The Basics of ADA Compliance

By Welton Hong

If you own a funeral home, cemetery, or brick-and-mortar cremation services business, I'm sure you know that your public-facing business premises must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Here's the thing: The ADA's regulations aren't limited to physical locations. It's critical to understand how *website accessibility* factors into the equation.

ADA and Websites

According to Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, businesses with areas that accommodate the public must remove barriers that might keep people with disabilities from accessing business services or goods.

The language of Title III doesn't *literally* mention websites (it was passed in 1990), and you might think digital locations shouldn't count as "areas that accommodate the public."

But the courts tend to disagree. In lawsuits and regulatory action on the matter, U.S. courts and the Department of Justice have repeatedly interpreted Title III as also applying to *websites* and *mobile apps.*

That makes sense, especially given everything that's occurred throughout the COVID health crisis. For some businesses, digital channels might be the *only* touchpoints currently available for consumers. People who can't fully access your site and its information and functions are at a disadvantage.

Digital Accessibility Guidelines

How do you ensure your deathcare website is ADA-compliant? The technical requirements are spelled out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

The WCAG document is *long*. It's also been updated a number of times over more than a decade, with another update expected in 2021. The updates are necessary because technology keeps changing—for example, the mobile app options available today didn't exist when WCAG was first created.

Tons of information and a moving target can make it challenging for funeral service providers to ensure their websites are ADA-compliant. Here are some of the things required by WCAG:

- *Text alternatives for all content.* The ability to hear written content read aloud and have images described can be important to those with disabilities.

All images should have descriptive alt text so text-to-speech programs have something to interpret. For example, where others might see an image of a woman selecting an urn for cremated remains, users with a need for auditory processing might hear alt text that states, "Image of a woman choosing among urn options."

Captions for videos, written explanations of charts and graphs and alt text for navigation items are other examples of this requirement.

- *Ability to use all functions from the keyboard.* Functionality on the website must work with keyboard commands and interactions for people who cannot use a mouse.

- *Information available in multiple or simplified formats.* Complex information on your site should be available in various formats to ensure people can find an option they're able to engage with. Someone might be unable to properly view a certain graph, so the information contained within should be explained in text somewhere else.

So if you have a step-by-step chart of cremation with a service options or an infographic on the benefits of funeral preplanning, the page should also include text versions of that information.

- ***Support for programmatic language applications.*** Machine learning and artificial intelligence support a myriad of software programs and other tools that help people engage with online content. Many of these involve programmatic solutions that read the content to help users make decisions or convert information into audio formats.

- ***Support for other assistive technologies.*** ADA-compliant websites should also support other types of assistive technologies, including browser extensions and solutions users have invested in to help them navigate the web.

Ensure Your Site Is ADA-Compliant

Staying compliant with the few things listed above probably sounds like a daunting task, and we've only made the smallest of dents in WCAG technical requirements.

Start by reading up on ADA requirements for websites. You can find the entire text of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines with explanations and examples related to each section online at w3.org.

Numerous software companies provide *ADA compliance checkers*: tools that crawl your website and return information about areas you might need to address.

WCAG requirements are so complex that automatic tools can't check for *all* requirements. However, they can save you a lot of time spent checking elements such as images for alt text and ensuring you're meeting many of the other simpler requirements.

To get into the nitty gritty of ADA compliance on the web, a manual audit might be necessary. Small deathcare businesses might consider working with WCAG experts. These individuals are extremely familiar with how the ADA relates to digital solutions and what courts have decided in previous cases.

More Reasons for ADA Compliance

Reducing the risk of expensive lawsuits is obviously a compelling business reason to look into ADA compliance for your deathcare website. But if you're still on the fence, here are a few other potential benefits:

- ***Improved SEO:*** ADA compliance requires working on alt image text, meta tagging, transcripts, and other elements that can improve SEO performance.

- ***A more functional website:*** Sites that function well for people with disabilities tend to function well for everyone because thought was put into the navigation and other elements. This can improve customer experience, a major driver for conversions and revenue.

- ***Greater customer reach:*** Ensuring your site is accessible by more people helps you reach out to more potential clients.

Wonder whether there's any true danger you might be sued? Just ask Beyonce, Harvard, Burger King, or Nike; they're just a few entities and brands that have been sued for this reason.

Funeral service businesses—even small ones—aren't immune from ADA-related lawsuits and penalties. So take some time this year to handle this marketing housekeeping task.

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Welton is a leading expert in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. He's the author of the book ***Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes***. Learn more at **FuneralHomeProfits.com**.