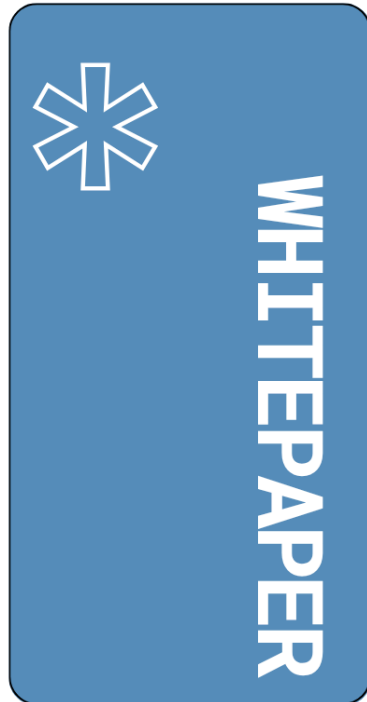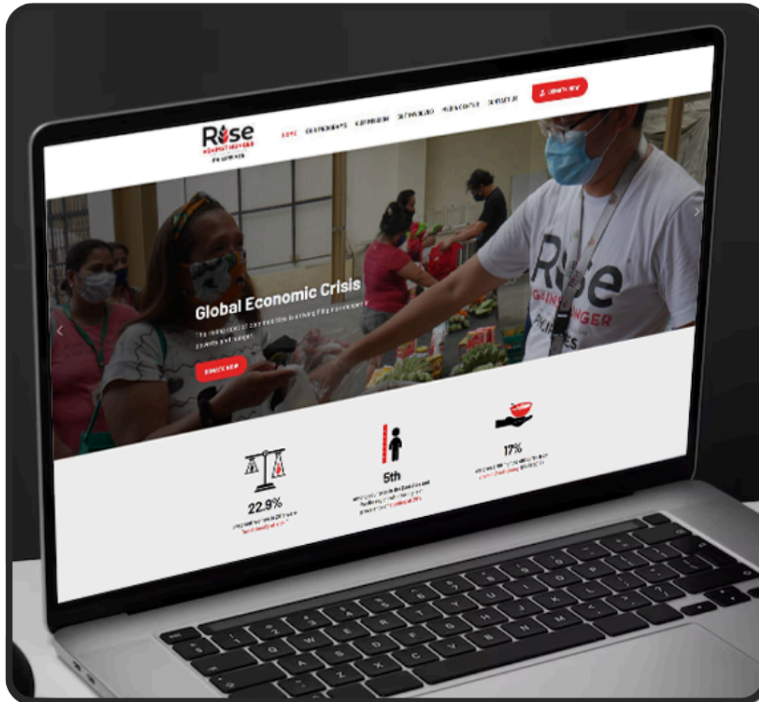# Accessibility-first Web Design
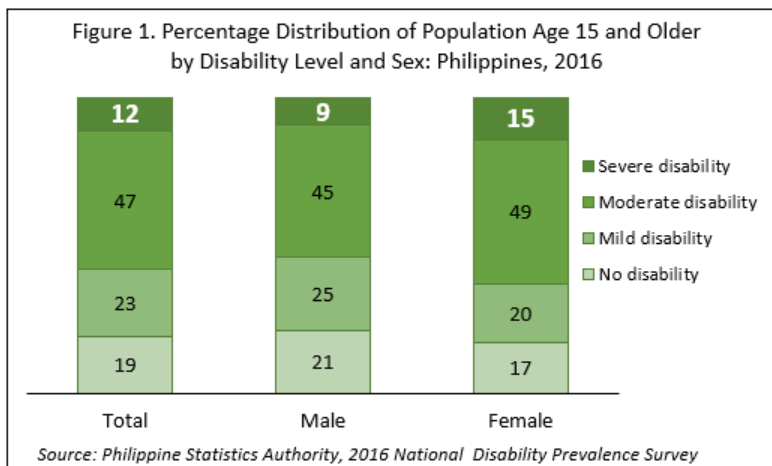
Designing the Web for Every Ability

By: CliqAlly

Introduction

Imagine being dyslexic and you quit half way through attempting to read an article composed in long, heavy paragraphs with no headings, no bullet points, and no opportunity to change font to a readable size. Or, you rush to pay your bills online, but the captcha needs you to listen to garbled sound, but you are hard of hearing.

With the internet age today, websites are becoming the foundation of a company's web presence. Most customers start their search for goods and services online and a website is giving companies an upper hand over their rivals. But not everybody is well-versed in navigating the web and if a company website is not accessible enough or at all, then it could be a problem that could lead to lost customers, or even a lawsuit.
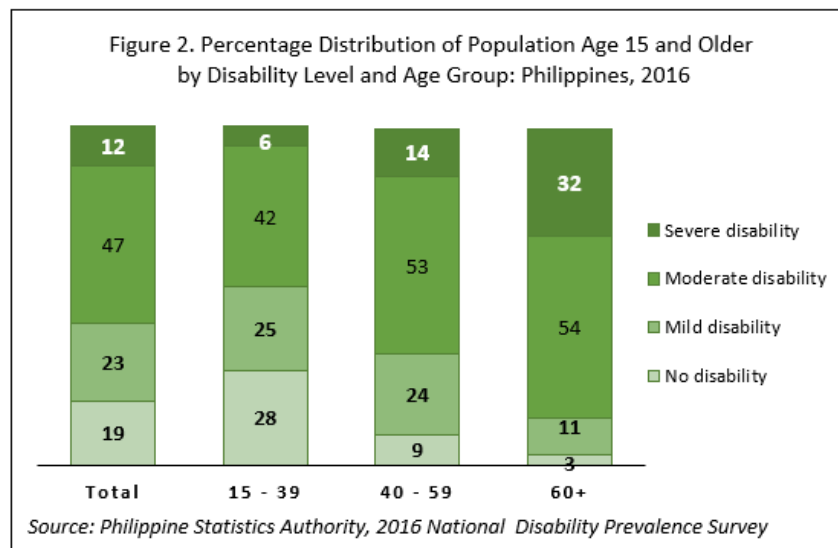
Fortunately, there are businesses, government organizations, and advocacy groups rising to improve accessibility for all on the internet, including individuals who experience visual, hearing, or mobility disabilities.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, about 12 percent of Filipinos aged 15 and above have a severe disability in the year 2016.

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Population Age 15 and Older by Disability Level and Sex: Philippines, 2016

	Total	Male	Female
Severe disability	12	9	15
Moderate disability	47	45	49
Mild disability	23	25	20
No disability	19	21	17

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016 National Disability Prevalence Survey

The survey shows that females more likely than males to experience severe and moderate disability.

The survey also shows that approximately 82% of the population experience mild to severe disabilities.

Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of Population Age 15 and Older by Disability Level and Age Group: Philippines, 2016

	Total	15 - 39	40 - 59	60+
Severe disability	12	6	14	32
Moderate disability	47	42	53	54
Mild disability	23	25	24	11
No disability	19	28	9	3

Source: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016 National Disability Prevalence Survey

The Republic Act No. 7277 or Magna Carta for Disabled Persons ensures the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled individuals and their integration into society. It covers centers on employment, education, health care, social services, telecommunications, buildings, transport, and political and civil rights. It also ensures the non-discrimination of disabled individuals in employment, transport, and in public accommodation and services. The Magna Carta for Disabled People is actually offline service-based and not digital. This means that digital accessibility is not yet legally mandated by law for websites or any digital product or platform.

On the other hand, the United States government also has a legislation that prohibits discrimination against people with disability in public life, including internet access. They call it the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA.

In 2012, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) in Maryland, USA, sued the popular streaming service, Netflix under the Americans with Disabilities Act, for failing to deliver closed captioning for most of its movies and television shows streamed on the Internet.

A blind New Yorker named Maria Mendizabal also filed a lawsuit against Nike Inc., claiming that Nike.com and Converse.com did not conform to design standards that allow screen readers to read and access its web content. Major issues cited included missing alternative text for images, empty link texts and redundant links, which violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A blind Filipino writer named Angeline Bernadette Rodriguez Pancho from Naga City, Camarines Sur, wrote about "The online life of a visually impaired student" in Inquirer Lifestyle. She mentioned that while social media is inclusive for people with visual impairment, it's not fully accessible. She encounters pictures without text descriptions and unlabeled buttons. She also added that to make the web content accessible to individuals with visual impairment, there should be accurate text descriptions on photos, automatic audio descriptions for videos and no unlabeled buttons.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on 26 July 1990. It covered civil rights protections to the physically and mentally disabled and guaranteed them equal opportunity in employment, private business, accommodations, transportation and services. In a nutshell, ADA provides a clear and broad national mandate to prevent discrimination against disabled people.

The ADA allows individuals with disabilities to move around the world safely and effectively. For individuals with hearing disability, the ADA offers telecommunications services and sign language interpreters wherever necessary to communicate effectively.

The ADA is America's best civil rights and accessibility legislation for individuals with disabilities, including web accessibility. As the internet increased in importance and websites became more central to the way consumers interact with businesses, the way the ADA is used to manage web accessibility began to change. Since 2017, there has been a clear consensus that the ADA does cover the online environment. Disability rights groups, lawyers, and court decisions have all concurred that websites, online portals, and online shops must also be made accessible to individuals with disabilities according to the ADA.

The WCAG

WCAG refers to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. It is a collection of international rules created by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to make digital content (such as websites and apps) more accessible to users, particularly for individuals with disabilities.

Imagine it as a manual or guide which can be used by developers, designers and content authors to ensure their sites are accessible to all, no matter what ability.

In the Philippines, there is not yet a formal adoption of WCAG as a national digital content requirement, but there are some government websites that try WCAG-like functionality already, though with very poor implementation.

Disabilities and websites

A majority of the web development agencies tend to give emphasis to aesthetics, responsiveness, and functionality while designing websites. One important component is rarely given attention, and that is Web Accessibility.

There are five main categories of disabilities that all web development agencies should keep in mind in order to make the websites they are designing accessible to all: Visual, Hearing, Cognitive, Physical, and Speech disabilities.

Visual

Visual impairment affects how users see and interpret information on their screens. There are three (3) common types of visual disabilities:

1. **Blindness** - This is a significant or complete loss of vision that can be caused by various factors, including:

   a. Age-related conditions
   b. Diabetic retinopathy
   c. Refractive errors
   d. Congenital conditions
   e. Nutritional deficiencies
   f. Trauma
   g. Brain damage

2. **Low Vision** - People with low vision are not able to read the screen comfortably. They may require screen magnifiers, zoom, high contrast, or increased font size in order to easily read material.
   Tiny text, low color contrast, or a fixed design where zoom is not possible can render a website inaccessible.

3. **Color Blindness** - This isn't that people who have color blindness don't see color at all. It's having trouble distinguishing between particular colors, especially red and green. This is a problem when websites only use color to communicate.

4. **Hearing**

These are users who may not be able to access content with audio like videos, podcasts or voice instructions.

5. **Cognitive**

People dealing with challenges like dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, autism, or traumatic brain injuries often find it tough to concentrate on specific information, read effectively, and retain memories.

6. **Physical**

Conditions like cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, or amputations can really complicate things for people trying to use a mouse or a regular keyboard.

7. **Speech**

These are conditions that affect spoken communication.

Accessibility-first Web Design

To give everyone the best online experience, it is vital to start focusing on digital accessibility. Every website and app must be designed and built to be easily accessible, thus making the digital world more inclusive for every user.
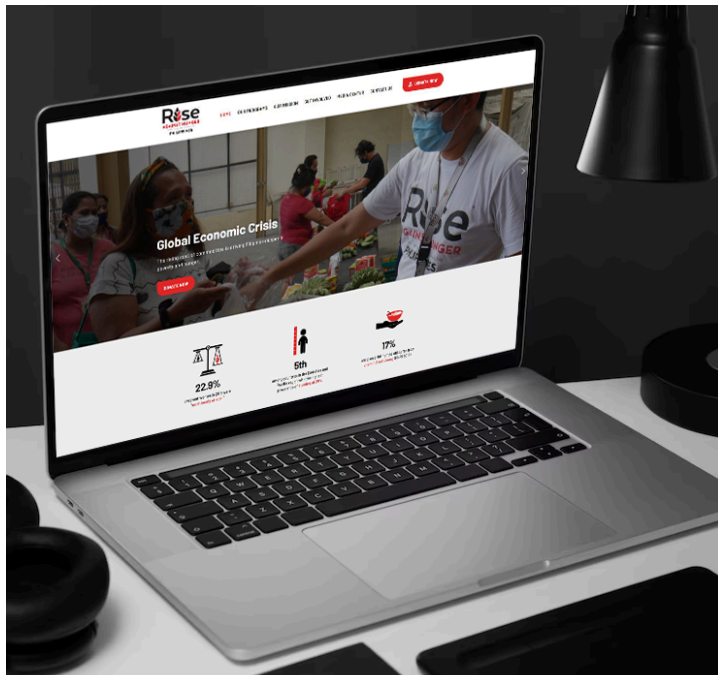
CliqAlly offers a proactive solution: **Accessibility-first web design and development**.

The mission of CliqAlly is to make the digital world a more inclusive one by assisting organizations in becoming compliant with international accessibility standards (including WCAG, ADA, and other laws), providing equal access to all users—both current and future.

Instead of addressing accessibility as an afterthought or a Band-Aid, CliqAlly's Accessibility-first web design and development build WCAG 2.1 standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) into the very first planning phase.

CliqAlly's development and design process guarantees that your site is accessible, compliant, and usable to all users—while still being an accurate representation of your brand's vision and identity.

Accessibility-first design also drives innovation. Features such as closed captions, voice navigation, and responsive interfaces enhance experiences across the board.

CliqAlly incorporated accessibility into every phase of the digital product lifecycle. This end-to-end dedication not only guarantees compliance but also overall user experience, brand reputation, and operational efficiency.

How It Solves the Problem

The CliqAlly team audits, designs, and codes with screen readers, keyboard navigation, contrast ratios, alt-text, and cognitive-friendly layout as core principles, not optional features. To ensure that websites are in line with ADA and give accessible digital experiences to all users, particularly people with disabilities, it is important to pay attention to the following technical aspects:

1. WCAG Compliance

Compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) ensures that making online content perceivable, easy to understand, and compatible with assistive technology users.

2. Keyboard-Only Navigation and Semantic HTML5

Ensuring that everything runs seamlessly with just a keyboard is crucial for users with physical disabilities.

3. Uses ARIA Roles and Landmarks

Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) roles and landmarks helps assistive technologies better understand and navigate complex interfaces, making the web more accessible for everyone.

4. Responsive and Scalable Typography

Text content should be readable on all devices and support zoom or text resizing without loss of functionality or clarity. Using relative units (like em or rem) allows for user-controlled scaling.

5. High-Contrast, Color-Safe UI Palettes

Designs must meet contrast ratios defined by WCAG to ensure legibility for users with visual impairments. Colors should not be the sole method for conveying information.

6. Accessibility Auditing (Manual and Automated)

Conducting both automated testing (with tools such as Axe, WAVE, and Lighthouse) and manual reviews using screen readers ensures comprehensive coverage of potential accessibility issues.

Additionally, CliqAlly is developing an AI-powered Accessibility Auditing tool that helps their client to deeply track down accessibility issues from any parts of their website.

7. Multimedia Accessibility (Captions, Transcripts, Alt Text)

All video and audio content should include synchronized captions and transcripts. Informative images must have descriptive alt attributes to support screen reader users.

8. Consistent and Intuitive User Interface Design Patterns

Using predictable layout patterns and interaction models reduces the learning curve and improves usability for users with cognitive or learning disabilities.

9. Accessible Forms and Validation

Forms must include properly associated labels (<label> elements), error messages that are programmatically conveyed, and logical focus management to ensure all users can complete tasks independently.

10. Proper Heading Hierarchy and Tab Order

A clear and logical heading structure (e.g., <h1> to <h6>) enhances page navigation for screen reader users. The tab order should follow the visual flow of the page to maintain consistency and ease of use.

What We Learned So Far

Through real-world implementation and continuous collaboration with clients, several key takeaways have emerged that reinforce the value of web accessibility.

- Accessibility boosts SEO and usability for everyone.
- Early integration of accessibility requirements saves time and cost in the long term.
- Inclusive design strengthens brand reputation and engagement.
- Regular accessibility audits ensure ongoing compliance and adaptability to evolving standards.
- Accessibility requires commitment and continuous attention.

Summary

This white paper pinpoints the urgency for accessible digital experiences in today's increasingly web-based world where millions of people with disabilities remain severely hindered. It indicates how poor accessibility on the web can drive visitors away and expose companies to the threat of litigation. It alludes to influential local and international legislation, such as the Philippines' Magna Carta for Disabled Persons Act and the United States Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Although the ADA has been enforced in the online space by landmark cases between businesses such as Netflix and Nike, the Philippines does not yet have definitive guidelines on digital accessibility, although 12% of Filipinos above 15 years old have severe disabilities.

To bridge these gaps, CliqAlly advocates for an Accessibility-first web development process, incorporating international standards like WCAG 2.1 right from the start. This report describes key technical practices—ranging from semantic HTML and ARIA roles to keyboard navigation and multimedia accessibility—and presents a case study of an American law firm that revamped its website and realized quantifiable benefits in usability and engagement. Major findings identify that putting accessibility first not only enhances compliance and user satisfaction but also fuels innovation, boosts SEO, and bolsters brand reputation. The conclusion of the paper is a call for proactive, ongoing embracing of accessibility as an integral pillar of digital strategy.

The future of the internet is for all of us. Everyone deserves to access and navigate it freely, without barriers. CliqAlly empowers your business in crafting digital experiences that are welcoming, human-centered, and future-proof.

Build with intention. Design with inclusion. Partner with CliqAlly.

To learn more about our services or request a website audit, visit www.cliqally.com.

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