

Why Is Video Accessibility Important?

Video content is an integral part of the modern online experience. Whether you are reading the news, searching for reviews of a product, or using a library database, chances are you will encounter video content. Even without considering the ever-increasing number of online services devoted to streaming video, the simple fact of the matter is that video is everywhere online. Streaming seasons of television shows, the latest Hollywood movies, product reviews, cute cat videos, and everything in between are found on the internet. In fact, research has shown that over 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube alone every minute in May 2019,¹ and this number has likely only increased as more activities moved online in the spring of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's easy to understand why video content is proliferating so quickly. It can be a dynamic way to reach a wide range of audiences. In some cases, it can also be the fastest way to convey complex information. Most of all, internet users are less likely to scan past an auto-playing video without absorbing some of the content than they are to skip over a line of text. In addition, the tools for creating video are continually growing less expensive and more user-friendly. That means that more people can share their message via video than ever before.

As a result, many content producers, from companies selling products to news organizations to individual creators, have put an increasing emphasis on video production and dissemination. The data suggests that this trend will continue. By 2018, 85 percent of internet users in the United States watched online video, including 50 percent who watched online videos daily, and by 2020, the total number of digital video viewers in the United States was 232 million.² The data suggests that this focus on video is only going to continue to increase. Cisco Systems, Inc., a major international telecommunications and network solutions corporation, predicts that by 2022,

video will make up 82 percent of all internet traffic.³ It's clear that video content will not disappear from the internet anytime soon.

But Who Can Use It?

With video making up such an important segment of internet usage, the question of whether this content is accessible gains urgency, particularly given how many people are impacted. Worldwide, 15 percent of the population has a disability.⁴ In the United States, that number is even higher, at 26 percent of the total national population.⁵ For some of these individuals, video may be more accessible than other methods of conveying information. For example, users with disabilities that impact reading may prefer watching a video to reading a text on the same subject.

However, for many users, video content presents significant accessibility barriers if it is not formatted properly and designed to include features such as captions, audio descriptions, and transcripts. People with different types of disabilities experience barriers to the use of videos when these elements are omitted, including those who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, those who have limited vision, and those with sound-processing or cognition disabilities. It is estimated that in the United States, 5.9 percent of the population is D/deaf or hard of hearing and 4.6 percent of the population is blind or has serious vision issues that aren't fully correctable with surgery or corrective lens, which gives some sense of the size of the overall population that relies on accessible video content.⁶ Beyond these numbers, users who do not identify as disabled can also benefit from these features, including aging users who may have experienced changes to their vision or hearing and those for whom English is not their primary language.

Unfortunately, much online web content remains inaccessible. As a whole, web accessibility remains

uneven. A recent study of one million home pages of top websites found that 98.1 percent of them had accessibility issues that could be detected through automated testing.⁷ Video content is also frequently inaccessible. Some video platforms still do not offer integrated captioning functionality, which makes it difficult to add captions and impossible to offer closed captions. Even fewer platforms offer support for separate audio tracks featuring audio descriptions. This fact means that the only way to offer audio descriptions in many platforms is to integrate them in the main audio track used by all viewers. While there are often options for offering transcripts for videos, many of those that are offered online are formatted in ways that limit their accessibility, especially for those who use assistive devices. However, recently there has been a move toward greater awareness about these issues, which means that the tools for improving video accessibility are growing more robust all the time. Creators have an ever-expanding number of options for offering more inclusive access to their content.

Video in Libraries

Just as video content is important on the internet as a whole, it is a central element of many libraries' content, and accordingly, it is important that libraries consider questions related to video accessibility. Libraries offer video in many different ways, with varying levels of control over that content. This fact makes it vital that libraries understand how best to ensure that their video content is usable and accessible by all of their patrons and does not unintentionally exclude some from the information shared in this medium.

Much of the video content offered to patrons by libraries is delivered via vendor products to which the library subscribes. For this content, the library may not have the power to make the video accessible within the database, but it should still consider accessibility as a factor in selecting products and have a plan in place for improving access. In addition, libraries have a strong role in advocating with vendors for

better quality content and negotiating contracts that require that videos meet their standards.

Libraries have the most control over video content when the content is owned, created, or hosted by the library. Such content can encompass everything from social media posts to video tutorials for archival content. Though the precise features needed to ensure that this content is accessible may vary based on the specifics of each video, libraries that are stewarding this type of video content must have workflows in place to address its accessibility. This issue of *Library Technology Reports* will explain the elements of video accessibility and offer advice for those interested in addressing these topics at their libraries.

Notes

1. J. Clement, "Hours of Video Uploaded to YouTube Every Minute 2007–2019," Statista, August 25, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259477/hours-of-video-uploaded-to-youtube-every-minute/#> (requires subscription).
2. J. Clement, "Online Video Usage in the United States—Statistics & Facts," Statista, September 30, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/topics/1137/online-video> (requires subscription).
3. Thomas Barnett, Jr., Shruti Jain, Usha Andra, and Taru Khurana, "Cisco Visual Networking Index (VNI) Complete Forecast Update, 2017–2022," APJC Cisco Knowledge Network (CKN) presentation, December 2018, https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/m/en_us/network-intelligence/service-provider/digital-transformation/knowledge-network-webinars/pdfs/1213-business-services-ckn.pdf.
4. The World Bank, "Disability Inclusion," May 15, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2019, September 9). "Disability Impacts All of Us" (infographic), September 9, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Disability Impacts All of Us."
7. "The WebAIM Million," WebAIM, last updated March 30, 2020, <https://webaim.org/projects/million>.