

Meet a Member of Our Staff



In past issues we've introduced you to several members of the VHA Section 508 office staff. Now we'd like you to meet Larry Lewis, who joined our team in July, 2013. Larry brings with him a wealth of experience in the areas of adaptive technology, professional development, emerging technologies, business and sales. He has worked in private, non-profit, and corporate environments over the past twenty years.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I grew up in the Chicago area. Because my parents had careers in the military, real estate, and other ventures my family moved around a lot. As a blind student who attended several different public schools, I got comfortable meeting new people and adjusting to new situations. The ability to be flexible and willing to work with other people to accomplish goals has served me well throughout my career. After high school I attended Wheaton College, a small liberal arts college outside of Chicago, and then completed my graduate work at Northern Illinois University. I received my undergraduate degree in English, a Master of Arts in English, and a Master's degree in Special Education which focused on working with the vision impaired.

Q: How did you get involved with assistive technology and accessibility?

I started working with adaptive technology in the 1970s, when reading machines, Braille displays and notetakers for

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people who are blind and visually impaired first became available. In addition to using these devices myself, I worked for companies that developed and marketed adaptive technologies, and for agencies that provided training and support for people who used them. In 2006 I started my own company, whose mission is to provide people who are visually impaired with adaptive technology solutions to make them independent and efficient in unlimited capacities.

Q: If you could give one piece of advice to project teams about developing accessible information technology, what would it be?

Plan for accessibility, and be consistent in your design. In today's competitive environment, people with disabilities need to be able to perform tasks and find information as efficiently as their non-disabled peers. This can be difficult if controls are in a different place on every screen, or if several steps are needed in order to access information using a keyboard. When controls are accessible and easy to locate, and when information is organized and presented in an accessible way, everyone, including people with disabilities, will be able to use your product more effectively.

I'm looking forward to being a part of the Section 508 team, supporting the accessibility needs of Veterans and employees in VA.

**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 in previous issues. 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.

IMAGES ON THE WEB

Both of our top violations in Web/HTML had to do with images. One may actually be among the most common general accessibility issues ever (though we've been lucky enough not to see it for some time), while the other is a more complex element of it.

Ensure Images Provide Informative Alternative Text

All images that convey meaning should have informative alternative text of some kind. For regular images and image links, this can be accomplished using the alt attribute (alt="meaningful alternative text") used with the img tag. The key here is meaningful, because a person who cannot see the image and is using a screen reader to browse the web needs to know what the image is or what it is meant to convey. So using text like "image" or "picture" isn't particularly meaningful, since it naturally prompts the question, "of what?" Similarly, for images used for navigation or interaction it is more important to know that the arrows mean "back" and "next", or "edit", than "left arrow", "right arrow", and "pencil", respectively.

Ensure CSS background images that convey meaning have textual equivalents

The alt attribute can't be applied to images that are placed in the background with CSS, but all meaningful images are still required to have a text alternative. When such images are used, such as for identification information or logos, meaningful text must also be included somewhere in the text on the page. So if you have a background image meant to convey that this page contains important information from the central office, that should also be conveyed in text on the page. That way you're sure that everybody who accesses your page will get the same information, including those who may have style sheets turned off or handled differently.

NAME THAT PDF

Ensure documents utilize the Title element

To guarantee that documents can be correctly identified by all users and technologies, provide a title for all PDF documents. This is done through File > Properties > Description > Title in Adobe Acrobat.

FLASH MULTIMEDIA

Provide synchronized equivalents for multimedia (audio and video)

Section 508 requires that all audio-video multimedia, including that created with Flash, include synchronized captioning for those who cannot hear the narration or dialog, and audio description of meaningful visual information for those who cannot see it. To learn more about this topic, checkout these sections of our Flash course: [Providing Captions and Visual Indicators for Sound Cues](#) and [Using Audio for Visual Information](#).

THE REST OF THE LIST

Adobe PDF

- Ensure headings are denoted through structure and not implicitly ([Summer 2012](#), [our PDF tutorials](#))

Adobe Flash

- Ensure objects and graphics provide textual name, description, role, state, and value ([Summer 2012](#), [Spring 2012](#))

Microsoft PowerPoint

- Ensure text and images of text provide sufficient color contrast ([Summer 2012](#), [Spring 2012](#))
- Ensure images provide informative alternative text ([Spring 2013](#))

Saying Good-bye To A Member of the Team

When Mia Lipner joined the VHA Section 508 Office team in 2007, she brought with her a wealth of experience in the areas of accessibility and assistive technology. She has worked in various environments including public and not-for-profit agencies, and in the software industry. She has done a little bit of everything, from writing technical specs and requirements to writing training documentation to developing test code. She has managed our office's remediation support efforts, helping development teams eliminate accessibility barriers identified by our testing team.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I grew up in Miami, but I've lived in several states, including Iowa, where I spent a summer as an assistant director for a theater group, and Washington, where I worked as an accessibility evangelist for Microsoft. I graduated with a degree in English from Princeton University, where I also studied political science, linguistics, physics and computer science.

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

I started programming computers when I was fourteen. More often than not, whatever I wanted to do with the computer was inaccessible to me. I had two choices. I could either give up, or I could work on making information technology accessible.

When I started interviewing for jobs, employers were interested in my accessibility experience. Even when they didn't hire me, they would ask me to take a look at their systems and give them advice about how to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. After a while, getting involved with accessibility work as a career just seemed like a logical choice.

Q: If you could give just one piece of advice to developers, what would it be?

Talk to us before you start development. Tell us about the design you're planning to use. Based on our experience, we may be able to help you avoid using an approach that won't result in a 508 compliant product. Then, let us test early. We can help you identify accessibility barriers before they become big problems that involve a lot of re-work.

Q: What kinds of accessibility barriers concern you most?

I get very concerned about accessibility barriers that prevent people with disabilities from using creativity, authoring and management tools. Even when applications are designed to be accessible to end users, the tools used to create, update and manage those applications are often not accessible. Project teams may assume that there aren't any developers, creators or authors with disabilities out there, but that's just not true.

With accessible authoring and management tools, people with disabilities have the opportunity not only to use products, but to create and improve them as well.

Accessibility isn't an end in itself. It's a means of making things possible.

Quick Tip

Layout Tables and Data Tables

Section 508 requires that data tables be properly identified and tagged. Lately, however, we've run across a few instances where it seemed that people didn't actually realize that what they were creating were data tables. They added table summaries that said things like "This table for layout purposes only."

To clarify, in a data table, the organization and presentation of the information in the table makes a difference. There is a relationship between the information in each cell. It matters that the information in cell A1 is above that in cell A2, and is to the left of cell B1. Sometimes this data is a "layout" like a seating plan, but that doesn't mean this is a layout table. Because the relationship of the information in the table matters, it is a data table. Calendar grids and multi-column task lists are also data tables. In other words, if you have a table that requires access to more than one piece of information to know what that information means, it's a data table. For example, you have a calendar, but you can only see the number, or the day but not both at once. How can you tell which number goes with which day? If the information isn't marked up as a data table, a screen reader user might not be able to distinguish that information either.



Twelve Years and Counting

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act went into effect twelve years ago, on June 25, 2001. As you probably know if you're reading this newsletter, Section 508 is the law that requires agencies to procure information and communication technology that can be used by people with disabilities who are government employees or members of the public seeking services from federal agencies.

We're making progress. During the past twelve years, websites, software, documents, multimedia and other types of information communication technology have become more accessible to people with disabilities than ever before. But there's still more work to be done.

If you are creating documents, designing presentations, buying products, or supporting information communication technology, it's important for you to understand your Section 508 responsibilities. Take advantage of all the resources your agency's Section 508 program provides. Visit our website from time to time to see what we've added. We'll continue to offer this newsletter as a way to share information and examples to help you understand how to meet the Section 508 requirements. Together we all can make a difference.

New Course Is Now Available at VA

"Testing HTML for Section 508 Compliance" is a newly updated and expanded course available to employees and contractors who have access to the VA's Talent Management System (TMS). The course includes the following modules:

- Text Equivalent for Non-Text Elements
- Color
- Page Structure
- Navigation and Keyboard Access
- Focus
- Tables
- Frames
- Multimedia and Embedded Content
- Forms
- Dynamic Content and Animation
- Timed Responses and Flashing Content
- Rich Internet and Mobile Content
- Text-Only and Alternative Content

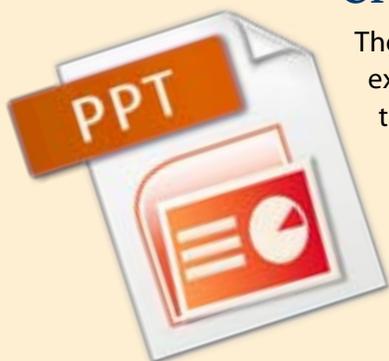
A certificate is available to those who successfully complete the final exam.

The courseID number is 1717414. *Testing HTML for Section 508 Compliance* is available to VA personnel at <https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/login.jsp>.*

Creating Accessible PowerPoint Tutorials Coming Soon!

The VHA Section 508 training team is hard at work creating a series of innovative tutorials that explain accessibility barriers of Microsoft PowerPoint 2010 and provide solutions that address them. The tutorials are called "**Creating Accessible Documents with Microsoft PowerPoint 2010**".

Using short topic-specific modules and brief videos, the tutorials will help you gain an understanding of barriers that prevent users of assistive technology from accessing certain content. Through the step-by-step directions, you will learn to create PowerPoint documents that comply with Section 508 and make your content available to your entire audience.



Accessible Use of the Title Attribute

"If you want to hide content from mobile and tablet users as well as assistive tech users and keyboard only users, use the title attribute."

Thus begins Steve Faulkner's blog post on the HTML title attribute.

An odd way to begin a blog post on accessibility of HTML, perhaps, but it's true. Title attributes are those bits of text that get displayed as a tooltip when you hover your mouse over them. They're the victim of a technological perfect storm. The first blow to the usefulness of the title attribute came from a lack of browser support. Desktop browsers simply never implemented a method for giving keyboard only users access to the title attribute. Users who don't have the manual dexterity to use a mouse to hover over an item with a title attribute will never get the information contained in the title. The second blow to its usefulness is that assistive technologies, such as screen readers and screen magnifiers, do not provide uniform access to the title attribute. Titles are not spoken by default by most screen readers and some screen magnifiers so there's another group of users who won't get access to the information. The rising popularity of mobile devices has dealt the biggest blow of all to the usefulness of the title attribute. No mobile browser supports display of tooltips. Put that all together and you won't come near to reaching your entire audience if you put information in the title attribute only.

BOTTOM LINE

- Do not use the title attribute, on any element, for any text that you want all users to have access to.
- Only use it to label a form control when the same text is provided as visible text.
- Do not use it on a link to provide information that may be important to any user.

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.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE TITLE ATTRIBUTE

- For providing additional information about a link

Instead, include the additional information in adjacent text or as part of the link text.

- Don't duplicate link text in a title

Many users will never get the information and it's just clutter for those who do. Save yourself the trouble.

- Captions for images

If you're going to caption an image, the caption, presumably, is important for everyone in your audience. Place caption information in text adjacent to the image.

- Labeling a control that has no visible text label

While this implementation will work for screen reader users, there are other groups for whom it will not work. Use a visible label for controls if possible.

- Additional instructions for using a control or form field

If there are special instructions for using a control or entering information into a form field, provide them in text just before the control or field. All users need to know information such as form field constraints or instructions for using custom controls.

- Expansion of abbreviations

If you provide a title attribute on an abbr element, screen reader users will have access to it but other users may not. Provide an expansion of the abbreviation in adjacent text the first time it is used or provide a glossary of terms.

For more information, see: [Using the Title Attribute](#) and [Is It Appropriate to Use a Title Attribute in a Menu Link?](#)