

How to Talk to eRecruiting Technology Providers About Accessibility

An Employer Tip Sheet



When buying a piece of eRecruiting technology—such as a talent management tool, online job application software, or digital interviewing product—employers and human resources professionals can often feel like they're at the mercy of the vendors who are selling or building the technology.

This can be especially true in the area of accessibility, whether you're buying commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products or having a technology solution custom built. However, requesting an accessible product and getting one are two very different things, and achieving the latter requires effective communication with your technology vendors. This tip sheet explores techniques for communicating about accessibility—clearly, directly, and throughout the technology development lifecycle.

Do Your Homework

Experience with accessibility varies widely, so you might find that a given technology provider knows a lot about accessibility—or just a little. It's not always a bad thing if you know less than your vendor since they can often teach you a great deal and enhance your own efforts around accessibility. On the other hand, some inexperienced vendors may simply be telling you what you want to hear, pretending to understand accessibility in order to secure new business. So if possible, try to find out about the vendors you're interested in through some indirect research. You can examine their corporate website, look through their accessibility documentation, and check out the tools they've built for other customers.

Some easy ways to do this include:

- Ask to see the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG](#)) conformance statements for their corporate website, relevant products, and other websites they've developed. If they don't have any, that's a warning sign.
- Check their website or web product yourself to see how well they've addressed a few aspects of web accessibility using the Web Accessibility Initiative's [Easy Checks - A First Review of Web Accessibility](#). No accessibility experience is needed to use the tool, and while it covers only some WCAG criteria, it can provide you with a sense of how well a vendor considered accessibility in developing their website.

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Be Clear

It's certainly possible to tell your vendor that you insist on comprehensive accessibility and leave it at that. But things may go better in the long run if you can express your requirements in some detail. To assist you in getting specific, [BuyAccessible.gov's QuickTips tool](#) is a useful resource that connects accessibility requirements with product categories. Although designed to assist federal government agencies who must comply with the [Section 508](#) standards, BuyAccessible can also give private sector entities ideas on how to more clearly word requirements documentation. Many public employers, like state and local governments, and many private employers, rely

on Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 guidelines as a standard when buying eRecruiting technology from vendors. The National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAAE) also provides [sample procurement language](#) that can be added to enhance accessibility of purchased or licensed products. These samples represent (1) requests for proposals, (2) purchasing contracts of specific products, and (3) purchasing procedures used for general purchasing.

Know Whom You're Talking To

Are you communicating with the company that produces the technology product—in other words, the original equipment manufacturer (OEM)? Or are you doing business with a company further along the value chain, such as a value-added re-seller (VAR) or system integrator? These companies take an original product and modify it or package it with others so that it fits your environment. They can sometimes have less accessibility expertise, relying on the product manufacturer's support. If this is your situation, you should do everything possible to strengthen the relationship between your vendor and the OEM, while seeking out direct information yourself.

Request a VPAT

In terms of accessibility matters, one of the most common forms of information exchange between vendors and their customers is the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT). It is basically a table of accessibility provisions applicable to federal agencies subject to Section 508, with spaces for the vendor to indicate how well the product complies, along with notes and comments. The VPAT can also form the basis for a rich conversation between private employers and vendors about their accessibility capabilities. So be sure to ask your vendor if they have a VPAT for the eRecruiting product you are purchasing.

Dig Deeper

While valuable, a VPAT is not always sufficient enough to inform your eRecruiting purchasing decision. Thankfully, most vendors capable of completing a VPAT probably have other accessibility information they would be willing to share with you in the context of an actual procurement. These might include:

- **Testing results, especially AT compatibility testing.** Be ready to compare the vendor's findings with the AT in use in your workplace since it won't always be the same.
- **Support information.** Ask the vendor how other customers are offering help desk and related support to their users with disabilities. This is especially important if your own IT department will be providing such internal support.
- **IT management details.** Some products require certain administrative settings or add-ons in order for the accessibility features to be activated. These are not always fully documented in an administrative manual, so be sure to ask the technology provider about these possibilities.
- **Product plans.** If applicable, make a point of asking what accessibility improvements will be found in the next release of a product (Note: This typically applies to software products). This can be the subject of a purchasing negotiation—a schedule of committed accessibility improvements known as a remediation plan.

Build Relationships

In the end, your goal is to develop a collaborative relationship with the technology providers in your circle. And no matter what the outcome of your conversations, your adventures in vendor communication can breed fruitful results. Experienced technology providers have a lot to teach you, while informed, smart questions can help vendors identify ways to make their products better and more accessible. Keep in mind that every time OEM accessibility experts hear from customers like you, they gain more intelligence about market needs, and stories to tell management about the impact of their accessibility work.

Learn More:

- PEAT's Accessible Technology Action Steps: A Guide for Employers - [Action Step 4: Buy & Implement](#)
- Web Accessibility Initiative's [Easy Checks - A First Review of Web Accessibility](#)
- [BuyAccessible.gov's QuickTips tool](#)
- The National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAE)'s [Sample Procurement Language](#)