Communicating during Procurement - VPATs

A VPAT stands for Voluntary Product Accessibility Template, and they are free templates provided by the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) that help you to audit and describe the accessibility of your content. A completed VPAT is referred to as an Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR).

There are different versions of the VPAT template available for the most widely used accessibility standards including those based on WCAG, EU legislation, 508 (which means US legislation) and an international template called INT. We recommend completing this INT template as it can be used in all areas. You can download the templates at this link:

Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates

A VPAT is useful in a lot of situations when communicating the accessibility of your content at the point of procurement, and can be used to refer to by yourself when completing other work. It is completed at the whole press level, rather than the individual book level. It makes it clear exactly what success criteria constitutes compliance, although it can take a little bit of extra work to determine what that success criteria means in practice and how to fully audit it across all your content.

They are not a legal requirement and are voluntary, however, you could be asked to produce them by libraries, especially in the US. Sometimes, requesting libraries will accept the public accessibility statement instead of a VPAT. Using them would enable librarians to assess the accessibility of publisher content in a standardised format, in comparison with other publishers who use the same template. You would produce the VPAT on request from libraries, but you could also decide to publish your VPAT online.

The VPAT specifies 5 conformance levels:

- **Supports**: The functionality of the product has at least one method that meets the criterion without known defects or meets with equivalent facilitation.
- **Partially Supports**: Some functionality of the product does not meet the criterion.
- **Does Not Support**: The majority of product functionality does not meet the criterion.
- **Not Applicable**: The criterion is not relevant to the product.
- **Not Evaluated**: The product has not been evaluated against the criterion. This can only be used in WCAG Level AAA criteria.

Our recommended workflow for working long term with VPATs is below:

1. Complete an initial VPAT that just describes your ebooks (called Electronic Docs on the VPAT) as a whole and uses your existing knowledge of your workflows to complete it (not a full audit). This is part of our Getting Started advice.

2. Complete an audit of your ebooks and use this to complete a fuller VPAT, that ideally gets updated every year.

- Depending on the size of your catalogue, you might want to split this work in a meaningful way. The most obvious one might be to look at books published 2018 onwards, as most accessibility legislation does not apply before this date.
- Complete all of the success criterion that show 'Electronic Docs' on the VPAT (this will be a few more than those we recommend in the initial VPAT) up to level AA. For any that are Not Applicable, the ITI recommend that you actually assess this as Supports, stating, "if there is no content to which a success criterion applies, the success criterion is satisfied."
- Considering the 'remarks and explanations' column more fully might include providing:
    - Information regarding the testing of a given criteria.
    - Information on application dependencies to support accessibility (e.g. OS, app frameworks, browsers recommended).
    - How the customer can find more information about accessibility issues. One method can be to include the bug ID where customers can call the company's customer support to get additional information.
    - Known workarounds for accessibility issues.

3. Audit the accessibility of your website (called Web on the VPAT) and you could consider producing a separate VPAT for this, although there would not be many situations where this would be used aside from your own reference.

ITI's VPAT Training Modules and Additional Resources

VPAT® 101: Introduction to the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (YouTube)

Deque Understanding your VPAT

Examples

Open Book Publishers

Liverpool University Press (Atypon)

Scholarly Publishing Collective

Science Open

Wiley Online Library

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