



State of the eNation Reports July 2006 – Online Supermarkets (Revisited 2 Years On)

State of the eNation Reports – a summary

The AbilityNet State of the eNation Reports are a quarterly review of a number of websites in a particular sector. This report marks the two year anniversary since the first report was published in June 2004.

That first report concerned the websites of the top five UK supermarkets - Tesco, Sainsburys, Morrisons, Asda and Somerfield. Now two years on we revisit these same sites to see if there has been any improvement in the level of access for the many millions of potential visitors who have a disability, dyslexia, literacy difficulty, or who simply find it a little difficult using a mouse.

Web Accessibility – why it's important

Today many services are only available, or offered at a discounted rate, on the Internet. Other sites provide vital information. If a website doesn't meet a base level of accessibility then it will be impossible for a large number of disabled visitors to use it. Many others with some sort of limiting condition will also have great difficulty.

It is illegal to bar disabled visitors from on-line services and information offered to the general public. No organisation would purposefully do this but many are either not aware of the problem, or don't know what to do to address it. In the UK there are estimated to be 1.6 million registered blind people, 1.5 million with cognitive difficulties, a further 3.4 million people who are otherwise IT disabled and 6 million that have dyslexia. The total spending power of this group is now estimated at £120 billion a year.

A Commitment to Accessibility

All the parties reviewed were contacted two months before publication of this report and asked to make a public commitment to accessibility. To date the following have done this (please see Appendix C for the text of these statements):

- ASDA
- Morrisons
- Sainsburys
- Tesco

Online Supermarkets – in summary

A 5 star scale was used: * = Very inaccessible
 *** = Satisfies a base level of accessibility
 ***** = Very accessible.

5 sites were reviewed: 1 site had a **** ranking
 1 site had a *** ranking
 1 site had a ** ranking
 2 sites had a * ranking

For information on how we decide a site's ranking please see Appendix B.

Website Audit – The findings

All sites were audited in June 2006 for accessibility and usability using a wide range of in-depth manual checks. The testing process was assisted by the accessibility testing tool 'Bobby WorldWide', the AIS toolbar and colour checking tools.

Tesco - www.tesco.com

Ranking: ****

When last reviewed back in June 2004 Tesco had a main site that had several accessibility issues (awarded a single *), and an additional site designed with the help of the RNIB which was far more accessible and usable for disabled shoppers (awarded **).**

Tesco have recently relaunched their site – doing away with the twin site approach and providing the user the option of viewing the same content in two very different ways – a standard mode, which still has a number of the original issues with accessibility, and a more simple mode ('Access'), which is highly accessible and usable. Offering a single site with a number of different presentation options in this way is considered a best practice approach.

Note – those issues of accessibility with the standard mode outlined below should be taken in the context of there being a well signposted and highly accessible alternative available. Ideally, however, the standard mode would be equally as accessible for those not choosing the Access option.

Though pages in the standard mode are relatively busy, nevertheless page elements are sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. Pages in the Access mode are very clear and uncluttered.

Whilst the text used throughout both modes is a clear sans serif font and generally of a decent size (again assisting these groups), there are a few exceptions such as the links in the main menu at the top of the page which are a little small under normal viewing conditions. However, all text can be easily resized by the user - so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen.

Many visitors who are blind or who find mouse use painful will be using the keyboard. Tesco's site is able to be used fully by a keyboard user without difficulty. The only exceptions are the links in the main menu – their dark background may make spotting the highlight difficult while a keyboard user moves through the links.

Often a text label appears when you put the mouse over an image. Blind visitors rely on the presence of text labels as a spoken description of the image. Without them the image is meaningless. The vast majority of images throughout the site are well labelled. However, in the standard mode some pictures of text have been used instead of actual text which do not allow the visitor to change their colours, and become pixelated and difficult to read when magnification software is used.

A helpful online guide is available, but opens a pop-up window without informing the user, which may confuse blind visitors who are not aware they are no longer looking at the main site.

The shopping process in the standard mode is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript. However when JavaScript is disabled a message is displayed that offers the Access mode as an alternative, meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will still be able to use the site fully.

Sainsbury's - www.sainsburys.co.uk

Ranking: *

www.sainsburys.co.uk (including its online shopping site www.sainsburystoyou.com) has not improved significantly since the last review in June 2004 in which it was awarded a single *. It still does not meet a base level of accessibility for the following reasons:

Whilst the text on this site can now be easily resized (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen) there are

instances of very small text – e.g. the links across the bottom of the page. Significantly this includes ‘Accessibility’ which links to info on how the user can achieve this resizing of text – a catch 22 for visitors with a vision impairment.

The majority of images on this site have clear and descriptive labels – so vital for blind visitors and those with dyslexia using text to speech software. However some ads include pictures of words which cannot be resized, do not allow the visitor to change their colours, and become pixelated and difficult to read when magnification software is used.

Many visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia rely on certain colour combinations that make reading easier. Some colours on this website have been ‘hard-coded’ so that a visitor’s colour preferences are only partially reflected – causing text to disappear black on black when, for example, white text on a black background is chosen.

The site also conveys important content, such as special offers, in interactive presentations called ‘Flash Movies’. Despite recent improvements in the accessibility of such page items, the majority of visitors who cannot use a mouse, are vision-impaired, or use speech output or voice recognition software will not be able to access this content. Other visitors with a cognitive impairment will be distracted by their continual movement.

The main menu of Sainsbury’s site is unable to be used from the keyboard.

The online shop uses ‘frames’ (a way of sectioning the page) which are not handled well by some speaking and text-only browsers, as well as creating difficulties when the visitor wants to print or bookmark the page.

Moreover, the online shop is reliant on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to use the site.

Occasional pop-up windows are also an added complication for blind visitors who may not appreciate what has happened.

Morrisons - www.moreasons.co.uk

Ranking: ***

Morrisons has improved on its single * ranking of two years ago. We have given it * despite a few minor issues outlined below.**

Note - it is also worth bearing in mind that this site remains informational only and not an online store – the latter representing somewhat more of a challenge to make fully accessible:

The site is generally uncluttered with page elements sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. Text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups).

Whilst the text on this site can now be easily resized (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen) there are instances of quite small text – e.g. some links at the bottom of the page. Significantly, just as with Sainsbury's site above, these small links include 'Accessibility' which links to info on how the user can achieve this resizing of text – a catch 22 for visitors with a vision impairment.

The vast majority of images on this site are well labelled – so vital for blind visitors and those with dyslexia using text to speech software. However, some ads would benefit from a more extensive, meaningful, label. Moreover some pictures of words included in special offer ads cannot be resized, do not allow the visitor to change their colours, and become pixelated and difficult to read when magnification software is used.

The colours on this site generally afford good contrast, however there are instances of black on dark green text which will be difficult to read for many visitors with a vision impairment.

The active link is clearly visible as a keyboard user moves through the links on this site, with the exception of a number of links that have a black box around them which makes spotting the highlight difficult. The Flash football games were also able to be used from the keyboard.

The site does not rely on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons are still able to use the site effectively. (Not being an ecommerce site means that JavaScript is often less critical to functionality).

ASDA - www.asda.co.uk

Ranking: *

ASDA's site is still the least accessible of the online supermarket websites and remains at a single * - presenting a number of the most serious accessibility issues for the disabled shopper:

The pages on this site are quite busy with very little space between the links on the left – this may cause visitors who have difficulty controlling a mouse to click on the wrong link. The text on these links is also quite small.

In general the text on this site is a little small under normal viewing conditions, with instances of extremely small text. Moreover the text size has largely been "hard-coded" so that a user cannot easily make it larger – so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen. There are also instances of serif text which can make reading difficult for these groups, or for visitors with dyslexia.

Some colours on this website have been 'hard-coded' so that a visitor's colour preferences are only partially reflected - causing text to disappear black on black when, for example, white text on a black background is chosen. Moreover some of the text and background colour combinations do not afford sufficient contrast – causing difficulties for many visitors with a vision impairment or dyslexia.

Numerous images on this site are unlabelled or poorly labelled - making it very difficult for a blind person to understand what pictures represent. Furthermore there are numerous pictures of words, including important menu items, which cannot be resized, do not allow the visitor to change their colours, and become pixelated and difficult to read when magnification software is used.

Some areas of this site include slow moving images and blinking text which may nevertheless present difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment, cognitive or learning difficulty. Some of these ads are 'Flash Movies' which may be problematic for visitors who cannot use a mouse, are vision-impaired, or use speech output or voice recognition software.

Constant pop-up windows are also an added complication for blind visitors who may not appreciate they are not still looking at the main website, and are a source of frustration for all users.

Although this site includes many areas with different website addresses they are all branded to feel as if you are in one site. One area, Local Nostalgic Gifts, has a menu that is not able to be used from the keyboard.

ASDA's site uses 'frames' (a way of sectioning the page) which are not handled well by some speaking and text-only browsers, as well as creating difficulties when the visitor wants to print or bookmark the page.

The ability to add or remove items from your shopping basket relies on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons will not be able to shop online with ASDA.

Somerfield - www.somerfield.co.uk

Ranking: **

Somerfield's website has not improved in the two years since it was first reviewed and still does not meet a minimum accessibility standard.

Note – as per the Morrisons site this site is informational only and not an online store – the latter representing somewhat more of a challenge to make fully accessible.

Though pages are relatively busy, page elements are sufficiently separated by white space – facilitating those with a vision impairment and dyslexia. Text used is sans serif (again assisting these groups).

Whilst the text on this site can be easily resized (so vital for many visitors who have a vision impairment or who are viewing the site on a small screen) there are instances of quite small text – e.g. some links at the bottom of the page.

The majority of images on this site have clear and descriptive labels – so vital for blind visitors and those with dyslexia using text to speech software. However numerous invisible or cosmetic images on every page are labelled with a '*' which adds significant 'auditory clutter' for blind users.

Moreover there are instances of pictures of words which cannot be resized, do not allow the visitor to change their colours, and become pixelated and difficult to read when magnification software is used. There is also a moving image which may present difficulties for visitors with a vision impairment, cognitive or learning difficulty. Some of these ads are 'Flash Movies' which may be problematic for visitors who cannot use a mouse, are vision-impaired, or use speech output or voice recognition software.

The active link is clearly visible as a keyboard user moves through the links on this site, with the exception of the links in the main menu which have a dark background which makes spotting the highlight difficult.

The site does not rely on those mini programs called JavaScript meaning that those using older browsers, those with vision impairments using some special browsers, and those whose organisations disable JavaScript for security reasons are still able to use the site effectively. (Not being an ecommerce site means that JavaScript is often less critical to functionality).

There is also no accessibility help or information to assist disabled visitors to use the site more easily.

Appendix A - Further Sources of Advice and Support

- www.abilitynet.org.uk

AbilityNet is able to offer information, advice and a range of services to help make a website accessible and usable for everyone – including accessibility audits, disabled end user testing, training, support, accessible web design and a Key Info Pack to get you started.

For further details please call Robin on 01926 312847 or email accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Other sources of help and information include:

- www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is the body at the forefront of the development of standards in good design on the World Wide Web (including accessibility). The W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) form the basis of all other standards.

- www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric

This link will take you to a subsite of the W3C website which tries to explain in plainer terms, with examples of good and bad code, the W3C guidelines checkpoint by checkpoint.

- www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp

The UK E-government Unit has guidelines on web accessibility (based upon the W3C guidelines). These can be viewed on-line or downloaded as an illustrated Word document.

- www.drc.org.uk

Organisations are legally obliged to provide websites that are accessible to disabled people. This site includes information on the DDA, its accompanying code of practice and their recently published report outlining the findings of research into the accessibility and usability of 1000 websites.

Appendix B – How We Decide the Ranking

The world standards in web accessibility (W3C WCAG) have prioritised their checkpoints into 3 priority levels. Compliance of your sites with these levels are phrased as - level 1 (highest) = “must”, level 2 = “should” and level 3 = “ought”.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has meant that it has been law in the UK to have an accessible website since 1999. Arguably a site can only meet its legal requirement under the DDA if it is, at the very least, compliant with all level 1 checkpoints.

As it is only level 2 compliance which does not hinder some groups’ access (as defined by the W3C) it is our opinion that the true DDA requirement lies somewhere between levels 1 and 2 compliance.

This said, it has been our experience that many sites that meet level 1 and even level 2 priority checkpoints can nevertheless still present significant difficulties for disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to a number of reasons. For example, over-reliance on purely visual clues to guide the user (leaving blind users without vital clues about where the designer intends the user’s ‘eye’ to be drawn), small or closely clustered links or buttons (causing those with fine motor control difficulties to miss what they intended to click on - or click on the wrong thing), lack of proper separation of page objects (meaning that users with vision or cognitive difficulties can miss important items which are not sufficiently separated from neighbouring content), the sheer bulk and complexity of links and sections on a page (making those who’s access technology or methodology is slow become frustrated or give up) or a host of other reasons.

Similarly a site that falls short of priority 1 or 2 compliance in a number of respects can nevertheless be very accessible and usable by the vast majority of disabled visitors in practice.

This can be due to the fact that particular checkpoints are only contravened very rarely (still denying the site level 1 compliance but having very little impact on a disabled users overall experience of the site), or because checkpoints that are contravened more widely only impact upon a very small number of users.

Thus we have tried to reflect the overall user experience of a site when deciding its ranking.

***** Ranking**

We have chosen our *** (“satisfies a base level of accessibility”) ranking as compliance (or near compliance where the shortfall has little evident impact on users) with priority level 1 checkpoints.

Further than that we look for significant (in our opinion based upon broad experience of working with disabled users) priority level 2 issues - such as the scalability of text, the avoidance of frames and any positive steps a site has taken to benefit visitors with an impairment (such as accessibility info or offering a choice of colour/text size schemes).

Note - It is our opinion that the addition of a Text only parallel site to the exclusion of addressing the accessibility/usability issues of the main site is neither necessary or in the spirit of inclusion or the W3C WCAG standards.

*** and ** Rankings**

We award * and ** to a site dependant upon how much it falls short of our definition of *** ranking.

****** and ***** Rankings**

We award **** and ***** to a site dependant upon how much it exceeds our definition of *** ranking.

For any further clarification please contact accessibility@abilitynet.org.uk

Appendix C – Statements of Commitment to Accessibility

Tesco

"Tesco.com is committed to ensuring that this website is accessible to all our customers. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding the accessibility of this site, please contact us, as we are continually striving to improve the experience for all visitors. The grocery section of Tesco.com operates in two formats - one which is reliant on frames and JavaScript and a second which has no restrictions and is accessible to all technologies. From a customer point of view the only difference is the way in which each version is presented - the underlying technology and functionality is shared between the sites."

– from www.tesco.com website

Sainsburys

"At Sainsbury's we take the issue of accessibility very seriously and believe we provide a great service for all our customers however they choose to shop with us. We are committed to providing a great online service and have made improvements to the accessibility of our websites over the past few years. We are working in partnership with System Concepts which includes extensive usability testing of our websites by customers with disabilities to enable us to continually improve our service. We are also the only major supermarket to offer a telephone ordering service."

- Kevin Plant, Head of Sainsbury's Online

Morrisons

"We make every effort to ensure that our Internet presence has been built to internationally recognised accessible website guidelines produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and aims to exceed Level Double-A of those guidelines by meeting all Priority 1, 2 and some additional Level 3 checkpoints. We recently launched the Festival of Football website which supports our in-store activities surrounding the 2006 World Cup tournament. This site has been built using Cascading Style Sheets to ensure that that it is easy to use for people who access the web using an assistive technology. As with any large site, it is difficult to monitor the impact of each and every change we make, we take accessibility very seriously and welcome any feedback from our websites users in how we can improve our online presence."

- Catherine Kelly, Website Manager, Morrisons

ASDA

"Improving accessibility for our customers is very important to us and that's why we are currently working on a re-launch of all of our web-sites that will deliver a significant step change in our offer."

- Richard Ramsden, Head of Home Shopping, ASDA