have you held it?

I have been in this position for 5 years. Prior to working for EES, I was President and Team lead of a small consulting company for 15 years where we worked with corporate clients, law firms, schools and Government.

Q: In general terms, please describe what it's like to work with our office.

Excellent. Typically, I hold a call with the 508 office early in the project to discuss possible issues. My contractor also attends this call. Early in the development cycle, we always submit a prototype with a variety of technical features to ensure they pass 508 or to work out a solution if they don't pass. Then, we take what we've learned and apply them to the rest of the course or curriculum.

Q: Have you used the online resources provided by the VHA Section 508 office? If so, which have you found particularly helpful?

Yes, I have and they have been a tremendous asset. The 508 checklists are particularly helpful. The online 508 submission form is good. I often have to type in extra information so it is nice to save it as a Word document and then add that information. But what I have found as an even better asset is that all 508 staff I have encountered has been more than accommodating in answering any additional questions that I have had. They have also been very

quick to put me in contact with any subject matter experts if I needed any more specific information.

Q: You've indicated that prototype testing is critical.

1. What is a prototype?

A prototype is a sample of the web-based training that is representative of the course. It includes examples of functional pieces that are used throughout the course such as an interaction, video, pop up, graphic, audio, video, simulation, captivate example, etc.

2. When is the best time to submit a prototype?

As early as possible in the cycle. Typically in a 1 year project, we will submit a prototype about 1 month into the project.

3. What is the purpose of prototyping?

To learn prior to full submission of a course that there are 508 issues that need to be resolved and figure out how to resolve them.

4. What do you learn from prototyping?

Here is an example:

I have a new project coming up that will integrate Captivate simulations of software and will engage the learner in using the software, guide them through it and tell them what is incorrect. We will also be doing testing using Captivate. We submitted a prototype prior to the start of the project to ensure the tests would provide results from the TMS and would pass 508. There were some issues, but now moving forward, we know how to deal with the issues. We will be submitting another prototype after we have a "real example" of what we will be doing in the course.

Q: If you could give advice to an e-learning producer who is new to our process, what would that advice be?

Hold a call with the 508 office to discuss a project at the VERY beginning. Involve contractors in that call. Discuss what will be coming and potential examples that will need to pass 508. Also, submit a prototype early so that you eliminate problems downstream.

Now Hear This: Synchronized Audio Description is A Section 508 Requirement

Most people are aware that synchronized captions are a requirement for making audio-visual multimedia accessible to people who are deaf or who have hearing impairments. Not as many people know or understand that there is also a requirement to help make multimedia more accessible for people who are blind or who have vision impairments. It is listed in the Section 508 requirements for Video and Multimedia products: “1194.24(d) All training and informational video and multimedia productions which support the agency’s mission, regardless of format, that contain visual information necessary for the comprehension of the content, shall be audio described.”

This means that if you are producing multimedia products, they need to have both captions and audio description in order to meet Section 508 requirements.

But what does that actually mean? What is audio description?

Audio description – also called video description, or described video – is a way of telling a user about the important visual information on the screen. It can be accomplished in several ways.

METHOD 1: PUTTING DESCRIPTION DIRECTLY IN THE NARRATION OR DIALOG

This is often the most cost-effective way to create videos with audio description, but it must be planned for in advance and descriptions must be put into the script. A narrator or speaker describes the visual information as part of what they are saying. For example, if it were a video about planting seeds, rather than say, “spread the seeds about this far apart”, a narrator would say “spread the seeds about 1 inch apart.” Not only does this provide the necessary description to somebody who cannot see the video, it can reinforce the information for those who can see it.

One way to think of it is as though you were presenting to somebody at the back of a crowded auditorium who can’t see the screen. What do you need them to know?



There are a few potential drawbacks to this method:

1. It must be done as part of the production. If you don’t do it then, you’ll either have to rerecord your audio track, or find another method.
2. Sometimes visual information is meant to imply or demonstrate something that could be interpreted in different ways. Is that image of a clock and someone rushing out the door meant to show, “X had a hard time getting up in the morning” or “X was always late”? Make sure the visual imagery and narration have the same intention.
3. Sometimes it is too disruptive to describe something in depth. If a video has lots of in-depth information, having somebody talk through all of it – like reciting every data point on a chart – may not really work. In this case, describe the key points and consider what other methods might work.

METHOD 2: SEPARATE AUDIO TRACK WITH DESCRIPTION

This method is not uncommon. It is how audio description is provided for some first-run movies, television shows, and on DVDs. In this process, a separate audio track is created which includes all the

regular narration or dialog, and then adds descriptive audio into the audio track when nobody is speaking. You can experience this yourself by turning on the SAP feature of your television and finding one of the shows that provide audio description. A list of programs is available from <http://www.afb.org/tv.aspx>

Or if you own or rent one of the DVDs listed at <http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/dvsondvd.html>, try playing part of the Descriptive Video Service (DVS) track.

Advantages to this method are:

- You can add description after the video has been recorded.
- You can add details that might sound redundant or disruptive as part of the main audio track.

Disadvantages are:

- It may be an additional cost.
- You will have to produce and host two copies of the video.

There are also methods that people think will meet the audio description requirement that don't.

Do not:

1. Make descriptions part of captions. Most people who require descriptions won't be reading the captions; first because many won't think they need it if they can hear the audio track, but also because it is likely that they are using screen reading technology, which may be drowned out by sound from the video itself, or which may not work reliably with the captioning features of an online video

player. Work is being done to create technologies and players that allow for the insertion of narration into online videos and access to alternative audio tracks from within a player, which work similarly to the caption toggles available in some players, but at the time of this writing, none of them have proven fully workable across multiple web technologies. Of course, if you have incorporated descriptions into your main audio track, they will show up in the captions, but that's not what we're talking about here.

2. Assume that a transcript is an acceptable solution. There are times that a transcript may be accepted by a Section 508 office as a last resort, but it does not meet the Audio description requirement. It may be thought of as meeting the requirement for an accessible alternative to the multimedia, but that requirement is only allowable when access cannot be accomplished in any other way. Transcripts are not synchronized with multimedia, and require a user to read a separate document after the video has played. If you are given permission to use this method, understand that you have not truly met the requirements of Section 508, and should not plan to use this method forever. "We didn't plan for this and ran out of money" only works as an excuse once, and do you really want to admit that you didn't plan for Section 508?

One more recommended approach:

ASK! If you're not sure what the best approach for providing audio descriptions for your videos might be, get in touch with us. We can help you figure out the best way to make your multimedia accessible to everyone.

Get Onboard!

It is now possible to be alerted when a new edition of the 508 XPress becomes available. Just visit <http://www.ehealth.va.gov/508/newsletter/> and activate the link to subscribe to our list.

Visit the VHA Section 508 Web site to review Section 508 checklists; training materials for developing accessible content in Flash, HTML, Word, PDF and PowerPoint; and to locate additional resources.

Internet: www.ehealth.va.gov/508/

Intranet: vaww.vista.med.va.gov/508workgroup/ *

**Links designated with an asterisk are available to VA internal users only.*