

AIRLINE WEBSITES DON'T CATER FOR THE DISABLED



AbilityNet is a disability charity which devotes itself to improving the online facilities available to the disabled people, mostly the visually impaired. The improvement of facilities usually involves reducing the necessity of using the mouse, the availability of aural aids and the possibility of enlarging text to make it more visible. AbilityNet handled over 19,000 enquiries last year, proving the importance of the benefits of computer technology being available to all. It works on the basis of grants from other companies and is becoming a common factor in the thoughts of web designers and company managers all over the planet. By making their websites available to disabled users, companies are thought to be adding 15% to their visitor rates. Furthermore, in an age of court battles, there are no legal issues to contend with once sites secure themselves a solid base which makes them useable by everybody.

Unfortunately, airline websites do not meet the criteria set by AbilityNet, especially those with sites which do not allow for text to be enlarged and lack the so-called tooltips, which are spoken descriptions of pictures. In a recent survey Easyjet, British Airways and Monarch scored the highest from all the airlines involved. However, they only scored a maximum of 2 stars from the 5 available on the scale. The rest of the ten or so airline sites monitored scored a miserly 1 star.

The irony of the situation is that by neglecting the needs of disabled users, the airlines are shooting themselves in the foot. By installing some relatively simple software in creating the tooltips, enabling visitors to enlarge text and restricting compulsory use of the mouse, airline companies could find themselves free of legal problems and with a whole new market to aim for. Furthermore, disabled travellers would be a lot more content and everybody would be a winner.

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