CASE STUDY

Accessibility testing delivers 508 compliance to federal agency

Guidehouse helps federal agency navigate technical complexity to create an accessible, user-friendly dashboard for critical processes.

Challenge

One of the largest federal government agencies developed a new digital dashboard for internal use by employees, allowing its staff to complete a range of mission-critical processes more efficiently and effectively.

However, the agency's developers soon realized the dashboard did not address the necessary accessibility standards for all users. More specifically, the dashboard would not meet compliance requirements for accessibility regulations as outlined in laws such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. In addition, the development team did not have experience testing for accessibility and needed resources to create a test plan for future use by the contracting team.

Given the strict requirements for accessibility in the public sector, if the dashboard were to be deployed without meeting the compliance requirements, this would risk legal concerns and prevent important processes and workflows from being completed effectively by key personnel.

Making this digital platform fully accessible—and 508-compliant—became a top priority for the agency, as the dashboard's successful deployment was urgent. It was equally important to solve this problem for the benefit of the platform's overall user experience (UX), because accessibility is often directly linked to usability. But doing

so would require support from external consultants with the technical expertise to navigate the complexity of the platforms and tools involved.

The challenge was to ensure all accessibility testing was seamless and rapid in execution, so the dashboard could quickly be made as accessible and user-friendly as possible for all users.

Approach

The agency sought the help of Guidehouse to ensure the internal developers could guarantee the dashboard was accessible and meeting 508 compliance.

This needed to be done using only demos, as Guidehouse consultants could not be given access to the agency's dashboard, which added an additional level of difficulty to the project. Still, the Guidehouse team was able to quickly learn the nuances and intricacies of the dashboard without direct access.

From there, the team developed a comprehensive plan for accessibility testing, which contained recommendations for accessibility auditing tools, remediation techniques, and more. This included who should test and what should be tested, as well as when and how to test it.

Both manual and automated testing processes were recommended to assess the dashboard completely for all aspects of accessibility. That entailed deploying a range of solutions, including specific 508 compliance testing tools.

The agency members benefited from close support and guidance from Guidehouse to help them understand the testing process, how to prioritize defects found during testing, and other important steps.

This solution was designed specifically so that that all users, regardless of ability, will be able to access and use the dashboard comfortably with a positive UX. This includes people with visual, auditory, motor, cognitive, and other disabilities.

Despite having no direct access to the dashboard and working in an extremely short timeframe, the Guidehouse team successfully developed an in-depth understanding of the testing criteria, and the diverse methods required to test all sections of the dashboard for accessibility.

To support this testing plan, the Guidehouse team tailored the HHS Accessibility Checklist to the specifications of the agency's custom platform. The HHS Accessibility

which provides a standardized format for testing digital products. Implementing all items on this checklist would ensure 508 compliance, as well as adherence to other regulations, and generate far greater usability for the dashboard.

Impact

Guidehouse delivered the project at a rapid pace and the accessibility plan was soon approved by the agency, giving the internal developers clear, thorough guidance to test the platform, and to then make the dashboard fully compliant and accessible for all users.

This accessibility plan has also equipped other areas of the organization, including those involved with additional Guidehouse projects running within this same federal agency, to make their digital products more accessible and 508-compliant.

A more accessible dashboard will improve the UX for all employees, not just those with accessibility needs, which will significantly enhance the value and return on investment (ROI) the solution can deliver back to the agency.

For instance, implementing this project will help improve the dashboard's usability, which will in turn have positive impacts on user productivity, efficiency, satisfaction, and more.

And, crucially, compliance with strict public sector regulations is now guaranteed, giving the agency peace of mind and confidence in their mission-critical digital processes.

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