

Meet the New Team Director: Derrick Curtis



The VA Section 508 Office is pleased to welcome Mr. Derrick Curtis to PD as the new Director of the Product Assessment Competency Division (PACD). Mr. Curtis leads the team responsible for many critical tasks involved in implementing software applications including verification,

testing, quality assurance, Section 508 compliance, and deployment of software applications.

Before joining VA, Mr. Curtis served as Chief of Mobility Air Forces (MAF) Programs Division, Directorate of Communications, Air Mobility Command (AMC) at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. The Mobility Air Forces Programs Division is responsible for the acquisition and program management of the information technology programs that improve command and control of AMC assets, as well as increase the air transportation velocity of cargo and passengers.

Prior to his civil service career, Mr. Curtis served 24 years in the U.S. Air Force as a Aerospace Ground Equipment Specialist and later as a Project Manager. His experience includes operations on a variety of maintenance platforms coupled with Program and Project Management of major information technology systems. His experience also includes acquisition, planning, budget/execution for systems and services supporting defense transportation.

He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems Management from the University of Maryland, as well as Master's Degrees in Information Technology Management in

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meet the New Team Director	1
Making PDFs Accessible on Mobile Devices	2
Section 508 Mobile Considerations for Responsive Web Design	3
New Accessible Social Media Course	4
Let's Get Right to the Point: The Importance of Skip Nav Links	5
Get Onboard!	5

Procurement and Acquisitions Management from Webster University.

While speaking with Mr. Curtis recently, we asked him a few questions about his career, his goals for PACD and his thoughts about Section 508.

What have been some of the highlights of your career up to this point?

One of the highlights of my military career was the chance to travel all over the world. My family and I were able to experience many different cultures and learn about the varying perspectives of people outside the United States.

In my civilian career I worked in communications, and was involved with the movement of cargo and passengers. I had the honor of supporting war fighters around the world. If there was freight or people to be moved, for whatever reason, including those times when humanitarian efforts were needed, we were there.

On the subject of military families, he says:

I think we take for granted the sacrifices made by spouses and children. Spouses of members of the military are asked to change jobs, and their children are expected to change

schools every three years. A husband or wife, mother or father may be deployed at a moment's notice and never come back. We don't pay enough homage to them for the sacrifices they make.

Are there specific goals you'd like to accomplish as Director of PACD?

I've had a philosophy throughout my career: Always leave things better than they were when you got there. If I can do that, I've done good work. That's what I plan to do here in VA.

What's your vision for the Section 508 Office?

We need to start with fundamentals, and establish consistent processes. When I was a maintainer in the Air Force, we had processes. We had checklists. I could go into an installation anywhere in the world, read through the checklists and know what needed to be done.

When somebody comes to the Section 508 Office, they need to know what to expect. Our team is going to establish processes that can be used consistently, so that our customers will know, 'If I take these steps, and I submit something to the 508 Office, this is what will happen.'

Is there a message about Section 508 that you'd like to share?

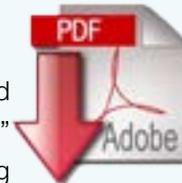
If you read the Section 508 law, you'll find that it focuses on accessibility for employees. We need to have that same focus. It's important to make sure the information technology used by Veterans and their families is accessible. But it's also important to pay attention to the accessibility of the IT used by employees. There are Veterans with disabilities who are also VA employees - Veterans serving Veterans. Employees with disabilities will be able to provide better service to Veterans if the IT they need for their jobs is accessible.

Are there interests or hobbies you enjoy during your spare time?

I'm a big fan of team sports, especially football. And I like to spend time playing war games on my iPad.

The VA Section 508 team looks forward to Mr. Curtis's leadership as we continue our mission to provide resources and support for accessibility and Section 508 compliance.

Making PDFs Accessible on Mobile Devices



The Section 508 office has developed tutorials and "Bring Your Own Document" sessions to help document authors bring PDF content into conformance with Section 508 and we've made tremendous strides equipping document owners with the skillsets to create accessible PDF documents and remediate those that are not. But what happens when the Assistive Technology doesn't allow the end user to read this compliant document in a logical manner?

We've run into this scenario countless times as we test mobile web content using mobile browsers on handsets and tablets. In short, iOS devices such as iPads and iPhones allow the user to open a PDF document within Safari, but then VoiceOver proceeds to read a continuous stream of text to the end user, not allowing him to navigate by pages and respective web elements that are properly tagged throughout the document. Imagine closing your eyes and listening to a steady stream of text that you do not have the ability to review; nor do you comprehend the intended reading order of the document. Regrettably, assistive technology currently present on Android devices does an even worse job reading this text.

Until recently, we've not flagged these mobile technology shortcomings as violations of Section 508. We have now established a best practice to provide a more accessible PDF reading experience for assistive technology users with visual impairments, but we need a little help from you — the document owners and web developers. If you are publishing a PDF file online, providing a download link to the document will allow users to download the file. When users of i-devices select this download link within Safari, the .pdf document downloads by default to the iBooks App. iBooks provides an accessible means for the reader to navigate by pages and other web elements in an accessible manner comparable to that of a desktop PDF reader. While we anxiously await Apple's possible enhancements to their current reading experience within the Safari browser, we're expecting that if the author intends a PDF document be read on mobile devices, a download link for opening the document will be provided.

Section 508 Mobile Considerations for Responsive Web Design

Over the past few years, we've seen a shift in the methodologies we use to access information on the web. An exercise that has historically been tied to launching a web browser from a desktop PC has expanded to the use of smaller computers, tablets and mobile handsets as these options have become viable alternatives to accessing the same information. We can now get that information quickly, efficiently, and while "on the go". A constant upturn in the sales of mobile devices coupled with unwavering commitments by mobile developers to provide continual improvements and optimization to our mobile web experience suggests that the trend of moving from desktop to mobile devices will increase over the next few years.

Although the VA still invests quite heavily in the use of desktop computers, it strives to keep pace with all of the benefits that mobile access has to offer. The VA is not unlike any other large organization that seeks to convey pertinent information to its employees and the Veterans it serves in a timely manner with a great deal of consideration as to how information is accessed by its intended audience. To that end, VA is beginning to shift toward the practice of Responsive Web Design as a strategy for accommodating its desktop users as well as embracing users of Mobile Web Browsers and their devices with content that is optimized for this uniquely different environment.

WHAT IS RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN?

In short, it's the methodology of developing web content that dynamically responds to the user's device and operating system. Issues such as the screen size of a device, information rendered on a screen by a compatible browser, external keyboard entry, touch gestures, and screen orientation are examples of the considerations that web developers use when developing content that is accessed by different types of devices. Through the implementation of a series of flexible layouts, the web content is able to automatically alter its screen resolution, text size, and image size which minimizes the need for the user to zoom or pan to access content. For instance, a Responsive Web Design site might appear a certain way on a desktop computer, but when accessed on an iPhone, its resized and rendered in a fashion best suited for a screen that is a fraction of the size of a computer monitor. Also, content is rendered on the fly to the person's screen orientation of

choice; landscape or portrait. Lastly, web content displayed on a desktop PC's browser that is organized from left to right is reorganized on a mobile device whereby the user navigates from the top to the bottom of the screen to access the same content, a practice that is commonly used by screenreading manufacturers for persons who are vision impaired. Finally, controls and navigation menus are also accounted for through this methodology, and when properly coded, complex desktop navigation menus are rearranged to showcase the same functionality in the mobile browser.

Logistically, responsive web design saves VA money and time. It gives the web designer one unified code to update and maintain, making updates to the information more seamless and less costly than managing multiple websites such as a traditional desktop site alongside a separate mobile website. This also makes life easier for those who visit these sites--one website with one web address provides more information on multiple platforms.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSIVE DESIGN FOR MOBILE USERS

There are a few Section 508 related practices to keep in mind when developing a responsive website. Fortunately, these practices can be easily implemented by the developer using Section 508 techniques, the site's cascading style sheets, JavaScript and/or a JavaScript framework. There are four primary considerations to address to allow a disabled user to have better access to web content on a mobile device:

1. **Make the page content fit:** As discussed, one of the primary roles of responsive websites is to adapt to the devices on which they are viewed. If you are working on a site with lots of content, do not attempt to cram a bunch of information designed to be viewed on a desktop browser into a browsing web session on an iPhone. If you do, some of the built-in accessibility features such as Voiceover's "Explore by Touch", or the single finger swiping technique to read information in its intended order will be compromised. Alternatively, it can be very frustrating to have to scroll repeatedly to get to the desired information, so use your style sheets to make sure that the appropriate amount of content is being rendered on the screens of whichever device the user selects. Keep this in mind when deciding how

much or how little information you wish to have present within a webpage accessed through a mobile browser.

- 2. Keep the page simple:** Again, mobile users are accessing content on a smaller screen, using touch gestures or onscreen keyboard input. Do not expect that they're going to be able to affectively perform all of the same sorts of desktop-related browsing activities that they might on a desktop PC using a mouse, keyboard, or a desktop screen reader. Mobile screenreaders like Voiceover and Talkback take into account that the user has limited landscape on the screen to work with and provides a variety of gestures for navigating, panning, and interacting with controls within this limited space. The degree of simplicity or complexity that you offer the mobile user of assistive technology can determine how compliant the site may be.
- 3. Remove images that do not convey meaning:** Again, persons using a mobile device may not wish to view all of the graphics that they might view on a desktop PC, and, for a user with a visual impairment, these graphics might slow down their ability to glean vital information. You will undoubtedly need to use some images; make sure the ones you use are necessary, that you have appropriately applied text alternatives, and that the images resize as the screen display changes.
- 4. Simplify navigation:** Mobile users can be frustrated by the need to access complex navigation menus, and this can be especially true for users of mobile screen readers. It's best to take the contents of these menus and put them into "side panels" or dropdown menus that are much easier to access than using a navigation system designed for a desktop browser. For example, by rearranging menu items within a dropdown menu, you can allow the user to double tap the selected menu item, additional menu options appear, and they may then use the appropriate gesture to select and activate the desired menu option. Such an approach makes the mobile web screen far less busy, and gives the user a great deal more control over, and effectiveness accessing the desired content on a webpage.

Having an understanding of the value of Responsive Web Design and keeping these four principles in mind during the development process will assist you and the testing team when you submit your content for Section 508 Certification. If you have any questions, or if you would like us to provide specific direction early in the development process, send a message to Section508mobile@va.gov and we'll be happy to assist!

New Accessible Social Media Course Available



The Section 508 Office is pleased to announce the launch of a new course, "Social Media: A Guide to Posting Accessible Content" -- TMS Item ID #3915728, which is now live on the VA's Talent Management System (TMS).

The course is divided into two parts. Part 1 covers the VA social media policy and why accessible social media content is important. It includes an overview of Section 508 requirements that relate to content posted to social media sites. Part 2 includes considerations and best practices for contributors to VA social media sites.

Course topics include:

Intro to accessible social media

- Impact of inaccessible social media content
- Section 508 technical and functional requirements and social media
- Non-text elements
- Links
- Color and contrast
- Flashing content
- Multimedia
- Structure
- Tables
- Alternate versions

This course contains valuable information for anyone who is responsible for producing or contributing content to VA social media sites. To take the course, log onto [the Talent Management System*](#) and search the catalog for TMS Item ID #3915728; then add the course to your learning plan. If you have questions about this course or other training resources offered by the VA Section 508 office, feel free to email Section508resources@va.gov, or check out the [Section 508 training page*](#).

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

Let's Get Right To The Point: The Importance Of Skip Navigation Links

What if you couldn't use a mouse? What if, because of a disability, you needed to use a screen reader, or maybe just a keyboard, to operate your computer? Would you still be able to do your job? What kinds of barriers could get in your way?

For one thing, you would need to make a lot more use of the Tab key to move around pages on the web. Suppose you were using a website where a set of links was displayed at the top of every page. As a screen reader user who wanted to get to the main content, or a keyboard-only user who could see that the link to the information you needed was in the middle of the page, would you really want to have to tab through all those links to get there? Not only would all that tabbing be a tedious, repetitive chore, but it would take up valuable time you could be using to get your other work done.

One of the Section 508 requirements addresses this problem. It says that a means must be provided that allows users to skip repetitive navigation links.

A skip navigation link should be placed in the HTML code for any group of links that appear on more than one page in the same fashion. The link should be visible when it receives focus from the keyboard or mouse, or else it should be visible all the time.

The skip navigation link is generally the first tab stop on the page. It is a good practice to place this code at the beginning of the HTML content so it appears first in the focus order of the page.

EXAMPLE:

```
<!-- SKIP NAV -->

<div id="skiplink">

<a href="#content-area">skip to page
content</a>

</div>

The target is a <div> tag, which
is placed just before the main
content.

<div id="content-area">
```

More information about skipnavs can be found in the [Skip Navigation Links](#) section of the [Developing Section 508 Compliant Web Content](#) tutorials.

Get Onboard!

It is now possible to be alerted when a new edition of the 508 XPress becomes available. Just visit www.section508.va.gov/support/newsletter and activate the link to subscribe to our list.

Visit the VA Section 508 website to review Section 508 checklists; training materials for developing accessible content in Flash, HTML, Word, PDF and PowerPoint; register for courses and to locate additional resources.

Internet: www.section508.va.gov

Intranet: vaww.section508.va.gov*

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