

## Stories of Web Users

### How People with Disabilities Use the Web

#### Introduction

The following stories are selected scenarios of people with disabilities using the Web, to highlight the effect of web accessibility barriers and the broader benefits of accessible websites and web tools.

#### **Ms. Olsen, Classroom student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia**

Ms. Olsen attends middle school, and particularly likes her literature class. She has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with dyslexia, and the combination leads to substantial difficulty reading. However, with recent accommodations to the curriculum she has become enthusiastic about this class.

Her school recently started to use more online curricula to supplement class textbooks. She was initially worried about the reading load, since she reads slowly. She experimented with text-to-speech software that highlighted the text on the screen and read it aloud at the same time, and found that she was able to read much more easily when she could hear certain sections of it read to her, instead of struggling over every word.

When she goes onto the Web, she finds that some websites are much easier for her to use than others. Some of the web pages have a lot of graphics and illustrations that help her focus in quickly on sections she wants to read. In some cases, though, where the graphics are animated, it is very hard for her to focus and she is constantly distracted by the movement. She set her web browser to freeze or hide animated graphics so that she can focus on the relevant information but that does not always work on every website.

One of the most important things for her has been the level of accessibility of the web-based online library catalogues and the general search functions on the Web. Until recently, Ms. Olsen often needed to visit the library and to seek assistance to find the information that she needs. Today, the accessible online library catalogue of the school enables her to find the right information without any assistance.

Her teacher taught a number of different search strategies but sometimes the search options are still quite confusing for her. She finds that websites that provide error corrections and suggest alternative spellings assist her significantly. Also websites that provide multiple navigation mechanisms such as a navigation bar, a search box, a sitemap, or bread-crumbs trails, are easier for her to use.

## **Mr. Sands, Supermarket assistant with Down syndrome**

Mr. Sands has put groceries in bags for customers for the past year at a supermarket. He has Down syndrome, and has difficulty with abstract concepts, reading, and doing mathematical calculations.

He usually buys his own groceries at this supermarket because he is familiar with it, but sometimes finds that there are so many product choices that he becomes confused, and he finds it difficult to keep track of how much he is spending. He has difficulty re-learning where his favorite products are each time the supermarket changes the layout of its products.

Recently, he visited an online grocery service from his computer at home. He explored the website the first few times with a friend. He found that he could use the website without much difficulty because the items were clearly indicated, the information and instructions were formulated in simple language that is easy to understand, and the navigation was consistent and easy to use.

His friend also showed him some software that highlights links and form options on the web page, and helps him select such links and options using a single key. This software also has word prediction functionality which highlights a selection of likely words based on the first few characters that he can easily select. Mr. Sands uses this function frequently when he is entering text, such as comments and product reviews. He is happy that the website provides a similar feature for its product search function because it highlights the product names which his software does not know.

The website also provides an option that lets him select from a list of products that he has ordered in the past or that he selected as his favorites. Once he decides what he wants to buy, he selects the item and puts it into his virtual shopping basket. The website gives him an updated total each time he adds an item, helping him make sure that he does not over spend his budget.

Mr. Sands now shops on the online grocery site a few times a month, and just buys a few fresh items each day at the supermarket where he works. He is one of the many happy customers of this usable website.