

May 6, 2019

This month, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) turned 20 years old. WCAG version 2.0 was released on May 5, 1999 and was a total game-changer for web accessibility. Today, WCAG version 2.1 is the current standard in accessibility. So, how did we get here?

Quick history lesson: the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

What is WCAG?

WCAG is a set of specific standards designed to make the web more accessible to people with disabilities. It is the third version, updated over the years to account for changes in web-based digital technology, assistive technology design and development trends, and the growth of the mobile web. It is published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) in collaboration with individuals and organizations within the accessibility community according to the [W3C Process](#).

Why is WCAG so universally accepted?

WCAG offers an actionable framework for creating or remediating websites and apps to be accessible. It is abstract, but specific and technical, and is supported by documentation that identifies methods that would be considered to pass or fail the minimum accessibility expectations of each checkpoint. It is based on four guiding principles, which state that web content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

Developed for content creators, content authoring tool developers, accessibility testers and test automation, and anyone who wants to understand how to make digital experiences accessible, WCAG is used all over the world.

"Rarely does a single document have such a direct impact on people's lives, but the guidance that WCAG provides allows developers and content creators to include people who have historically been excluded from the digital world," said Mark Shapiro, President of the Bureau of Internet Accessibility.

WCAG timeline

- May 5, 1999: WCAG 1.0 is born. It included 14 guidelines, ranging from the need to provide text alternatives to considering clarity and simplicity on the web. Each guideline had between one and 10 success criteria.
- December 11, 2008: WCAG 2.0 broadens scope and offers the four principles. The early 2000s saw unbelievable changes in technology, so WCAG evolved to keep up. WCAG 2.0 was an incredible improvement over its predecessor and was intended to be applied to almost all things digital (including documents). It also introduced the four guiding principles of accessibility, stating content must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

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