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How Blind People Surf the Web

The vision impaired have a few options for surfing the web. The main way this is achieved is through screen reading software, such as the voiceover function on Mac OS or Microsoft Narrator on Windows. This software reads the text on the webpage in a linear way, which includes navigation elements and image alt text. There is also a peripheral device that translates the text into braille for those that prefer to read that way. However, the internet is designed almost completely with visuals in mind, so it is often not intuitive unless the site is designed with these people in mind.

Websites are often laid out in a jumbled way that makes it difficult for screen reading software to read the text in chronological order. Web developers can make sure their sites are W3C, HTML compliant (something that is often disregarded), which will ensure that as many people as possible are able to access your site in a reliable way. However, even a compliant site can be overly complicated, so some people will use a simplified version of a site, such as a mobile version of Facebook. Making sure you have a simplified version of your site and keeping updates to the structure of the site can make it easier on the vision impaired to use it without adapting to large structural changes on a regular basis. Web developers can also focus on keeping their tags consistent. The <em> and <i> tags are often viewed as interchangeable, but they *sound* different on screen reading software. Additionally, screen reading software will read the alt text on an image so that the vision impaired can still have an idea of what they are viewing. Making sure to include alt text and making it comprehensive can make things much easier for these people.

On a bright note, the internet is moving more towards touchscreen devices such as tablets and phones more and more. These devices are mostly configured very well to provide universal access, and it is easier to use a touchscreen as a blind person than try to move a mouse around and press buttons because the layout of a touchscreen is always consistent and everything is narrated. The downside is that some apps are not configured for voiceover, so it will take some time to get everyone up to speed. Overall, touchscreens are still the way to go for the vision impaired.

**References**

<http://gizmodo.com/5620079/giz-explains-how-blind-people-see-the-internet>

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