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Using the Internet without Sight

According to the CDC, over 1.3 million Americans are legally blind in the United States. The Internet has become an integral part of American society, with business matters, health data, social life, and education all taking place there. When those of us who are fortunate enough to have sight think of the internet, we have a very different perspective on it than those who lack sight. The Internet is a very visual experience, with most of its use being relegated to sight. While sound does exist on the Internet, it is by no means the default, primary method of navigation. Sight is essential to being able to use a mouse to see where you are pointing or for a keyboard to see what you are typing. For those that are vision impaired, there are two options for navigating the 'net. The first option is a text-to-speech reader. A user would download a screen reader that essentially reads all text displayed on a page. This can be a very time-consuming process, as most websites contain lots of text that are not really organized chronologically. If there are many links at the top of the page, it can take a while for a text-to-speech program to get through them. Web designers and programmers need to put content into organized boxes, with content grouped together and ordered logically. The other tool the visually impaired use are braille readers. These readers translate text into braille, with little dots that can rise-and-fall to form braille characters. The way websites are written is nested and out-of-order, unlike how screen-reading software and braille readers work. Programmers should caption all images and describe what is being depicted. Correctly labeling HTML elements is important, as readers could ignore heading and skip right to the body. Navigating the website should not use Flash elements. Form elements need to be labeled and logical.

Works Cited

<http://www.id-book.com/preece/whatisitlike.html>

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