

## **Trustee Tip: Bobby Checks Library Website Accessibility by Patrons with Disabilities**

(A CALTAC Trustee Tip)

**Introduction:** Trustee Tips are intended to supplement CALTAC's Board Development materials. They may be used to stimulate a more-in-depth discussion of a topic included in Training sessions, or to cover topics pertinent to trustees beyond those included in the training curriculum. Also, as an option available to Board Presidents and Library Directors, a Trustee Tip may be used as a 10 minute topic for stimulation of discussion on a regular Board agenda, or they may be used as handouts at one meeting with an opportunity for comments and questions at the beginning of the next meeting.

*This Trustee Tip was written by Mary Minow (May, 2002)*

**A library user that is visually impaired may use a screen reader to read your library's web page. Is this what s/he sees?**



**“Welcome to the [IMAGE] Library. Click on [IMAGE] for [IMAGE]”**

*To Begin this Presentation, assign 4 Cast Members and read through it -- Trustees #1, #2, #3, #4*

Trustee #1: My mother is losing her eyesight. She's been getting books on tape from the library for some time now, and enjoying them quite a lot.

Trustee #2: My father has been getting books on tape from the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; he got them through his local library. Several years ago, we got him a computer, and he's been able to read the news and get all kinds of information from the Internet.

Trustee #1: How is he able to see the screen?

Trustee #2: He doesn't need to see the screen. He uses screen reader software. It can read electronic text – it used to be in a computer voice, very stilted, like “Wel-come to the Hap-py Pub-lic Li-brar-y.” Today he has a version with a very pleasant British woman's voice, quite chipper, really. She says [with female British accent] “Welcome to the Happy Public Library.”

Trustee #3: That's terrific! You mean he can read everything we can, as long as it's on his computer?

Trustee #2: Yes and no. He can read everything that's **text**. Even a few years ago, that meant he could read almost everything on the net. Today, there are more and more images, graphics, movies, all that stuff that uses memory and bandwidth! He has a fast connection, but he can't always "read" the images.

Trustee #4: What do you mean he can't **always** read the images? Don't you mean he can never read the images?

Trustee #2: No – sometimes webmasters put in a tag (it's called an alt-text tag) whenever there's an image. It describes the image, like "Happy Public Library building," or "card catalog." If your settings are right, you may have seen these text tags when your cursor hovers over an image.

Trustee #3: I've seen those. In fact, when I have a slow connection, sometimes I turn my images off, and then I really appreciate the text tags.

Trustee #2: Exactly. Well, he completely relies on the tags. Sometimes the image is essential to navigating a website, like "click on the card catalog to search our titles." If there's a text tag attached to the image of the card catalog, he can navigate as well as you or I. If not, it just says "IMAGE" (or nothing), and he has no idea where to go.

Trustee #1: Does our library have the alt-text tags? If it does, my mother will be able to find books on tape she wants by herself online, and reserve them.

Trustee #2: I don't know if our library's website has them or not. But I know how to find out. There's a nifty website called Bobby. You go to <http://www.cast.org/bobby> and it evaluates any website you want, and tells you whether it's accessible or not to patrons with disabilities.

Trustee #3: Don't you mean patrons with visual disabilities?

Trustee #2: People who are blind or have other visual disabilities are major beneficiaries of the alt-text tags. But other patrons with disabilities also need these tags. Some patrons with learning disabilities also use screen readers, as they can hear text better than they can read it with their eyes. Bobby checks other aspects of websites as well. For example, it makes sure that a website doesn't unexpectedly send you to a new window with no explanation, a real difficulty if you can't see. It also checks to ensure a website is accessible to people with certain physical disabilities, who use alternative input devices, such as speech recognition and pointers instead of keyboards and mice. It uses standards established by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for Accessibility.

Trustee #3: But doesn't the library need to have the screen reader to make it work?

Trustee #2: Libraries should have at least one station with accessibility features. But whether they do or not, many patrons with disabilities have trouble getting to the library, and access the catalog from home, where they have their own equipment with a screen reader.

Trustee #1: What was the way to check our library's website again, to make sure its accessible to patrons with disabilities?

Trustee #2: It's the Bobby website. When you go to <http://www.cast.org/bobby> , it tells you what to do.

[If the equipment is available, the group of trustees logs on to the Bobby website and enters the library's URL address. Within minutes, Bobby evaluates the library's website and generates a report of accessibility errors (if any), and recommendations on how to fix the errors.]

Note: The expense in complying with disability standards is negligible with textual and simple graphical material. It is \$0 if done at the time of creation, and requires simple corrections when "retrofitting." The size and accessibility report of a library's website, of course, will determine the amount of retrofitting needed. The expense grows much larger if multimedia is used on a site, particularly sound recordings, which must be captioned for deaf patrons.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. If a library website has problems, what is the best way to approach the issue with the library?
2. Are electronic resources as important to make accessible as the physical building?
3. Why are newer websites more likely to be a problem than older ones?

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