

Accessibility of the Online High Street

An accessibility evaluation
of UK ecommerce
retailers in 2010



webcredible

user experience • research • design • training ●●●

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Introduction

The market opportunity

With 650 million disabled people worldwide, the disabled population in the UK alone has an estimated combined spending power of up to £80 billion¹. According to recent statistics, there are almost 370,000 registered blind or partially sighted people in the UK² and around 2% of the UK population have a learning disability³. The substantial disabled population in the UK, coupled with the fact that almost two thirds (64%) of UK adults have made a purchase online⁴, makes website accessibility an important issue for ecommerce sites.

In addition to this undoubted widespread Internet usage by disabled people, the Disability Discrimination Act identifies websites as a service that must be accessible to disabled people⁵.

The basics of accessibility also go hand-in-hand with usability and search engine optimisation. This means that an accessible website can help boost your online presence and sales with all user groups, not just disabled people.

About this report

Last year, Webcredible investigated the accessibility of the websites of 19 of the UK's leading high street shops. With an average score of below 62%, they had improved since the previous year, but generally weren't doing enough to make their websites easily accessible to all. This year Webcredible has decided to re-investigate against the same accessibility criteria (as well as looking at the website of former high street, but now online only retailer, Woolworths).

Increasing the accessibility of any ecommerce website will lead to a more commercially successful site – it's as simple as that. Improved accessibility can lead to a massive increase in reach to potential customers, improved search engine optimisation and faster download speeds.

Evaluations of the 20 websites were conducted throughout January 2010.

Who is this report for?

This report is aimed at anyone involved with a website trying to sell products or services, including marketing managers, Internet managers and web developers. Although our analysis was of ecommerce websites, the guidelines are highly transferable to other websites. The report assumes no prior accessibility or technical knowledge.

Methodology

Webcredible analysed the websites of 20 of the UK's leading UK high street retailers (and the website of online only retailer, Woolworths) in January 2010. We focused on a typical user journey through the homepage, search results, browse, product, basket and registration pages.

Each website was evaluated against 20 best practice guidelines and assigned a score of 0 to 5 for each guideline, with 5 being the maximum. With 20 guidelines in total, websites were assigned a total Web Accessibility Index rating out of 100. The guidelines represent a cross-section of important accessibility criteria across all user groups with disabilities.

The guidelines against which we benchmarked the 20 ecommerce sites were:

General

1. Text is resizable and remains legible when resized
2. Descriptive page titles used

Images

3. Information images have useful ALT text
4. Decorative images have null ALT text & aren't links by themselves
5. Text isn't embedded within images

Headings

6. Headings are correctly labelled as headings
7. All sections of the page have their own heading
8. Headings stand out from regular text

Links

9. Link text makes sense out of context & is front-loaded
10. A focus state is provided for links
11. Links use a high contrast colour
12. Links employ the widest possible area

HTML code

13. All lists labelled as lists
14. Skip to main content link provided
15. Decorative items not inserted through HTML code
16. CSS used for layout

Forms

17. Form label present and correctly positioned
18. Labels assigned to form items
19. Form items don't cause auto-refresh
20. Forms effectively designed

Results

Summary

The 20 ecommerce websites received the following scores in total, out of 100:

2010 rank	2009 rank	Website	2010 score	2009 score
1	6=	B&Q (www.diy.com)	84	68
2	1	John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	79	74
3	8	H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	75	65
4	3	Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	73	71
5=	2	Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	68	72
5=	4=	HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	68	70
7	6=	Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	67	68
8	11	WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	64	61
9	12=	Topshop (www.topshop.co.uk)	62	58
10	15	Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	61	56
11	18	Next (www.next.co.uk)	60	51
12	12=	Marks & Spencer (www.mands.com)	59	58
13	10	Accessorize (www.accessorize.co.uk)	58	63
14=	4=	Game (www.game.co.uk)	55	70
14=	12=	Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	55	58
16	9	Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	54	64
17	16	Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	47	54
18	17	Body Shop (www.thebodyshop.co.uk)	40	53
19	-	Woolworths (www.woolworths.co.uk)	38	-
20	19	Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	37	37
		Average score	60.2	61.6

Please consult the Appendix on p28 for a full breakdown of scores.

1. Text is resizable and remains legible when resized

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5) [Last year 3.3]

Users with limited vision may need to increase the size of text through the browser. This can simply be achieved by going to View > Text Size > Largest (in Internet Explorer). As such, it's crucial that text is specified with a relative (not fixed) font size.

Cushions beanbags & throws

```
<div id="page_title">
  <h1> Cushions beanbags & throws, Cushions, Throws - from Debenhams.com </h1>
  <h2>Cushions beanbags & throws</h2>
  <div class="products_found"> 113 products found </div>
```

Text on the Debenhams site is specified with a fixed font size and cannot be resized. For example, the heading level 2's, <h2>, are set to 18px.

```
body#psp #page_title h2 {
  font-size: 18px;
  font-weight: bold;
}
```



Hamleys performed reasonably well with text resizing but some key content disappeared.

2010's study sees a slight drop in this guideline with the average score decreasing from 3.3 to 3.1, the level it was in the previous report.

Half of the sites reviewed resized text very well, with 10 sites scoring 4 or 5. However, 4 of the sites are failing almost completely in this guideline, scoring 0 or 1 out of 5 as text either fails to resize or becomes very difficult to read when it does.

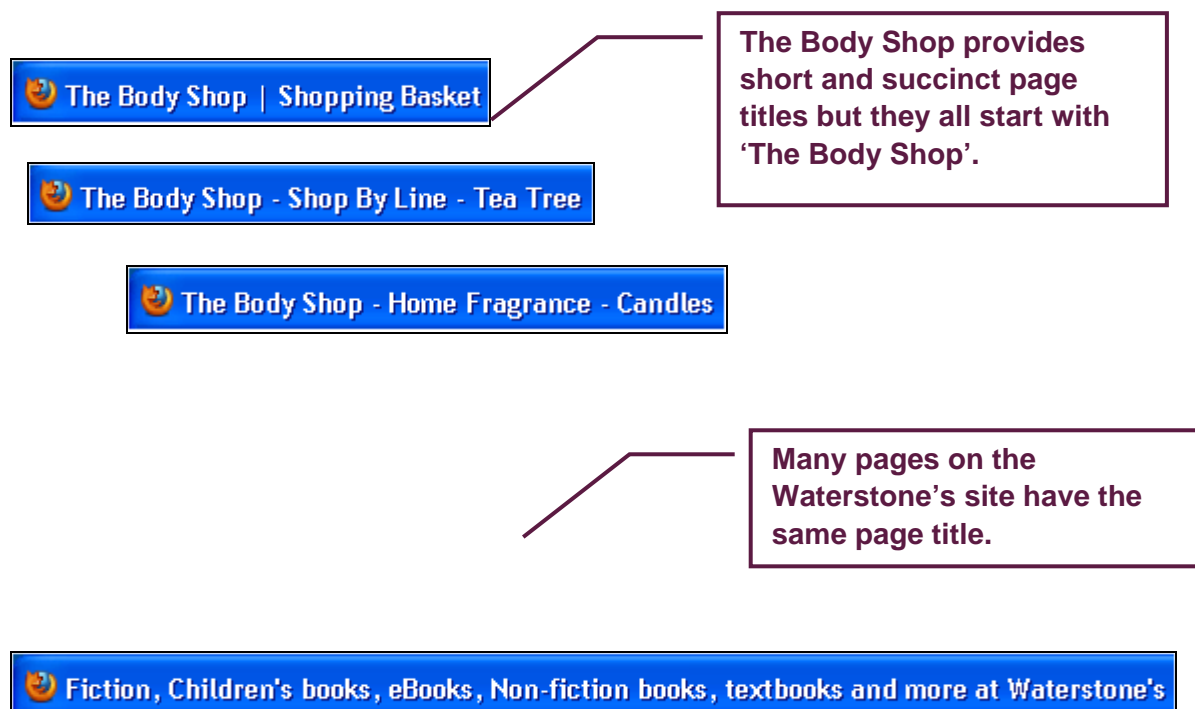
2. Descriptive page titles used

Average score: 3.7 (out of 5) [Last year 3.4]

The page title is the very first thing that gets read out by screen readers. It's crucial that the title is descriptive so screen reader users can instantly gain an understanding of the page's content.

All page titles must be descriptive of the page. As a general rule page titles should be:

- Unique – No two page titles should be the same across the website
- Short, succinct and straight-to-the-point
- Front loaded – The most important content should be placed at the start



As with last year's report, this guideline saw a gradual improvement in 2010 with the average score increasing from 3.4 to 3.7. 11 of the 20 websites scored 4 or 5 out of 5 and only Waterstone's scored less than 3. Common issues with sites that failed to score 4 or 5 are that page titles aren't descriptive enough, aren't front-loaded and/or always begin with the same phrase (usually the company name).

3. Information images have useful ALT text

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5) [Last year 3.4]

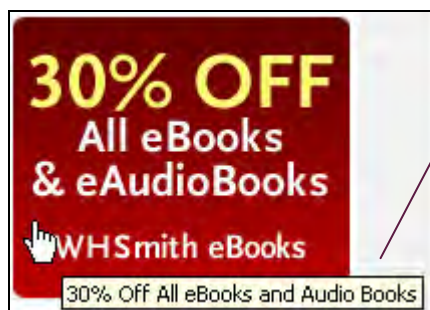
Screen readers can't understand images; instead they read aloud the ALT, or alternative, text. In the absence of ALT text screen readers typically read aloud the filename, something that's of course nonsensical. ALT text for any information image should convey the same exact same information conveyed by the image itself.

ALT text should:

- Be short, succinct and straight-to-the-point
- Contain no more and no less information than what's in the image



WHSmith provides good ALT text for informative images but they aren't always 100% descriptive of the image.



Assigning ALT text to images is perhaps one of the most well known accessibility guidelines, but despite this, the average score for this guideline has been steadily decreasing over the past two years. In 2010 it's down 0.3 to 3.1 out of 5.

Only 6 of the 20 websites scored 4 or 5 for this guideline and, as in previous years, sites that don't score high marks commonly have ALT text that's inaccurate or not conveying enough information. Effective ALT text is key for blind web users to get the full benefit of images on the website.

4. Decorative images have null ALT text & aren't links by themselves

Average score: 2.4 (out of 5) [Last year 2.3]

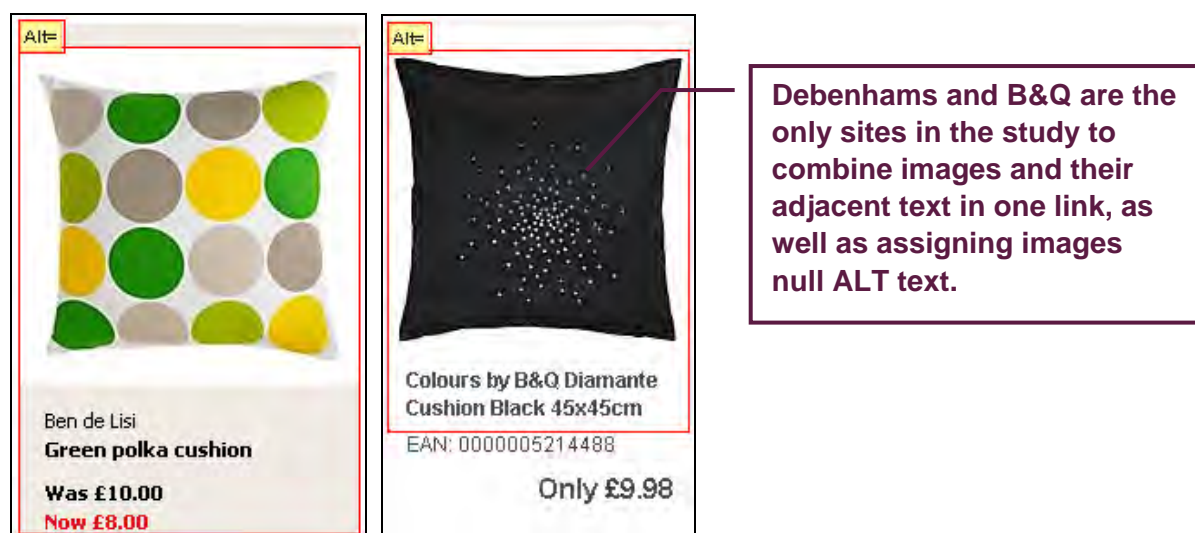
Screen readers ignore images with null ALT, or alternative, text assigned to them (`alt=""`). The following kinds of images are decorative:

- Product images adjacent to their product name
- Invisible 'spacer' images
- Icons that merely support text

Assigning descriptive ALT text to a decorative image makes it harder for screen reader users to work through the page. This is because unnecessary content is being read aloud to them.

In particular, assigning ALT text of the product name to a product image is unnecessary if the product name is displayed in text immediately before/after the image. Doing so means the product name is essentially read aloud twice.

The solution is to assign null ALT text (`alt=""`) to the image and contain it in the same link as its adjacent text. A decorative image should never be a link by itself as if it contains null ALT text, it's essentially a link that goes nowhere for screen reader users.



This was one of the worst performing guidelines in the report. The average score slightly increased from last year to 2.4 out of 5, but only B&Q and Debenhams scored more than 3.

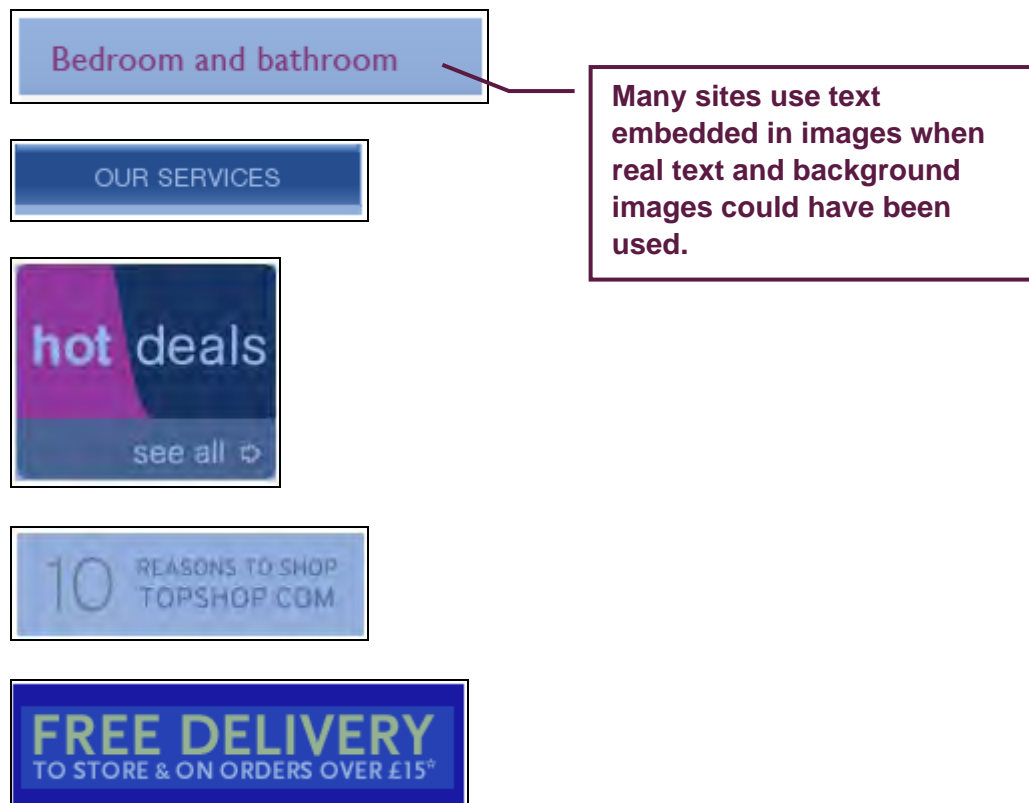
Most sites are still assigning ALT text to decorative images meaning that on product listing pages screen readers announce product names twice (the ALT text plus the text).

5. Text isn't embedded within images

Average score: 2.5 (out of 5) [Last year 2.3]

Text that's embedded within images can't be resized and can become blurry and pixelated when blown up with a screen magnifier.

Websites should ensure that all text is real text and not text embedded within images. Advanced visual effects can be created with background images and real text so usually there's no need to embed text within images. (The only reason to embed text within images is when using unique fonts or advanced text effects.)



This guideline has improved slightly after dropping drastically in last year's report, but with an average score of only 2.5 out of 5, there's still much room for improvement.

As with last year the majority of sites regularly use text embedded in images when they could just as easily use real text, and all the sites use embedded text at some point resulting in no site scoring 5 out of 5.

6. Headings are correctly labelled as headings

Average score: 2.8 (out of 5) [Last year 2.9]

Screen reader users can call up a list of headings and quickly jump to any heading on the page. This means they won't have to listen to the entire page to find what they're looking for.

All items that describe the content contained below them need to be labelled as headings in the HTML code (using `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>` etc.), otherwise screen reader users won't know that these are actually headings. There should also be one (and only one) heading level one on each page, to succinctly describe what the page is about.



Hamleys labelled almost all headings as headings within the code (headings are indicated by `<h1>`, `<h2>` etc.).



Topshop doesn't use any headings on its homepage.

The average score here has decreased very slightly to 2.8 out of 5, so still requires a good deal of improvement. Headings are the key orientation point for screen reader users but as with last year, 8 of the 20 sites are still scoring 2 out of 5 or less, typically using inconsistent and/or incorrectly nested heading. In the case of some sites, headings aren't used at all.

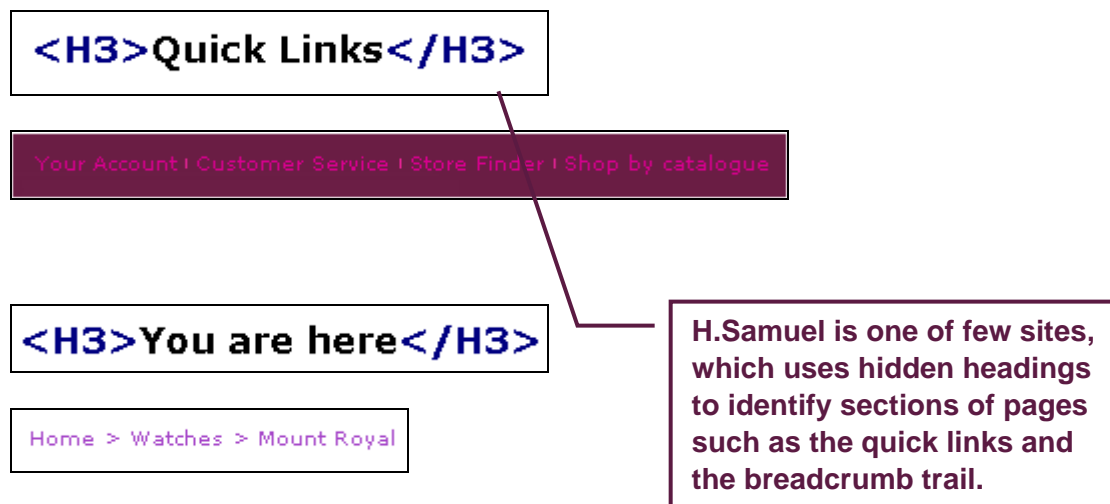
7. All sections of the page have their own heading

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5) [Last year 2.8]

By placing a heading at the start of each section, screen reader users can instantly gain an understanding of what each section is about, prior to listening to it. As such, there should be a heading immediately before every single section on every page.

The headings must be labelled as headings in the HTML code (using <h1>, <h2>, <h3> etc.) for this to work.

Sections of the page that usually don't have a heading, but require one, include the navigation, search and footer, for example. If necessary, headings can be made invisible.



The average score on this guideline has improved very slightly in the last year from 2.8 to 2.9. 6 of the 20 sites are still scoring 2 or less often failing to label a lot of headings and not nesting them correctly. However, 7 sites performed well in this guideline, scoring 4 or more.

8. Headings stand out from regular text

Average score: 4.3 (out of 5) [Last year 4.1]

Users with reading difficulties rely on items such as headings to find information. It's crucial that headings sufficiently stand out on the page. To ensure this, heading should:

- Be at least two point sizes larger than regular text
- Have plenty of white space both above and below them
- Ideally use a different colour to regular text (background or text colour)



Through the use of large fonts, bold text and background colours, HMV's headings stand out from regular text.

This is the highest scoring guideline in 2010 with an average of 4.3, up 0.2 on last year. This guideline is key to both usability and accessibility and this is demonstrated by the fact that only 2 of the 20 sites scored less than 4 out of 5, with 7 websites scoring maximum points.

9. Link text makes sense out of context & is front-loaded

Average score: 3.4 (out of 5) [Last year 3.5]

Screen reader users can call up a list of links as a way of browsing through a page so it's essential that link text is usable in this format. Often when listening to links on a page, screen reader users will listen to just the first 1 to 3 words before moving on to the next link. As such, words towards the end of the link text will often go unheard.

Link text should therefore be precisely descriptive of its destination and the text should adequately describe the page it's pointing to. As a very general rule, the link text should be roughly the same as the heading and page title on the page it's pointing to.

If necessary, invisible text can be used to expand on the meaning of the link destination, with the most important words placed towards the front of the link text. Non-descriptive link text such as 'Click here' or 'More' should be avoided at all costs.



'More details' links repeated for every product costs The Body Shop points for this accessibility guideline.

As with a number of guidelines in this year's report, there is not much change here. The average score of 3.4 is down 0.1 on last year.

12 of the 20 sites score 3 out of 5 making a semi-successful attempt at ensuring link text makes sense out of context. But these sites are still making mistakes such as using link text like 'click here' and 'see more'. Only John Lewis scores maximum points for this guideline.

10. A focus state is provided for links

Average score: 0.9 (out of 5) [Last year 0.5]

Keyboard-only users can better orientate themselves when tabbing through pages if links become highlighted when focused upon. To achieve this, each link needs to utilise a background colour when focused on.

[Skip to main content](#)

[Baby & Child](#) [Toys](#) [Sport & Leisure](#)

[Homepage](#) > [Home & Garden](#) > [Cushions, Beanbags & Throws](#)

[Throws](#)
[Floor Cushions](#)
[Seat Pads](#)

John Lewis is once again the only website in the study to provide a focus state for every link that visually stands out in all browsers.



Despite a slight improvement, this guideline is again the one that requires the most improvement across the board, with an average score of just 0.9. John Lewis scored maximum points as it did last year and B&Q and Argos scored 4.5 and 4 respectively. However, 14 sites are still not making any attempt at providing a focus state for links.

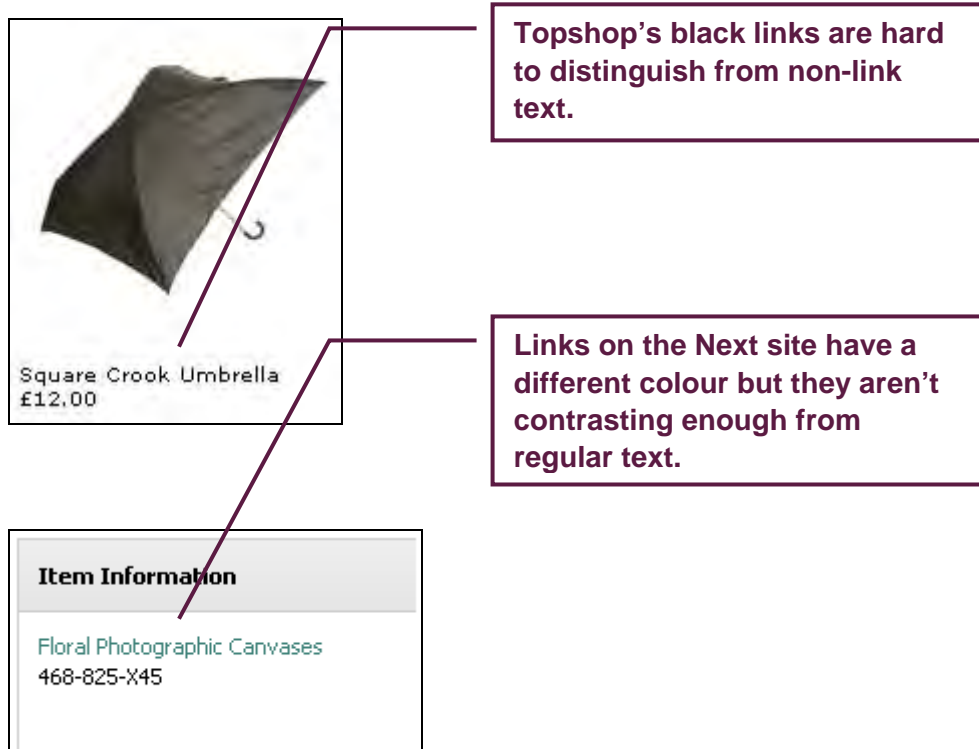
The needs of keyboard-only users are clearly still being overlooked by the major UK retailers as this guideline is crucial to these users.

11. Links use a high contrast colour

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5) [Last year 2.5]

Screen magnifier users and web users with reading difficulties can find it difficult to impossible to read text when scanning through a page. It's crucial that important items such as links stand out from regular text.

To ensure this, links should utilise a different, high contrast colour to non-link text. For example, if regular non-link text is black link text shouldn't also be black.



Topshop's black links are hard to distinguish from non-link text.

Links on the Next site have a different colour but they aren't contrasting enough from regular text.

Item Information

Floral Photographic Canvases
468-825-X45

More than half of the websites reviewed are scoring 3 out of 5 for this guideline, using a different colour for link text but not a high enough contrast colour. As a result, often link text doesn't really stand out enough for accessibility purposes. However, the average score for this guideline has improved since last year by 0.6 to 3.1.

12. Links employs the widest possible area

Average score: 2.7 (out of 5) [Last year 3.6]

Users with motor impairments that use a mouse will do so with limited mobility. By increasing the size of link targets it becomes much easier for this group of users to activate links. Two key ways of achieving this include:

- Ensuring the clickable area for navigation links spans the maximum possible width (e.g. the full width of the column for links in a vertical list)
- Including images (e.g. product images) in the link, as well as adjacent text



The Argos site provides links that use the widest possible area for its main navigation but not for its left hand side options.

But it's the only site in the study that uses JavaScript to maximise the clickable area of its products links.

The image shows three examples of navigation and product links on the Argos website. The top example is a horizontal navigation bar with four categories: 'Kitchen & Laundry', 'Home & Furniture', 'Garden & DIY', and 'Sports & Leisure'. Below this is a 'Kitchen' dropdown menu with links for 'Cookers & ovens' and 'Dishwashers'. The middle example is a 'By Type' sidebar menu with links for '> Beanbags and beanbag covers (39)', '> Cushions and cushion covers (5)', and '> Living room throws (13)'. The bottom example is a product listing for a 'Chenille Cushion - Aubergine' priced at £12.99, featuring a star rating and a promotional offer: 'Buy any cushion and get any second cushion half price'. Red lines connect callout boxes to the navigation bar, the sidebar menu, and the product listing.

This guideline has actually got substantially worse since last year, with a drop of 0.9 to an average score of 2.7. No websites score maximum points here and only 3 sites scored 4 out of 5, in contrast to last year when 11 websites scored either 4 or 5.

13. All lists labelled as lists

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5) [Last year 3.3]

Using lists in the HTML code is crucial for screen reader users as the screen reader alerts them to the number of items in the list. Screen readers announce the number of items in a list, before going on to read out the list items. As such, all lists must be labelled as lists in the HTML code (especially navigation).

As a general rule, if on-page text isn't a paragraph or heading, it's likely to be a list.



This is another guideline where the average score has dropped this year, from 3.3 to 2.9. No site scored maximum points here, with the vast majority scoring 3 or 4 out of 5. However, 6 sites are still scoring 2 or less but not using lists anywhere frequently enough.

14. Skip to main content link provided

Average score: 2.3 (out of 5) [Last year 2.1]

A skip link allows screen reader and keyboard only users to jump over the navigation on each page and get straight to the main content. The skip link can be invisible and then made to appear when focused on.

Ideally the link should use a strong background colour and large font size so it's highly visible when it appears.



The diagram illustrates three examples of skip link implementations:

- Marks & Spencer:** A box highlights the text "Jump to main Content [Accesskey 'C']" in a yellow background. A line points to the M&S logo.
- WHSmith:** A box contains a list of three blue underlined links: "Skip to page content", "Skip to primary navigation", and "Skip to secondary navigation". Below the list is the WHSmith logo.
- Topshop:** A box contains a list of three blue underlined links: "Jump to main content [Access key 'C']", "Jump to primary navigation [Access key 'N']", and "Skip navigation [Access key 'S']". Below the list is the TOPSHOP logo.

A central text box contains the following text:

Marks & Spencer has an excellent skip to main content link that appears when tabbed on to.

But there are still many sites such as WHSmith or Topshop that provide skip links (viewable with styles disabled) that aren't highlighted when tabbed on.

The average score of 2.3 out of 5 sees the gradual improvement in this guideline continue, but a big improvement is still required. Only 3 sites scored maximum points here, with the majority of sites again providing skip links but making them impossible to access for keyboard-only users and inaccessible to screen reader users. On 7 sites, no skip links could be found at all.

15. Decorative items not inserted through HTML code

Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year 3.9]

Each and every item in the HTML code gets announced to screen reader users. This includes decorative items such as:

- Vertical bar (|) – Announced as ‘vertical bar’ to screen reader users, it should instead be inserted as a left (or right) border through the CSS
- Greater than sign (>) – Announced as ‘greater than sign’ to screen reader users, it should be inserted as a background image through the CSS

Decorative items are of course useless to screen reader users so should be removed from the HTML file.



The screenshot shows a navigation menu with three items: "My Account | Help | Sign in / Register", "< Back To Home Essentials", and "Next Page >>". A callout box points to the vertical bar in the first item, stating: "Greater and less than signs (>, <) and vertical bars (|) are still placed directly into the HTML code of the Woolworth's site."

The average score for this guideline has remained constant at 3.9 and it's again one of the highest scoring guidelines in the report. 13 of the 20 sites scored either 4 or 5 and those that didn't are mainly making a few simple mistakes, such as using HTML to insert vertical bars, which are easily rectified.

16. CSS used for layout

Average score: 3.8 (out of 5) [Last year 3.9]




Screen readers (especially older versions) announce table information (number of rows and columns) each time they get to a table. This useless information can be a nuisance to screen reader users. Tables should be completely avoided (except for data tables) and CSS used to layout all the web pages.



The Mothercare website uses tables (represented by the red borders in these screenshots) to layout some of the content when CSS should have been used.

But there are still many sites such as WHSmith or Topshop that provide skip links (viewable with styles disabled) that aren't highlighted when tabbed on.

more in this range

		
Steiff Little Friend Koko Monkey £29.95	Steiff Fynn Teddy Bear £24.95	Waybuloo talking plush Nok Tok £19.99

Scores in this guideline remain pretty constant with a drop in the average score of just 0.1. Three quarters of the sites performed very well here scoring 4 or 5, but 3 sites only scored 1 out of 5 using large numbers of tables instead of CSS.

17. Form label present and correctly positioned

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5) [Last year 3.2]

Screen reader users won't know for what a form field is if there's no label. Additionally, if the label is incorrectly positioned then screen readers may associate the incorrect text with the form field, rendering the form unusable.

Form labels should always be present and come before their associated form fields, except with radio buttons and checkboxes when they should come after.



<p>Log-in (if you're already registered)</p> <p>Email address: * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Password: * <input type="password"/></p> <p>Forgotten your password?</p> <p>LOG-IN</p>	<p>Register (for new customers)</p> <p>Email address: * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Confirm your email address: * <input type="text"/></p> <p>Password (minimum 6 characters): * <input type="password"/></p> <p>Confirm your password: * <input type="password"/></p> <p>REGISTER ME</p>
---	---

The guideline surprisingly continues to slip and this year's average score of 3.0 is the lowest yet. Forms are a major part of ecommerce websites and are a constant issue in usability and accessibility alike. However, no website managed maximum points here, and 6 websites scored only 1 or 2 out of 5.

18. Labels assigned to form items

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5) [Last year 3.0]

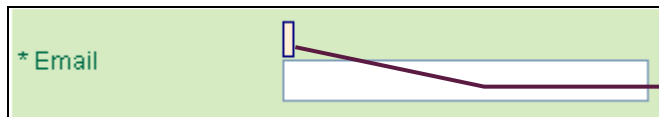
Modern screen readers will correctly associate form labels with their form fields if assigned to each other in the HTML code. All form labels should be assigned to their associated form fields by matching the `label for` and `id` attributes in the HTML.

An easy way to check for this is to click on any form label and the form field next to it should become selected (for input and text fields a flashing cursor will appear in the box).



B&Q performed very well in associating every form label with its respective form field.

Clicking on the 'Email address' label focuses the cursor on the input field - a sign that the label is indeed assigned to the form field.



The Early Learning Centre scored poorly on this guideline. It failed to provide and assign labels on its forms.

Clicking on the 'Email address' label doesn't focus the cursor on the input field - a sign that the label hasn't been assigned to the form field correctly.

With an average score of 3.1, there's been a very slight improvement in this guideline this year. 12 of the 20 websites scored 4 or 5 out of 5, however, 5 websites scored either 0 or 1, with many labels either not found or not assigned properly.

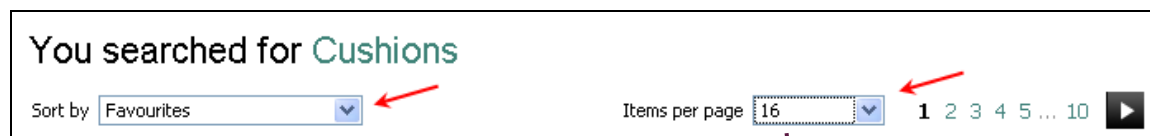
19. Form items don't cause auto-refresh

Average score: 4.0 (out of 5) [Last year 4.2]

Auto-refreshes unexpectedly send screen reader and screen magnifier users back to the top of the page. In some instances this means these users will be unable to use a particular form item as it keeps causing a refresh.

In particular, dropdown menus that auto-refresh can be impossible to use for screen reader and keyboard only users – the moment they attempt to work through the list the first item becomes selected and the page will automatically refresh.

Submit buttons should be used to submit a form, in order to avoid the auto-refresh.



You searched for **Cushions**

Sort by **1** 2 3 4 5 ... 10

Item Information	Size	Qty
Teal X-Ray Flower On Canvas 486-600-X45	ONE	<input type="text" value="2"/> <input type="button" value="v"/>

The dropdown menus on the search result and the basket pages of the Next site cause the pages to auto-refresh. If the page needs to reload then a 'Go' button should be provided.

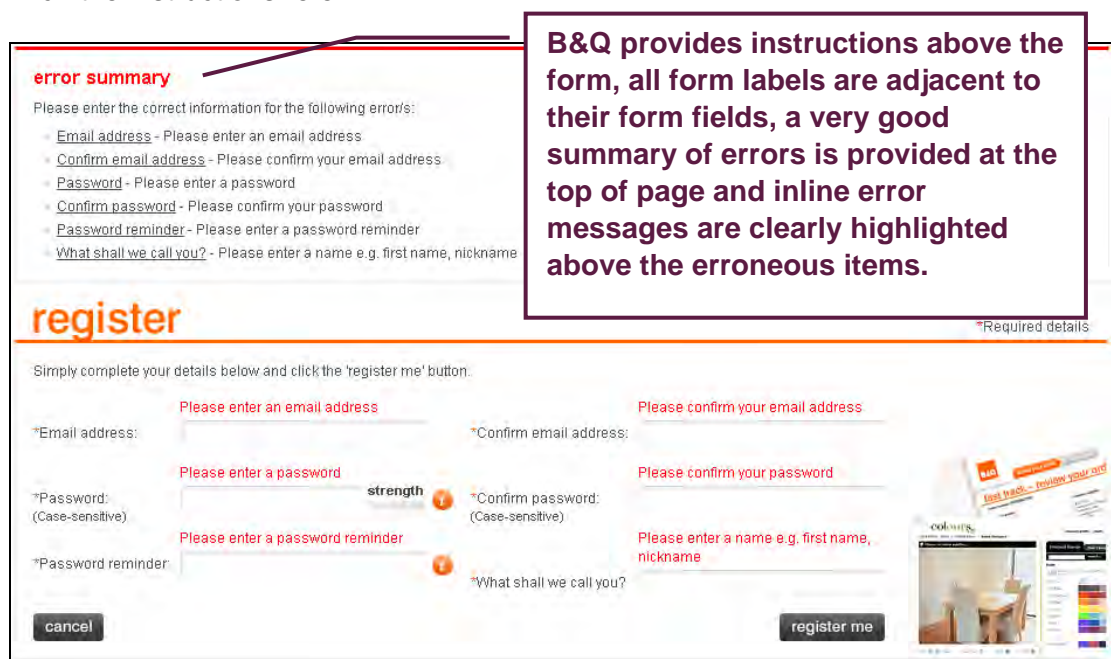
Despite a drop of 0.2 in the average score since last year, this is the second highest scoring guideline in the report with 4.0 out of 5. 14 sites scored either 4 or 5 for this guideline and those that failed to typically contained dropdown menus that caused an auto-refresh.

20. Forms effectively designed

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5) [Last year 3.5]

In addition to the other form guidelines, the following should also be adhered to in order for a form to be effectively designed for accessibility:

- Form labels and their associated form fields should be located next to each other – if items are too far away from each other then screen magnifier users, who can only see one part of the screen at a time, may match the wrong field to a label
- Server side validation should be used and display an error summary at the top of the page as well as an error message next to each erroneous item – the former is crucial for screen reader and magnifier users to explain why they're still on the same page; the latter informs users with special needs, within context, what error needs fixing
- Instructions should be placed before the form fields to which they refer (e.g. ‘* indicates required fields’ should come at the top of the form) – Screen reader and magnifier users need to know about instructions before they arrive at the item to which the instructions refer



error summary

Please enter the correct information for the following error/s:

- [Email address](#) - Please enter an email address
- [Confirm email address](#) - Please confirm your email address
- [Password](#) - Please enter a password
- [Confirm password](#) - Please confirm your password
- [Password reminder](#) - Please enter a password reminder
- [What shall we call you?](#) - Please enter a name e.g. first name, nickname

B&Q provides instructions above the form, all form labels are adjacent to their form fields, a very good summary of errors is provided at the top of page and inline error messages are clearly highlighted above the erroneous items.

register

*Required details

Simply complete your details below and click the 'register me' button.

*Email address: **Please enter an email address**

*Confirm email address: **Please confirm your email address**

*Password: (Case-sensitive) **Please enter a password** **strength**

*Confirm password: (Case-sensitive) **Please confirm your password**

*Password reminder: **Please enter a password reminder**

*What shall we call you? **Please enter a name e.g. first name, nickname**

This guideline has seen a significant drop of 0.6 since last year to an average score of 2.9 in this year's report. No website scored maximum point and 5 sites scored either 2 or 1 out of 5. As with last year's report the main reason for lost points is the lack of either an error summary or individual error messages when validation is provided.

Conclusion

With an average score of just over 60%, progress in making ecommerce websites accessible to all seems to have stalled (although the re-inclusion of Woolworths in this report and its subsequent low score has dragged the average down slightly lower than it would have been).

Despite this slight slip in the average score, the scores of those leading the way in ecommerce accessibility have increased dramatically:

- The top score has increased by 10 to 84
- 7 retailers are scoring over 65
- The biggest improvement came from B&Q which increased its score by 16 from 68 to 84 to lead the way

However, the drop in average score can be attributed to the bottom end, with 4 retailers now scoring under 50 for accessibility, as opposed to just one in last year's report.

The vast majority of websites now offer average to good accessibility on many of the guidelines, but, as with the previous reports, sloppiness and inconsistency is still inherent when it comes to the implementation of accessibility. We saw from Webcredible's 2009 ecommerce usability report that a lot of work has taken place on existing and redesigned sites to improve usability, but it seems in all this work many retailers have failed to take accessibility seriously enough. Indeed, half of the 20 guidelines this year saw lower average scores than last year.

In addition, there were still 4 guidelines where the average score came in at 2.5 out of 5 or less, including embedding text within images, and providing focus states for links and skip links.

The accessibility guidelines presented in this report represent just the start to achieving excellent accessibility. There are additional lower priority and/or complex guidelines not covered by this study. Also, guidelines can only go so far in evaluating crucial accessibility requirements as 'real world' accessibility can often extend beyond guidelines.

References

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2. RNIB (www.rnib.org.uk/aboutus/aboutsightloss/Pages/aboutsightloss.aspx)
3. Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties (www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/information/learning-disabilities-statistics/)
4. Office for National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0809.pdf)
5. RNIB (www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_legalcase.hcsp)

Appendix: Full results

The full list of websites audited, and the score they achieved for each guideline is as follows:

Website	Guideline number																				TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
B&Q	5	4	3	4.5	4	3	4	5	4	4.5	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	84
John Lewis	3	5	5	2	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	79
H.Samuel	4	5	4	3	2	4	4	4	4	0	3	2	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	75
Argos	4	3	4	3	3	2	2	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.5	3.5	5	4	4	73
Boots	5	5	3	2	2	4	3	5	2	0	3	3	4	0	5	5	4	4	5	4	68
HMV	4	3	2	2	2	2	4	5	3	3	5	2	3	3	4	5	4	5	5	2	68
Hamleys	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	5	4	1	1	1	4	3	5	4	3	4	5	3	67
WHSmith	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	4	4	0	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	64
Topshop	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	3	4	0	2	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	5	3	62
Waterstone's	4	1	4	2	2	4	4	5	3	0	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	1	61

Next	2	4	3	2	3	3	3	4	3	1	3	2	2	3	5	5	3	3	3	3	60
Marks & Spencer	4	5	4	2	3	2	3	4	3	0	2	2	3	5	3	3	3	3	4	1	59
Accessorize	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	5	3	0	3	4	3	1	4	5	4	4	2	3	58
Game	4	5	3	2	2	3	3	4	3	0	4	3	3	0	4	4	1	2	3	2	55
Debenhams	0	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	0	3	3	3	0	4	4	1	1	4	3	55
Mothercare	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	4	3	0	3	2	2	0	3	3	4	4	4	3	54
Early Learning Centre	1	4	3	2	2	3	3	4	3	0	3	3	2	0	3	4	1	1	3	2	47
The Body Shop	3	3	1	3	1	2	1	4	3	0	3	3	2	0	3	1	1	0	3	3	40
Woolworths	1	4	2	2	2	1	1	3	3	0	3	1	1	3	2	1	2	0	3	3	38
Currys	0	3	2	2	2	1	1	4	3	0	3	3	1	0	3	1	1	0	4	3	37
TOTAL	61	74	61	48	49	56	58	85	67	19	61	53	58	45	77	77	60	61	79	57	
Average score	3.1	3.7	3.1	2.4	2.5	2.8	2.9	4.3	3.4	0.9	3.1	2.7	2.9	2.3	3.9	3.8	3.0	3.1	4.0	2.9	60.2

About Webcredible

Webcredible is a user experience consultancy, offering a range of usability, accessibility, design & training services based around your specific requirements:

User-centered design

- Information architecture
- Interaction design

User research

- Usability testing
- Interviews & focus groups
- Persona creation

Accessibility

- Accessibility testing
- Accessible web design

Training & mentoring

- Usability & accessibility courses
- Online copywriting courses
- Web development courses

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected user experience consultancies in the UK. Our 200+ research articles and reports have been re-published on 100s of websites and we receive 250,000 visitors to our website each month.

We believe in taking a proactive approach with clients, whilst maintaining a regular open line of communication. We believe that we are being paid for our expertise and as such always take the initiative and offer our recommendations for any course of action. We are:

- **Focused on client needs** – Our aims are to optimise conversion rates for companies and ensure public sector organisations effectively disseminate information.
- **Passionate** – The team here at Webcredible loves what they do and we only recruit staff passionate about usability and accessibility.
- **Approachable** – We're friendly and jargon-free. Consultants, despite being highly educated and experienced, only communicate in a user-friendly manner.

For further information please contact:

Trenton Moss
020 7423 6324
trenton@webcredible.co.uk

Clients include Airmiles, Asda, BBC, eBay, EDF Energy, Laura Ashley, Lloyds TSB, More Th>n, Sony, St John Ambulance, T-Mobile, VisitBritain and World Health Organization.