Crawford Technologies
AccessibilityNow®

CRAWFORD TECHNOLOGIES

A Madison Advisors White Paper
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

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INTRODUCTION

Document accessibility is arguably considered one of the most important technology trends that has emerged over past few years—and there is a reason. Disability is not a minority issue, as demonstrated by the following statistics: Disabled people make up 10% of the population, around 777 million people.[1] According to the American Foundation for the Blind, 3.5% of the population live with vision impairment. That amounts to 253 million people: 36 million are blind and 217 million have moderate to severe vision loss.

Today, a responsible business strategy involves more than adopting a few accessible practices. Businesses are recognizing that implementing a complete platform for the creation and management of accessible documents is not only beneficial for the company's reputation, but it can also mean positive results for the bottom line. For organizations seeking to attract this demographic, the value of accessibility is considerable as those with disabilities choose to do business with a company based on whether they can access their products or services. C-level leaders responsible for increased market share and gaining e-commerce traffic have accelerated their focus on digital accessibility initiatives significantly over the last 18 months. However, it goes deeper than just the prospective opportunity of greater market share.

The task of making a document accessible can be overwhelming as each document presents its own individual challenges. However, there are software solutions and a wide range of tailored services available that meet the document accessibility needs of all organizations, large and small. This white paper, commissioned by Crawford Technologies, discusses best practices for implementing an accessibility initiative program that is good for users, ensures compliance and, ultimately, good for business.

DOCUMENT ACCESSIBILITY: FOLLOW THE LEGISLATION

Both the United States and Canada have passed legislation requiring that documents be made accessible when needed to those with vision loss or cognitive disabilities; and these laws also apply to websites. Specifically, these laws are, in the U.S., the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)[2] and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,[3] Sections 504 and 508;[4] and in Canada, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).[5] Additionally, recognizing all of the challenges for blind, partially sighted and cognitively disabled individuals, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) introduced Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to make websites accessible, including all the documents that are available through the website, in 2008 with version 2.2 slated to be released in 2021.[6]

The trend of rising numbers of federal lawsuits stemming from alleged violations of the ADA continues into 2021, serving as a cautionary indicator for companies of all sizes. In January 2021 alone there was a significant increase in accessibility non-compliance lawsuits filed that related to websites and mobile sites and apps, with just under 50% of them filed as Class Actions.[7] This is significant because the cost and effort associated with defending a class action claim are substantial and, because of this, many companies are even more inclined to settle. The top targets for this litigation occurred in retail and e-commerce, consumer services, food, beverage and hospitality and, more recently, elections. Legal settlements that substantiate the importance for businesses to proactively address accessibility include:

- Verizon - $20 million[8]
- Wells Fargo - $16 million[9]
- Target - $6 million[10]

In the United States alone there has been an acceleration in the revisions and additions to the current regulatory guidelines. Organizations are learning to develop content proactively to address these regulations, but the issue with converting existing content remains a challenging balance between compliance and expense.

To meet compliance, accommodation documents and electronic accessible documents need to be offered. However, different classes of documents require different strategies, tools and processes to produce accessible formats that are compliant and usable.

ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

While making documents accessible is clearly the right thing to do, a case can also be made that incorporating accessibility into your communication strategy will be good for your business as well, given the total after-tax disposable income for working-age people with disabilities is about $490 billion.[11] The monetary size of this opportunity, coupled with the improvements in tools and technologies available to address accessibility, confirms that a return on investment (ROI) can be clearly established. According to research, more than 70% of websites have critical accessibility blockers and inaccessible e-commerce retailers are losing out on $6.98 billion annually.[12]

To support this direction, it is worth taking the time to become aware of the vast array of tools and technologies available today with an understanding of what capabilities need to be inherent in these technologies to make the right decision on how to proceed. Not only will the pages on your website need to be accessible, but every document you house on the site will need to be as well.

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An accessible online document has an established reading order and visual elements that are tagged, with alternate text descriptions when necessary. For example, any visual element such as a photo, chart or graph that is necessary for the understanding of the document must be tagged with alternate text. The established reading order and alternate text descriptions are needed for assistive technology to communicate the information comprehensively and accurately to the reader.[13]

Because these documents can be both transactional and marketing in nature, industries like insurance, financial services or healthcare will have messaging that is both generic and containing customer-specific personally identifiable information (PII) or personal health information (PHI). Additionally, the tables, graphs, PII and/or PHI are typically more complex than other document types, which means producing accessible documents and getting them to the recipient can be significantly slower than static content documents if the right tools are not in place.

Given that many of the individual documents are created on a recurring basis—monthly, quarterly or annually—the solutions you choose need to allow individuals who use a screen reader to maneuver through documents, utilize document properties for contact information and document styles to jump from one part of a document to another, to hear descriptions of picture and image tags to help understand the images on the pages, and to have equal access to information that most of us take for granted. Essentially, you need to reference usability as a benchmark.

With this complexity in mind, as well as the lag time involved in creating accessible documents, it is easy to conclude that finding a way to automate the process of creating accessible documents is the preferred solution to convert documents to accessible formats, comply with legislation and deliver a superior customer experience that is inclusive to all customers.

In the customer communications management (CCM) space, Madison Advisors has identified Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow platform as a leader in this emerging area. Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, the company's comprehensive AccessibilityNow platform is flexible and supports both the unique processing requirements of high-volume transactional documents and static documents of all types.

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Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow platform offers several unique advantages in comparison to other offerings in the accessibility marketplace. In general, AccessibilityNow makes all the processes required for complete remediation and compliance much easier and lends itself to significant improvements in a company's ability to automate these processes.

Crawford Technologies ensures a company's compliance with AccessibilityNow by providing an automated solution for identifying every PDF on a website, determining if each of these is accessible or not and providing the necessary information required to remediate.

The first step toward online accessibility compliance is to determine the immediate state of compliance and to understand the specifics of the challenges involved to bring an organization's documents into compliance. AccessibilityNow SiteScan module provides an automated process that scans websites through a web crawler to search for all PDF documents. SiteScan then generates an output file of detailed reports that include findings like the URL location and file names of documents.

Once this is completed, the AccessibilityNow Validator module can be utilized to automatically check for accessibility. This tool examines PDFs and checks for the level of accessibility. It then generates a report with the details of validation and multiple levels of compliance.

This includes:

- WCAG 2.0, 2.1

- PDF/UA

- File size, total pages

- Untagged content

- Artifacts

Validator integrates with AccessibilityNow Dashboard (reviewed later in this paper) for complete workflow tracking and reporting. Validator can also integrate with other existing accessibility workflow solutions, which protects existing organizational investments in technology.

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One of the most daunting tasks for organizations committed to providing accessible materials is the actual remediation of their documents once they are identified. Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow Remediate module, a standalone desktop PDF remediation tool, eliminates many challenges in manual remediation and provides clients with a GUI-driven tagging tool, which is completely independent from Adobe Acrobat and is designed to auto-sense tags on PDFs and provide customizable settings to match document structure.

As a remediation tool, AccessibilityNow Remediate is quick and easy to implement utilizing an easy Windows GUI-based tool and meets WCAG 2.1 and PDF/UA compliance standards. As a stand-alone tool, it lends itself to flexible customization and PDF accessibility compliance, as well as being cost effective.

PRODUCT ARCHITECTURE

Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow platform delivers a comprehensive suite of tools designed to address accessibility compliance while improving the quality of customer communications, improving revenues and reducing operational costs within a variety of organizational environments.

The underlying architecture of all Crawford Technologies' accessibility solutions and services is called MasterONE Total Document Accessibility Architecture. MasterONE enables a single setup that supports all accessible formats, including braille, large print, audio, and e-text, as well as electronic formats. Single set up allows for alternate formats to be created without additional cost while giving the authoring organization the ability to provide this critical accommodation, thereby meeting global accessibility regulatory requirements. Also, this capability significantly reduces the time and expense of producing multiple accessible formats, ultimately moving customers to where accessibility is simply a part of the workflow process.

The AccessibilityNow platform provides total document accessibility solutions for both transactional and static documents. Utilizing template and rules-based tagging, AccessibilityNow Transactional can remediate documents at archive ingestion or remediate archived documents on the fly. Processing hundreds of thousands of documents per second, AccessibilityNow Transactional provides automated conversion with client choices of on-premises, SaaS cloud based or self-service solutions. Clients are further supported by Crawford Technologies through its Outsourced Accessibility Services and its Document Validation software.

AccessibilityNow Publisher module is an on-premises server-based solution for static documents. This tool can be automated like a drop box to automate converting unstructured documents to accessible PDF (WCAG and PDF/UA) or accessible HTML5 in real time, allowing organizations to reduce turnaround from days to minutes and cuts costs in half for ad hoc remediation.

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AccessibilityNow Services module addresses client requirements for organizations that are looking for a partner to assist with their internal remediation issues. Crawford Technologies delivers services that cover document remediation (including accessible PDF and HTML5, braille, large print, eText and audio), fulfillment and mailing services, assessment, consulting services, training, and validation.

Tying the entire solution together is the AccessibilityNow Dashboard. AccessibilityNow Dashboard allows organizations to track and report on the verification of accessible documents and provides the flexibility of integrating within client-specific environments, which allows customers to manage their workflows from a single dashboard. Complete with detailed document accessibility reports, which include level of compliance, number of tagged elements, WCAG and PDF/UA pass-fail items and custom configured reports, AccessibilityNow Dashboard delivers an industry-leading compliance tool that also can be utilized as a proof source in the event of a legal challenge.
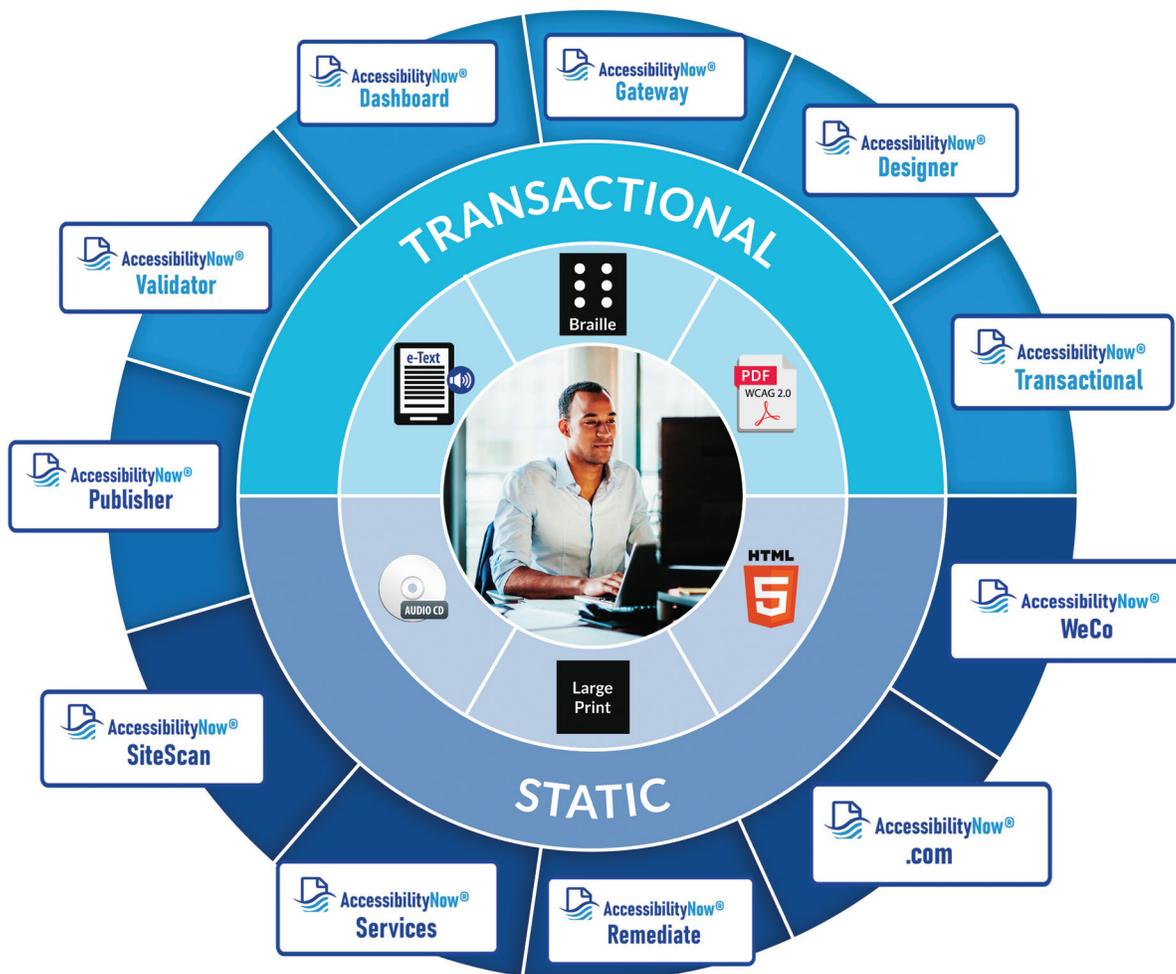
FUNCTIONAL OVERVIEW

Figure 1 – AccessibilityNow Wheel

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The AccessibilityNow platform is composed of 11 modules that make up Crawford Technologies' solution offering. These include:

- **AccessibilityNow Transactional®** – designed to address automatic tagging of high-volume transactional documents
- **AccessibilityNow Publisher®** – offering automatic tagging of all types of static documents
- **AccessibillityNow.com** – fast, cost-effective automated self-service document remediation
- **AccessibilityNow Designer** – used to con igure transactional tagging rules and templates
- **AccessibilityNow Gateway** – connectors for ECM and content services platforms
- **AccessibilityNow Validator** – validates that documents are compliant
- **AccessibilityNow SiteScan** – scope website PDF accessibility state
- **AccessibilityNow Services** – document remediation and quality assurance services
- **AccessibilityNow Dashboard** – dashboard for managing projects, automated tracking, reporting and service level agreements
- **AccessibilityNow WeCo** – creating accessible Word documents and the corresponding accessible PDF iles
- **AccessibilityNow Remediate** – ad hoc tagging tool that runs in a Windows desktop environment

KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

END-TO-END DOCUMENT ACCESSIBILITY CAPABILITIES

As the requirement for accessibility compliance goes mainstream, the most active markets will include insurance, government, education, healthcare, and financial services/banking. Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow platform offers unique end-to-end document accessibility capabilities in each of these vertical markets.

Since accessibility compliance requirements touch all aspects of an organization's communications and documentation, it is common to find that both static and transactional documents must be remediated across the enterprise. With the AccessibilityNow platform, Crawford Technologies' customers enjoy one source for automated software solutions. AccessibilityNow Transactional is designed to automate remediation of transactional documents and AccessibilityNow Publisher streamlines the process of remediation of static documentation.

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While automation is a significant advantage of the Crawford Technologies offering, people who are intimately involved with accessibility and compliance understand that in most cases there is a requirement for manual remediation to supplement the development of automated workflows. AccessibilityNow offers a one-stop solution for both manual and automated remediation, as well as expert consulting, services and training, which not only address the remediation requirement in the current state, but also confirm compliance on a go-forward basis. This ensures an organization's peace of mind that their information is accessible to this important market and that they are protected from potential expensive litigation.

AccessibilityNow supports all the accessible alternate formats including:

- Accessible PDF and HTML5
- Large print
- Braille
- Audio
- eText
- DAISY

There is also an e-commerce site for on demand accessible documents (AccessibilityNow.com).

SPECIALIZED TRAINING CURRICULUM

It is worth noting that Crawford Technologies recognizes the importance of client relationships and the importance of a partnership with their customers that not only provides significant value, but also educates their customers on the critical elements of the accessibility discipline.

The CrawfordTech Accessibility Academy provides customers with a specialized training curriculum staffed by certified instructors to supplement internal training departments and eliminate the need for additional internal specialty training specific to accessibility compliance, which can be very expensive. Another unique advantage to the CrawfordTech Accessibility Academy is that customers can attend training via web-based, instructor-led courses and can purchase a 12-month pass, which allows end users to train on their own timetables. The training passport reduces training budgets and simplifies and reduces administrative tasks by approximately 90%.

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CrawfordTech Accessibility Academy offers:

Training services

- Document accessibility

- Digital experiences and application development

- Certified instructors

- Live, interactive courses

- 100% focused on training

24 Courses

- Public, small class sizes

- Beginner to advance courses

- Tailored private courses

- French and English instruction

- Post-training support

- Hands-on training, not seminars

- WCAG, PDF/UA, HTML5, accessible web content and more

- Ties in nicely to Crawford Technologies' AccessibilityNow solutions

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For many of us, navigating through websites, reading attachments to emails, completing applications, and requesting online information is a relatively easy task, but for the 3 out of every 100 individuals who are blind or partially sighted[14] and use a screen reader, require alternate formats, or those who are cognitively impaired, tasks like these can be frustrating. This demographic makes up an ever-growing segment of the population, representing a market that can no longer be ignored by businesses worldwide. Organizations that have a strategic go-forward vision are actively looking to capitalize on this meaningful segment of this new business opportunity/environment. Providing high levels of automation and integration into any environment, the Crawford Technologies AccessibilityNow platform includes software solutions and a wide range of tailored services to meet the document accessibility needs of all organizations, large and small, private sector, and governments of all levels. Coupled with the concerns surrounding exposure to potential litigation, this presents a compelling business case for organizations seeking to grow revenues, grow profits, reduce risk and reduce organizational costs.

This would also appear to validate the industry rumblings that 2021 is the year that accessibility goes mainstream. Even more compelling in this age of social justice is that organizations align their core business values with the delivery of their products and services. This provides tangible returns, including higher customer and employee retention rates and increased productivity and puts diversity into perspective.

From strategies to handle high-volume transactional output and remediation of archived documents and consulting services for internal and customer-facing communications to providing a one-stop service bureau for manual and automated remediation to all physical and electronic formats, Crawford Technologies AccessibilityNow platform should be strongly considered by all organizations seeking to gain compliance, increase revenue/profit performance and deliver on their commitment to their core business values.

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1. World Health Organization
2. https://www.ada.gov/
3. https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/rehabilitation-act-1973
4. https://www.hhs.gov/web/section-508/what-is-section-504/index.html
5. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11
6. https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/
7. https://www.essentialaccessibility.com/blog/january-2021-ada-website-lawsuit-data-and-trends
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9. https://www.ada.gov/wells_fargo/
10. https://www.compuerworld.com/article/2532690/target-agrees-to--6m-settlement-of-accessibility-lawsuit.html
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12. https://www.boia.org/blog/brands-are-losing-billions-by-not-being-digitally-accessible
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14. https://nfb.org/resources/blindness-statistics

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ABOUT MADISON ADVISORS

Madison Advisors specializes in offering Fortune 1000 companies context-specific guidance for a range of content delivery strategies, particularly those addressing enterprise output technologies and print and electronic customer communications. Madison Advisors' analysts and consulting professionals are dedicated to technology and market research that is delivered through short-term project engagements, as well as articles, publications and presentations. In addition, the company's hands-on experience, developed through assisting its clients with deploying selected solutions, adds a practical dimension to their approach, which is not typically found at consulting generalists or other analyst firms.

For more information about Madison Advisors, visit our web site: www.Madison-Advisors.com

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Under Kemal Carr's direction, Madison Advisors has established a market niche as an independent analyst & market research firm that addresses the needs of the electronic and print customer communications Management (CCM) marketplace. The firm provides retainer and project-based strategy services designed to assist clients with technology selection and alignment and business process optimization decisions.

Kemal is regularly sought out by some of the leading output technology publications to write about or comment on the industry's key issues and topics, including articles on the impact of eDelivery and Multi-channel delivery, advancement in communication technologies, and electronic document presentment. He is also asked to speak at trade events, including key sessions at Xplor's Global conference, DOCUMENT Strategy Forum, Inkjet Summit, and numerous vendor trade events.

In 2010 Carr received the Xplorer of the Year award from Xplor International at its Global Conference. The award was in recognition of Carr's "volunteer service to the Association, dedication to the Xplor mission and promotion of the interests of the electronic document systems industry at large."

Kemal earned a B.B.A. in management information systems from the University of Wisconsin and is a M.B.A. candidate in management at Texas Christian University.

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