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Making Your Online Collections Accessible

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Access in terms of museums and archives traditionally refers to increasing the visibility of the hundreds, or thousands, of items in a collection which visitors might never see.

Obviously, we can't have *everything* out on display all the time and some pieces of a collection may be too fragile to ever exhibit. As technology evolves, creating online catalogs and video tours becomes an efficient way to provide better access to collections and puts them within virtual reach of visitors through our websites.

Going digital is also a powerful accessibility asset to people with disabilities and supports any organization's mission to offer an equal opportunity for all people to benefit from the educational and aesthetic value of collections. There are more than 50 million people in the United States affected by disability, and many factors complicate their ability to participate in their communities. For people who are homebound because of severe physical or health conditions, museum content online opens up new worlds they might not ever get to see in person. Lack of transportation also can limit travel and leisure activities, especially for older adults, or anyone with vision loss.

Perhaps your organization is just getting started with building up your web content with photos and videos of your collections and exhibits, or you've possibly already laid out a solid foundation for online access. Here are some key questions and considerations to keep in mind as you develop or add content to your website.

Is your website currently compatible with screenreader software used by people who are blind or have low vision?

This will be the first barrier that online visitors might hit. You can run your website through a free evaluation tool by [WebAIM](#). The [WAVE](#) tool is user-friendly and flags compatibility issues. There are also definitions and links for

more information on how to resolve the issues.

Use ALT tags with verbal description of images to provide access to people who are blind or have low vision. You can load ALT tags with text to inform people about the content of photos on your website. Details like size, color, shape, texture and composition are most useful. Screenreader software voices the text for people to hear. Keep in mind that most people with vision loss are able to detect colors, shapes or light effects. Adding descriptive language to ALT tags will supplement what they can see and help them create a better mental image of the objects highlighted in your online collection. Training for verbal description is available from [Art Beyond Sight](#).

Are your videos captioned? Even though people who are Deaf or hard of hearing usually won't have any problem getting to your museum, the guided tours and facilitated talks with staff don't often have transcripts and aren't offered with ASL interpretation. Captioning online videos is required by law, but also can connect web content to site visits to create richer experiences. [Access iQ](#) is a great resource to learn more about adding captions to your videos. Also, be sure to do a quality review of computer-generated captions because they aren't 100-percent accurate.

When in doubt, ask for help! The [ADA Network](#) operates a free and anonymous hotline to help businesses and organizations understand accessibility laws and guidelines. The World Wide Web Consortium ([W3C](#)) is a resource group that continually researches and disseminates information about web access.



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