

# Fix the Web – mapping the way forwards May 2010

Gail Bradbrook, Citizens Online

## 1. Purpose of this paper

The Fix the Web concept was borne of asking the question:

“How can network effects / social media help address the issue of e-accessibility?”

There appear to be two answers:

1. Through the mass usage of “web fixing tools” such as Web Visum or IBM’s Web Accessibility Tool, which can create fixes on top of a website for anyone using the tool.
2. Through mass reporting of website issues to website owners, with guidance to help solve issues in the short and longer term.

Initially I had thought answer 1 was the “cake” of this project with 2 being the icing, but my conversations with about 40 stakeholders suggest answer 2 is the cake!

This paper will therefore map the ideas, issues and possible way forwards, in more detail for answer 2- mass reporting of website problems. Web fixing tools are still of interest and we can carry on considering them; a brief discussion on this is given towards the end of this paper.

This paper poses a number of solutions, questions and requests for help. I welcome feedback on any aspect. Are stakeholders sufficiently inspired to work together to make this happen and if so how best shall we do that? I can begin with a conference call and can people let me know if they think a day workshop / hack day / is a good focus for the future? ***This is all entirely possible, I am convince the timing is right and we could make a huge dent on this entrenched issue- let’s do it!***

## Proposed goals

To create a web enabled mechanism in which disabled people can report an e-accessibility issue with a website in under one minute of their time. The issue is then taken up by a volunteer who manages the process of working with the web owner.

We should aim for:

- 10,000 UK based volunteers within two years of launch
- Each volunteer offering to do an average of 4 reports per month including any follow up (and accepting they manage just over 2) so 250,000 website issues reported per year

-400 disabled people reporting an average of 12 problems per week each (quarter of a million reports)

And in the longer term (5 years?) 1.5 million volunteers online from across the globe (150 countries an average of 10,000 in each). 3 million reports of web access issue per year from 5000 disabled people

These goals are outputs and they are only valuable if they help drive an improvement in web accessibility as an outcome. This could happen in two main ways. Firstly through the fixing of the web issues that get reported and secondly by hugely raising awareness of web accessibility (for both web owners and volunteer techies) therefore further sites created by these folks should bear accessibility in mind.

**Question for stakeholders:** How can we measure our impact on web accessibility? Are there any international benchmarks / measures we can tap into? I am aware of the Riga target of 100% accessible public sector websites (by 2010, 5% measured in 2007). Presumably W3C have their own measures?

## **2. What are the key issues in web accessibility and reporting of issues?**

My conversations with various stakeholders are showing that even “experts” do not have a full picture of what troubles different disabled people. Clearly it is a very individual thing, based on personal circumstances and preferences. The collective impact is huge, visually impaired users reported losing, on average, 30.4% of time due to web access issues<sup>1</sup>. Research<sup>2</sup> has showed that 45% of the issues raised by disabled users were not a violation of an (earlier) standard on web accessibility.

As an able bodied web user I encounter my own website issues, broken links etc. I would say I hit about 3 issues per day but generally none of them are very serious. I am starting to ask disabled people how many issues they hit and am hearing “pretty much something with every site I go to” with some issues more serious than others, in some cases complete exclusion from a website. Some users stick to sites that work for them some days and therefore encounter less problems that day, but on venturing “out” would hit about 10 significant issues.

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<sup>1</sup> What Frustrates Screen Reader Users on the Web: A study of 100 Blind users (2007 IJHCI)

<sup>2</sup> The Web Access and Inclusion for Disabled People: A Formal Investigation conducted by the Disability Rights Commission 2004.

A key issue then is that for disabled people the process of complaining about web accessibility would be a completely draining and time consuming activity. Therefore disabled people are generally not bothering to complain.

I am also asking disabled people **if** the process of complaining about a website took less than a minute and someone else handled the process would they be willing to make complaints? and the answer is yes!

I see the following benefits of establishing a process that makes use of volunteers:

1. Complaining could happen on a much bigger scale
2. Volunteers can offer support to make the web a better place, in their own time and online
3. It's an easier process for disabled people
4. The volunteers enhance their own knowledge and skills
5. Website owners get feedback they can work with or use to justify changes to budget holders
6. Web accessibility experts get more business
7. Disabled people don't have to keep fighting their own corner
8. It is clearer what the key issues are: there is a kind of mass user testing in place.

**Question for stakeholders:** Are there other benefits and any inherent problems?

**Next steps:** Some disabled people have offered to email Gail with examples of issues they are facing. This data will enable a stakeholder (who has offered) to develop a survey and thus the beginnings of a web reporting process. Check boxes can be used where possible. We need to consider this area in more detail.

### **3. How does a volunteer enabled reporting process work?**

Here in classic "strawman" style I will begin outlining the processes we could build in more detail so that issues and enhancements can be considered. Thus everything below is a suggestion with feedback welcome!

There may be current systems that can do most of this (eg getsatisfaction.com ?). Once we agree details of the system through the discussion below I would like help understanding how to specify this for a techie, break it down into jobs and get this done so as to not burden one person (Hack day?).

## **3.1 Processes for disabled people**

### **3.1a. Sign up**

Name and email address required, phone optional (could be useful for a volunteer). Is there a standard way of asking for details of a person's impairment (it seems like a personal question but also presumably useful for the web owner to understand the issues). Also information on any access technologies used could be captured. Radio buttons in a user profile could indicate how much feedback the person wanted (some generated automatically) to indicate when a volunteer had taken steps with their complaint and how far it was getting. There would need to be a process to indicate how many complaints the system can handle? We could give people a quota? I don't like that idea too much. In any case it needs thinking about. I feel if a person wants to make 20 complaints a day then we should let them! We will have to manage complaints to volunteers ratio..

Disabled techies could chose to be a volunteer too, the way to sign up for the two separate roles needs to be clear and simple as possible.

### **3.1b Desktop Application**

As part of sign up the disabled person gets an application downloaded to their desktop which is a simple double click to open. They can paste in a weblink to a site giving problems and type in one or two sentences saying what the issue is. Radio buttons could be used to highlight severity of the issue. The process should take less than a minute.

### **3.1c Communications re the issue**

Feedback on how the complaint is being handled could be generated automatically (eg a mail says a volunteer has now taken on the handling of your complaint, or a mail could say an email has been sent to the webowner regarding your complaint, etc). The person could chose whether to get these mails or not within their profile (they would probably be reassuring at first and tiresome after a while).

It would be important that the person agreed to be open to further questions about the issue, which may be fielded by the web owner. The volunteer would try to handle them where they could, but may require further information from the disabled person in some cases.

If a site is generically very bad, is it worth suggesting the site undertakes an automated access audit- if so which one is best?

## **3.2 Community building**

Disabled people and volunteers would be welcomed to join the online forum for Fix the Web to share experiences. Some issues may not be website related but to do with access technologies, which could be discussed with other users. Here there would be a strong link to [AbilityNet's GATE](#) resources.

We could also keep a running tally of what complaints were being handled, how they are going etc, any successes! There would be the usual social media aspects too, twitter feed, etc. In principle we can develop lists of the best and the worst but we have to be careful of how we work with stakeholders...

## **3.3 Processes for volunteers**

Getting this right will make or break the project because it is more complicated and needs to fit well to people's levels of expertise, time and sense of commitment.

### **3.3a Sign up**

A sign up for would get key data (name, email, weblink for those with a business to promote?) Volunteers would have a profile where they can manage the emails they are sent from the system. Once signed up it would be useful if a form popped up where they could invite friends to join up too?

### **3.3b Ensuring sufficient expertise**

For those that have higher expertise in this area ([GAWDS](#) members for example) there are a few ways to be involved: as a standard volunteer, as part of an online forum based resource for volunteers (or do we ask some people to be available via direct emails to them with requests for help?) as someone to whom web owners can be signposted to for limited free advice (and possibly paid work).

We need to have some clear guidance for the distinction between touting for business and volunteering. It is fine and certainly appropriate if experts get business from this Fix the Web project involvement, but we would expect a level of volunteering input first and those needing advice (Web Owners) should be told to expect a small amount of support from experts for free but beyond that they may need to pay. Volunteers should never have to pay for additional support from experts.

I am guessing that a certain amount of volunteering for Fix the Web could be done by people with fairly low level technical knowledge? There are plenty of materials out there to up skill people on the basics of this field and GAWDS had some basic training materials for earlier standards. It might be appropriate for professional bodies / GAWDS to work together in a short process to create some materials for those new to the field. This isn't about creating "new experts" but people with a bit

more knowledge, sufficient to do most of the volunteering for Fix the Web. Volunteers would then be asked to take the time to undergo a short piece of “training” (delivered online).

### **3.3c Accepting and managing volunteering opportunities**

I am unclear on the best way of sending volunteering opportunities out to volunteers (but have a couple of stakeholders who have worked on IT4communities so they will have some better ideas). Perhaps an email list twice a week? (Volunteers could set how often they get the list)

Maybe it doesn't need a list, just an email to say “there are X numbers of volunteering opportunities waiting please can you take one?”

When the volunteer clicks yes they get the next in the queue?

Their main task will be to find the email address or online form for the website owner. There would be, from the disabled person's complaint process, information generated on the problem and some information about the access technologies used, impairment, etc. This could be topped and tailed with our standard Fix the Web information- about e-accessibility, the project, where you can get further help, Shaw Trust accreditation, GAWDS, etc.

The volunteer would ensure this information gets to the web owner and they would be encouraged to add in their own information about how you create a fix for the issue. I also think it should be deemed OK (if not encouraged!) for disabled people in a state of frustration to write “this bl\*\*dy website gets on my nerves they never ever tag any of their photos!”. It would be then down to the volunteer to ensure the communications with the web owner are polite! WAI has guidelines we can tap into for complaining about websites.

It should also be understood that web development goes in cycles, sometimes with a five year gap before major changes can be made. The tone of information for / communication with web owners needs to be sympathetic whilst expecting change over time. Signposting to business case development tools could help.

The system should generate automatically a count when the web owner has been contacted, via the volunteer clicking “first step done” or something. The volunteer may then enter into a dialogue with the web owner (they may need extra help from experts if it delves into areas they are not sure about and we should clearly link to the many good resources out there)... or they may be ignored..

We need a way for a volunteer to report back on the status of a Fix- I would need to understand possible outcomes to simplify this. The system should also chase for

feedback, sending back the original complaint so the volunteer can re-issue it if ignored.

#### **4. Web Fixing Tools**

There are a number of tools that could possibly be very useful if used by a community on a large scale. I am collecting a list of these and am interested to hear about what people think. Web Visum seems to be used largely for Captchas. IBM's WAT is not available currently and we are trying a couple of routes to get access and understand if we can work with the prototype. I see a value in focussing on the volunteers for complaints angle, which should generate a community of users. At a later date we can add in a web fixing tool if we have had the energy to create one or come across something that we think is valuable. Keep feeding into me on your thoughts and experiences of web fixing tools.

#### **5. GATE as a Repository**

[AbilityNet's GATE](#) is a repository / one stop shop for access technologies. I have offered to review this as part of this work, because it seems like a useful "sister" venture to work alongside. I will spend some time suggesting improvements to the site and ways to market it. (It was created with little resource and needs some further input of time and financing). BIS have described the need for a one stop shop and it is worth the sector adding to my voice which says "don't create another one, you have one hear that needs some further resource and support".

#### **6. Marketing**

I am developing a database of places to market the Fix the Web offer once developed. Channels to both disabled people and techies and those who are generally good "nodes" for spreading the word around. Please let me know of any newsletters and channels you are aware of. I am also embracing the social media world (to an extent!) and getting some support on this from David Cushman, an expert at 9010 and Racepoint, the PR agency for Nominet Trust.

Messaging here has the potential to be very strong once we get a community mobilised- there is a good story. For disabled people the message "complain in unison, have someone else work the process for you" should be valuable. For volunteers "the web that you love and feel should be open to all is not so open as you think..and there is something simple and very valuable that you can do about it!".

## **7. Funding and sustainability**

Citizens Online have had a small amount of money to project manage Fix the Web till the end of the year.

At this stage we envisage a website which is largely run and owned from the grass roots. There is no long term desire on the part of Citizens Online to own this. If the website requires some concrete owner or steer for efficiency and future development we are open to others taking it up (AbilityNet who also manage IT4Communities are one obvious contender).

Future funding for the project is likely to be needed if it is still getting off the ground and a degree of holding and managing is likely to be needed. I am not overly concerned about finding further funding, if the project is up and running and going well. There are several obvious sources and this is SUCH a central and unsolved issue.

## **8. How to take this forwards**

I'm suggesting I need to do the following, from specific people / groups of people (but would like to confirm this via a conference call):

1. Techie(s) to help me understand outline approach needed to realise web enabled volunteering process as described above- i.e. very basic information on technology options.
2. Techies to help break down web development into bite size pieces with information on what skills a developer would need to have to do this
3. If sufficient support, techies to work with me to create a hack day (could otherwise post technical requirement as request on IT4communities)
4. Support to create a pretty user interface
5. Help defining the volunteering process for e-access experts and those who have worked with volunteers.
6. Help developing materials, processes and messaging for volunteers to up skill them from e-access experts
7. Disabled people as volunteers to give information on accessibility issues
8. Customer relationship manager + e-access expert or similar to help define reporting process for disabled people
9. Business web owner + e-access experts or similar (+ WAI guidelines) to help define messaging on web access improvement for web developers

10. Who else should be on a “core team” for this project?

Later:

11. Techie volunteers as user testers

12. Disabled people to do some user testing

13. Links and ideas for getting to techie networks

14. Links and ideas for getting to networks of disabled people online

15. Links and ideas for generic marketing of the project