



Maximize Product ROI By Prioritizing Accessibility

Without fully understanding what digital accessibility is, why it's critical, and its direct correlation to a product's ROI, user experience and revenue are at risk.

Maximize Product ROI with Accessibility

Any seasoned product leader knows that user experience and usability are essential to a product's success. Any successful product leader should also understand that those critical success factors are not possible without prioritizing digital accessibility.

● Digital accessibility isn't a nice-to-have.

The legal risks are real. The huge market of people with disabilities and their communities can't be ignored.

You oversee the entire life cycle of a product, from its inception to its deployment and well beyond. And if you're not incorporating accessibility in each step, you're capping ROI and putting your product at legal risk.

To understand how to implement effective digital accessibility practices and maximize product ROI, product owners first need to learn what digital accessibility encompasses and why it's a critical piece of the product puzzle.

● What is digital accessibility, and why is it vital for a successful product?

Anywhere [between 15 and 25% of the U.S. population live with some form of disability](#). Globally, that number reaches about one billion people or 15% of the world's population.

In the U.S., there are 7.2 million visually impaired adults according to the National Federation of the Blind. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, globally, blindness and low vision impacts over 282 million people and is expected to increase by 72% over the next 11 years.

● When you commit to web accessibility, you ensure that your product (whether it's a website, web application, mobile app, or self-service device) is operable by people with disabilities.



● Accessibility is a legal requirement in many regions around the world.

Countries in every continent have legislation that requires [information and communication technology \(ICT\) to be accessible](#).

In 1990, the United States Congress passed the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), which mandates that public and private spaces must be made accessible to individuals with sensory, cognitive, and physical impairments or limitations. Digital accessibility is an extension of ADA principles to the use of assistive or adaptive technology. For example, closed captioning of video helps deaf and hard-of-hearing people read what is being said and [screen readers turn text to speech](#) to assist blind or partially sighted people.

U.S. regulations include [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), which prevents discrimination by any entity receiving federal funds. Most states have similar provisions for entities receiving state funds and have non-discrimination laws like the ADA.

In the European Union (EU), providers of products and services must comply with the [European Accessibility Act \(EAA\)](#) by June 2025, encompassing many types of digital technology. Additionally, the [Accessible Canada Act \(ACA\)](#) seeks to create a barrier-free Canada by 2040 – including ICT accessibility – with guidelines and legislation already in place.

● Guidelines for Creating Digitally Accessible Products

The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) launched in 1999. WCAG is a set of recommendations for making web content more accessible to people with disabilities and includes a guide on how to make sure digital products are compliant with WCAG standards.

A few common examples of common accessibility issues include:

- **Image alt text:** Screen readers and other assistive technologies read the text on a screen but cannot read images. Images, then, need a complete text alternative, such as a description of the picture or reading text embedded in the picture.
- **Keyboard accessibility:** A disabled person may not be able to navigate with a mouse, and instead needs a keyboard to move between sections to menus, across form fields, and links to other content areas in a consistent presentation.
- **Heading structure:** Page headings aren't just design elements: they're also crucial for navigation and content organization to present content as it's intended to be read and understood.
- **Properly formatted hyperlinks:** Users that require reading assistance devices commonly scan for identifiable hyperlinks, which don't always show up.

The ROI of Embracing Accessibility

● The Missed Market Cost

The American Institute for Research (AIR) reports that people with disabilities have a purchasing power of \$490 billion. This market controls over \$13 trillion in disposable income globally, according to the Return on Disability Organization. Add in friends and family; that market reaches 3.3 billion potential consumers who act on their emotional connection to people with disabilities. Together, disability touches 73% of consumers globally.

When asked, people with disabilities reported that between 75% –80% of their experiences with customer service are failures. If these customers cannot use your website, app, or self-service kiosk because of accessibility barriers, they will be lost to a competitor that has made their accommodations accessible. And it's safe to assume their friends, family, and community will follow suit.

Even more, people with disabilities have the potential to become highly loyal, according to Matt Ater, Vice President of Vispero.

As a person with a disability myself, being blind, I'll tell you that if people with disabilities feel comfortable engaging with a business, they're more likely to come back and be loyal," Ater says. "They often have so much trouble with the vast majority of [digital assets] that once they find one that actually accommodates their needs, they stick with it."

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● The Legal Cost

Under Title III of the ADA, public accommodations must be accessible to people with disabilities. Website and app accessibility is essential, and both receive significant attention in the legal space.

The ADA Title III Team at law firm Seyfarth Shaw reports a [12% increase in website accessibility lawsuits in 2022](#) over the year prior. Lawsuits have steadily increased since 2017, with 813 ADA website accessibility lawsuits. In 2022, 3,255 suits were filed in Federal Court and are likely to continue increasing in 2023.

● The Cost Benefit of Shifting Left

Addressing the necessary cost and work to create a fully accessible product at the earliest stages of development is the most effective – and cost-efficient – approach. You may be "doing accessibility" or addressing accessibility issues as they come up, but without executive leadership support, necessary resources, and a holistic strategy that's supported from the top down, your product costs and sprint timelines are going to stack up. And quickly.

No single person can ensure a product is accessible on their own. Adopting a product-led accessibility practice involves making decisions at every step of a product's development, from the early design stages through to development and content management.

- **A proactive approach to fully and carefully integrating accessibility testing in any product's lifecycle could avoid innumerable costs over time.**

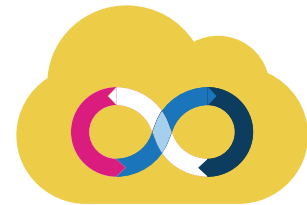
Accessibility should be built into your team's process and tested at standardized checkpoints. From a project's kick-off, requirements, mock-ups, design, development, QA, and testing – accessibility issues need to be identified and corrected along the way.

In its simplest terms, addressing accessibility barriers is just like addressing bugs. Product leaders know that finding and avoiding bugs is essential. And for any bug that's found, the cheapest option is to identify and address it as early as possible.

The [Systems Sciences Institute at IBM](#) has reported that the cost to fix an error found after product release was four to five times as much as one uncovered during design, and up to 100 times more than one identified in the maintenance phase.

Similarly, the cost of fixing an accessibility barrier goes up based on how far down the SDLC (Software Development Life Cycle) the barrier is found. When a barrier is found in production, the code needs to go back to the beginning of the SDLC so the agile development cycle can restart.

The software development approach often needs to change to accommodate a code fix, which can in turn bump back other code changes. So not only is the bug going to cost more to fix as it moves through a second round of the SDLC, but a different code change could be delayed, which adds cost as well.



To illustrate, if a bug is found in the requirements-gathering phase, the cost could be \$100. If the product owner doesn't find that bug until the QA testing phase, then the cost could be \$1,500. If it's not found until production, the cost could be \$10,000.

And if the bug is never found, it could be secretly costing the company money, and no one could be the wiser.

- **Add on potential legal fees and customer loss for not fully embracing digital accessibility as a product leader, and the case for ROI is clear.**

● **You're the glue that holds a product together and gets it across the success line.**

- Ask yourself: What are the procedures currently in place for QA processes?
- Who's responsible for what across the development lifecycle?
- Who needs to understand accessibility so you can avoid the potential profit loss outlined above?
- What do they specifically need to understand for their role so your digital accessibility ROI skyrockets?

● **Consider these steps to work toward a holistic accessibility approach for your product and organization:**

1. Establishing an organizational commitment to accessibility that includes identifying key stakeholders and their responsibility for accessibility.
2. Understanding the current state in terms of both the accessibility of existing products and services and existing processes and standards.
3. Establishing an organizational accessibility strategy that includes the definition of a benchmark that all digital products and services must meet.
4. Ensuring that stakeholder groups have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet their responsibilities towards accessibility, including people responsible for the project, product and service management, procurement, content authoring, development, quality assurance, and user research.
5. Involving people with disabilities early and throughout the process of understanding a problem space and designing technology to address that problem and meet business and user goals.

● **In taking an approach like the above, short-term, ad-hoc, and ultimately costly practices that lead to accessibility barriers are reduced.**

As a product manager, you're a master at spinning multiple plates simultaneously. However, developing usable and accessible products doesn't happen in a sprint. You don't have to put everything in place all at once: instead, start with designing an accessibility strategy that works for your product and organization. Try assessing the current landscape with an [accessibility audit](#) to have a clear understanding of the work that is ahead.



If it's not usable, it's not accessible.

TPGi, a Vispero company, provides digital accessibility software and services to help businesses reduce risk, grow revenue, and improve user experience. With over 20 years of experience and employees that actively influence accessibility standards on the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), TPGi offers the most robust knowledge base and accessibility expertise in the industry. Our unrivaled holistic and comprehensive approach delivers the best outcomes for your digital products, with access to the industry's most robust knowledge base and resources.

Achieve accessibility compliance and create the best user experience with TPGi, no matter where you are in your accessibility journey.

For more information, visit www.tpgi.com.