

Rethinking How You Connect with Talented Candidates

by Daniel Ferro



About the Author

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About Forum One

[Forum One](#) has successfully completed more than 1,500 web communications projects for 500+ organizations since our founding in 1996, building more than 150 responsive, accessible, open-source websites in just the last three years. Forum One works in close partnership with the [world's most influential problem-solvers](#): think tanks, foundations, nonprofits, government agencies, and issue advocates.

So you are interested in ensuring that your eRecruiting systems are accessible. You understand that this will widen your candidate pool and ensure you get the very best applicants for each position. So now what? We at Forum One have thought long and hard about this topic and want to share what we have learned. Let's start with defining accessibility.



What is accessibility?

Have you ever tried to find a stock photo that can quickly illustrate the idea of “accessibility”? Do you always run into the same image: an attractive man or woman, smiling, using a laptop while seated in a wheelchair? While this may communicate the idea that we are discussing individuals with disabilities, it does not necessarily communicate what computer accessibility is all about.

Think about it. Go sit down in a chair. Now fire up your phone, tablet, or laptop. How is this any different than the aforementioned image of a person in a wheelchair? Here is a better way to get an idea of what we mean by computer accessibility. Turn off your computer monitor. Use your phone from under a table so you can't see it. Unplug your mouse and navigate your favorite websites. Post a Facebook update with just your head. Set your zoom level in your Internet browser to be 500% or more, limiting the amount of content you can see at any one time. Unplug your speakers and watch your favorite YouTube videos.

Accessibility means that anyone—regardless of whether they have the ability to manipulate a mouse, regardless of how much vision they have or how many colors they can see, regardless of how much they can hear, and regardless of whether they have use of their hands—can use the exact same websites and applications as a fully-abled person. This is of course not an exhaustive list, but you start to get the idea by now.

How do people with disabilities use the Internet to job hunt?

So now you might wonder how people who are blind, for instance, use the Internet. How can they search for and apply for jobs? How do they use their iPhone or tablet? The answer is with the use of accessible technology. This technology adds layers that go on top of computer operating systems, mobile phones and more and allow people with disabilities to access all of the same information as everyone else.

Take a look for yourself! Below are two good examples.

Here is how someone who can't see uses technology to check email and social media

The following [video](#) features [Christine Ha](#), a chef who is blind and the winner of the third season of Master Chef. Ha demonstrates how she uses Apple's built-in VoiceOver feature on her computer and iPhone. This technology (combined with keyboard shortcuts) enables her to complete her daily work such as writing recipes and keynote speeches as well as creative pieces. She also shows how she uses VoiceOver to speedily check and update her Facebook and Twitter accounts on her iPhone.

I love to demo the accessibility features of an iPhone to anyone who is curious. I turn off the screen using the accessibility “privacy curtain” option, then navigate the phone, open up Safari, and load a website. You may not be nearly as skilled as someone like Christine, of course, but hopefully you now know enough to have some newfound appreciation of how [Apple cared enough to bake world-class accessibility into iOS](#).



Here is how someone who has limited use of his hands uses a computer

What about someone who can't use his hands to navigate a computer? Allow professional video editor and accessibility advocate [Christopher Hills](#) to [show you](#):

Christopher Hills is exceptionally good at editing videos in Final Cut Pro. This is made possible by the accessibility built into Apple's Mac OS.

He is a perfect example of someone who utilizes built-in accessibility features to work.



Accessibility and eRecruiting

Make sure your links make sense by themselves

This means no “click here” or “read more” type of links. The links must be clear if viewed without context. Also, when you are sourcing a job on social media platforms or drafting a job description, be careful of URL shortening services that strip out a link of any meaning. You should be able to look at the link, by itself, and have at least a general understanding of where the link is taking you.

Use coded headings in your website and documents

Use coded headings on your job application and across your job related documents, as well as across your entire website. The title of your page should be a heading level 1, any sub-headings should be heading level 2, any sub-sub-headings should be heading level 3, and so on.

I'd argue this is one of the single most important (and simple) accessibility features you can add to a website. Essentially, you are ordering the headings of your webpages logically so the nesting is programmatically defined.

Watch your color contrast

There are various tools online that can help you to ensure that your color contrast is sufficient for people who have vision disabilities to read your content, such as the [WebAIM color contrast checker](#). This is right up there with logically coded headings in terms of accessibility importance.

Make sure important images have ALT text

Images that communicate important information to a user should contain ALT (short for “alternative”) text attributes. So a photo of a cat who is surfing while wearing a lampshade as a hat should NOT have ALT text that says “a cat.” That is not nearly enough information.

But, there's no need to give decorative images such as lines or solid colored boxes any ALT text.

If you link to your Twitter feed from a Twitter logo, be sure the ALT text does not merely say “Twitter logo” but instead says “View our Twitter feed”

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Videos need to have synchronized captions

More and more employers are using videos to supplement information on their job sites. These videos need to have closed captions. A transcript is not enough. The captions should be synchronized in real time with the video.

Google has built accessibility into the video controls, including automatic closed captioning – although many users still feel this is a work in progress. If you upload a video to YouTube without captioning, for example, the advanced options easily allow you to add synchronized captions.

Make sure your forms have the labels programmatically associated with their inputs

This one is a bit more complicated, but basically you need to make sure users can navigate and use your forms without a mouse and without needing to see the screen at all. One easy way to test this is to click on the label of a form, such as “First Name,” and see if the input box where you type in your name now becomes active. If it does, good job! If not, you need to have a talk with your tech department.

It can be very frustrating for a job applicant to come across a form that is inaccessible or coded in a confusing manner. At minimum, provide a simple email link as a backup for applicants to send their information directly to your company.

Give people extra time before timing them out of a form

All users should be given the option to add additional time to continue filling out interactive forms before the system just logs them out or forces them to start over. While this is a requirement of federal accessibility law, this is common courtesy to all users as well.

Tabular data needs to be coded properly

If you display data in a table, you need to make sure that underneath the hood, the table headers use the proper code so that table cells under them are properly associated. This is, in my opinion, the toughest thing to comply with in [Section 508](#).

Don't use CAPTCHAs

Want to annoy, irritate, infuriate, and generally be the catalyst for an unpleasant day for all your users? Use CAPTCHAs in your website—those challenge-response tests that determine whether or not the user is human by asking them to type a series of letters and numbers. One better option for spam prevention is known as the “honeypot” method, which uses hidden fields to detect spam submissions without inconveniencing human users.

Be sure that all materials you give to job candidates are also available online

In the interviewing process, companies often hand candidates printed packets of information. However, printed materials can be tough for people with visual disabilities to read. To ensure that all candidates have equal access to information, provide digital versions of the same materials, preferably in an HTML format.

The Takeaway

Don't think of accessibility as some troublesome, annoying box you need to check—think about it in terms of your opportunity to connect with the best talent. It's important. It means something.

If you are out there doing a job you don't really think makes a difference in the big scheme of things, but has within it the possibility of making your hiring process and online materials more accessible, you can indeed make a difference. Your job is important.

So go make a difference. Connect with the most talented job candidates. Make your eRecruiting systems and websites accessible.