

R

The State of Website Accessibility 2024



Research
Powered
Content

In partnership with



Contents

- 3 Foreword by Crownpeak
- 4 Executive summary
- 5 Drivers of web accessibility investment
- 9 Accessibility maturity and approach to testing
- 11 Overcoming challenges through investment
- 13 Working with accessibility partners
- 15 Concluding recommendations
- 16 Appendix - respondent profiles



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Foreword by Crownpeak

by **Samuel Monti**
CEO, Crownpeak



Digital accessibility solutions enable businesses to ensure equal access to their digital assets as well as the quality, compliance, and performance of those properties. By combining the power of automation with expert manual testing and remediation services, organizations can offer accessible digital experiences that drive user engagement through increased access, higher customer loyalty, optimized SEO, and reduced potential legal exposure by meeting the regulations.

Without digital accessibility, organizations expose themselves to unnecessary legal and reputational risks, reduced website performance and poor customer experiences. For growing enterprises with multiple websites using varying technologies, complying with web accessibility guidelines becomes more complex, only increasing the risk of missed opportunities and lost revenue.

This survey and accompanying report provide valuable insight into how organizations are planning on meeting new accessibility regulations, what the benefits of working with an accessibility partner are, the drivers of web accessibility investment and more.

We hope this report provides you with valuable insights into web accessibility for both the current state and the future.

Executive summary

Businesses looking to improve the accessibility of their websites are driven primarily by the various commercial opportunities, not just the risk of legal action.

This is the key finding from The State of Website Accessibility 2024 report, carried out by London Research in association with Crownpeak. And it informs a number of other important insights. These include:

- The biggest single barrier to improved website accessibility is the organization having a decentralized or fragmented approach to the management of its digital properties, followed by finding the right technology partner and the lack of internal knowledge of best practices.
- Underlying most of the other challenges reported by companies is a failure to communicate the importance of the issue to senior management. Demonstrating the business case and potential ROI should lead to executive buy-in and the release of funds for implementation. It might even help persuade the C-suite that a more coherent approach to the management of the digital estate is a good idea.
- The most important reason for working with an external accessibility partner is that the partnership offers the client company access to solutions that save them time and money. Clients also value access to their partners' experience and legal knowledge. The other major benefit cited is that working with a partner encourages the client business to take a more strategic and less piecemeal approach to accessibility.
- Almost three-quarters of respondents plan to increase their investment in technology to improve accessibility in the next 12 months. Over half plan to spend more with external partners, or to improve their internal resourcing.
- Only half of respondents (49%) describe their awareness of the size of the website accessibility commercial opportunity as advanced. In comparison, 61% of businesses rate their understanding of their legal obligations as advanced.

The report's recommendations are:

- 1. Educate the exec.** This will pave the way for greater investment, increased resourcing and, ideally, a more strategic approach. But it has to be done in terms they understand.
- 2. Build the business case.** Hand in hand with outlining the potential costs and benefits, you need to explain how much investment you need, how it's going to be spent, and how you'll measure success.
- 3. Encourage a strategic approach.** Restructuring the organization to unify control of accessibility makes it easier to implement solutions at scale, as well as to get maximum value out of any partners you work with.
- 4. Recognize the limits of your knowledge.** Working with experienced partners should help you to comply with the appropriate regulations, while also giving you access to the skills and tools you need to boost your business performance. It's also a powerful way to demonstrate your commitment to accessibility if you hit problems before you get there.

Methodology

This research is based on a survey of 200 organizations in the United States and Europe carried out by London Research in July 2023. All survey respondents are senior managers and above who have responsibility for web accessibility within their organizations, and work for companies with at least \$20 million in annual revenue, and a minimum of 500 pages and 10,000 unique monthly visitors across their digital properties.

Please see the [appendix](#) to this report for more information about the profile of survey respondents.

Section 1

Drivers of web accessibility investment

There are two broad reasons for businesses to invest in the accessibility of their websites; the carrot of commercial advantage, and the stick of legislation.

Commercial benefits of accessibility include being able to access a broader audience. [The World Health Organization](#) estimates there are 1.3 billion people in the global population who are living with an impairment. According to the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), up to one in four adults in the United States describe themselves as having an impairment. That's a big market to turn your back on. Beyond that, accessibility efforts can also improve the online experience for people who might not consider themselves as having an impairment, such as those who are color-blind.

Being seen as a business that “does the right thing” around accessibility is increasingly important for customers and potential employees as tolerance for all kinds of discrimination falls. [Harris Poll research](#) last year found that 82% of shoppers want a brand's values to align with their own, and three-quarters said they ‘had parted ways with a brand over a conflict in values’. Meanwhile, 44% of millennials and 49% of Gen Z told [Deloitte](#) researchers that they've made choices over the type of work they are prepared to do, or organizations they'd work for, based on their personal ethics.

Getting accessibility right also helps with marketing and advertising. The design techniques that make websites accessible also support technical and on-page SEO. Best-in-kind accessibility providers say their customers regularly experience an uplift of as much as 20% in their SEO and overall marketing performance.



Breaking the law

As well as missed business opportunities, ignoring website accessibility also comes with significant legal risks. [Experts estimate](#) the total number of digital accessibility lawsuits in the US had reached 4,220 by the end of 2023, compared to 4,035 in 2022 and 4,011 in 2021. And this is just part of the story; it doesn't include the number of demand letters that businesses receive that are settled long before the courts get involved.

In the EU, enforcement of the 2022 European Accessibility Act will begin on 28 June 2025. The EAA goes beyond previous EU accessibility legislation, which mainly applied to public sector organizations, to cover the private sector as well.

The goals of the EAA are twofold. By synchronizing accessibility regulations across all EU member states, it aims to improve the functioning of the EU's internal market for accessible products and services – including software, hardware, websites, and apps and services. This will also improve the experience of the estimated 135 million Europeans who are living with an impairment.

Importantly, the EAA applies to private companies that provide products or services that are sold or used within the EU, regardless of where the companies themselves are based. So companies based outside the EU but doing business within it face the same choice as they did with GDPR. Do they attempt to create an accessibility system for domestic customers that adheres to their own national standards, and another for their customers from the EU? Or do they follow a single set of technical standards universally?

This is the question that businesses in the UK face. The UK left the EU before the EAA could be written into law and, to date, the UK government has not confirmed whether it will do so. But any UK company doing business in the EU will still need to comply with the EAA, while even those that don't will also find themselves competing with EAA-compliant EU businesses selling into the UK, with the resulting loss of competitive advantage.

Meanwhile, in the US, web accessibility falls under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This was signed into law in 1990 to prohibit discrimination against disabled people in all areas of public life. Title III of the Act prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation against persons with disabilities. In early 2022, the Department of Justice confirmed that websites are considered places of public accommodation under the ADA legislation. As a result, websites are now a prime target for accessibility claims, for example from people who claim they are unable to use a website because of its incompatibility with screen reader software.

Neither the EAA nor the ADA provides any technical accessibility standards with which businesses must comply to ensure their website is accessible, but [experts](#) recommend following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 level AA as a minimum requirement.

What’s driving investment in accessibility?

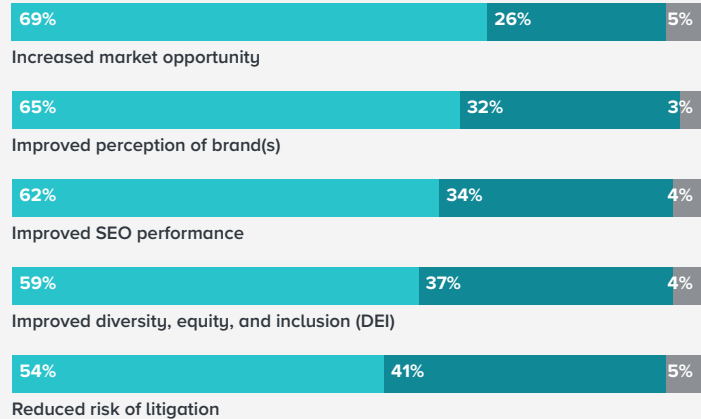
So how important are these factors when businesses are considering the accessibility of their websites (*Figure 1*)? Perhaps surprisingly, reducing the risk of litigation is the lowest priority for survey respondents (a major driver for 54%). Business improvement ranks significantly higher; increased market opportunity is a major driver for 69%, improved brand perception for 65%, and improved SEO performance for 62%.

The relatively low importance attached to regulatory compliance is all the more perplexing given that two-thirds of respondents (65%) said their organization had faced litigation as a result of inaccessible features on its digital properties. However, this is not to say businesses are ignoring their legal responsibilities. When asked when they planned to meet the requirements of the EAA, a fifth (21%) said they already do, more than a quarter (28%) say they plan to do so this year, and two-fifths (42%) plan to do so next year (*Figure 2*). Only 7% plan to leave it until the last minute, and make the changes required of them in 2025.

FIGURE 1

What are the main drivers of website accessibility within your business?

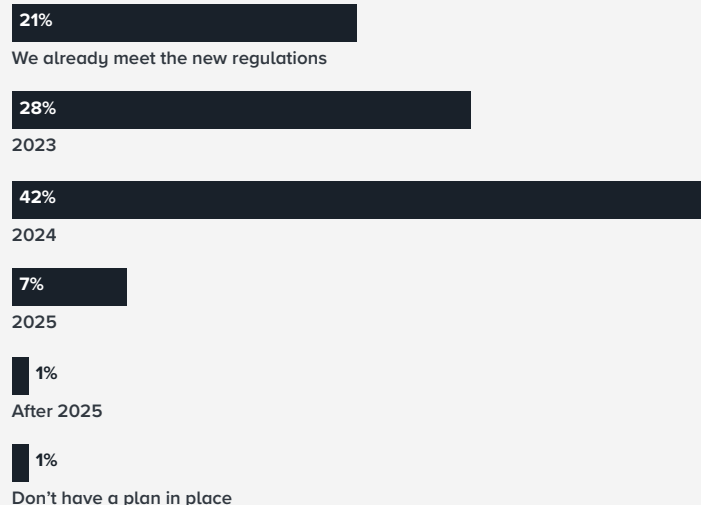
- Major driver
- Minor driver
- Not a driver



Commercial opportunities rank higher than litigation risk management as the main drivers of website accessibility.

FIGURE 2

When do you plan on meeting new accessibility regulations (i.e. European Accessibility Act)?



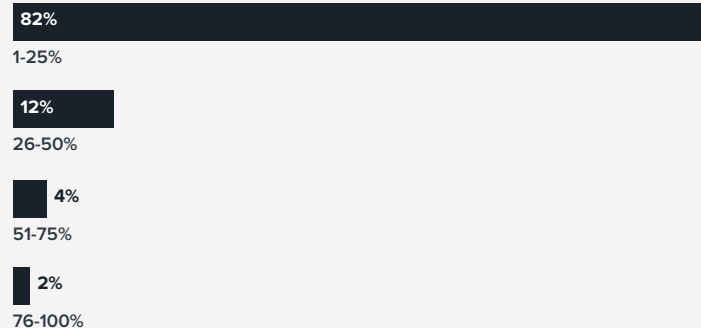
Almost half of companies said they already met new regulations (21%), or were on track to do so by the end of 2023 (28%).



In contrast to the relatively low priority given to reducing their risk of being sued, more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents said they could quantify the amount of revenue lost to their business due to website accessibility issues. And more than four out of five (82%) estimated they could increase their revenue by up to 25% as a result of having more accessible websites (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

By what percentage do you estimate you could increase your revenue as a result of having more accessible websites?
(Average: 17%)



On average, survey respondents said their companies could increase their revenue by 17% if they had more accessible websites.

Section 2

Accessibility maturity and approach to testing

Survey respondents are bullish about their progress in website accessibility. Almost all rate their maturity as better than ‘basic’, and in most areas the majority feel they are ‘advanced’ (*Figure 4*).

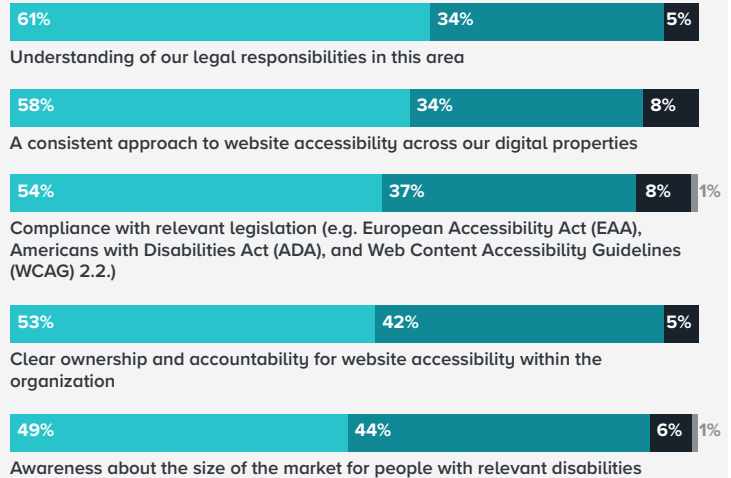
But given the importance most businesses attach to the increased market opportunity accessibility brings (*Figure 1*), it’s notable that only half of respondents (49%) describe their awareness of the size of this opportunity as advanced. In comparison, most businesses rate the maturity of their understanding of – and compliance with – their legal obligations as advanced (61% and 54%, respectively), and similar proportions have the same view of their approach to governance in this area.

Figure 4 shows that just over half of survey respondents (53%) feel their organization is advanced in establishing clear ownership and accountability for website accessibility. The person most likely to hold ultimate responsibility in this area is the head of IT security, risk & compliance (half of businesses surveyed). Only 12% of respondents have a head of accessibility to take on that role, while a slightly smaller proportion (11%) give the job to their head of UX/UI/design (*Figure 5*).

FIGURE 4

How do you rate your organization’s website accessibility maturity in the following areas?

- Advanced
- Intermediate
- Basic
- Non-existent



Companies are more likely to have an advanced understanding of their legal responsibilities than they are about the size of the market for people with relevant disabilities.

Testing best practices

A further measure of a business's maturity in accessibility is the approach it takes to testing. Expert advice is to use a combination of manual and automated techniques. Even the best automated tools cannot detect more than about 30% to 40% of issues under WCAG. This means manual testing is needed for the remainder. As *Figure 6* shows, three-quarters (76%) of respondents have adopted this best practice approach.

Further evidence of how seriously businesses are taking accessibility can be seen in *Figure 7*. The vast majority (89%) of respondents highlighted that they have paid for some or all of the tools they use for accessibility testing.

“We review on the automated side and then also do manual testing through our third party vendor. Manual testing just picks up more than the automated does. Automated testing seems like it's very high level, and it only picks up about 40% of the errors on the site, so you really need a manual review in order to test certain other aspects of functionality.”

Survey respondent

FIGURE 5

Who within your business is responsible for your accessibility efforts?

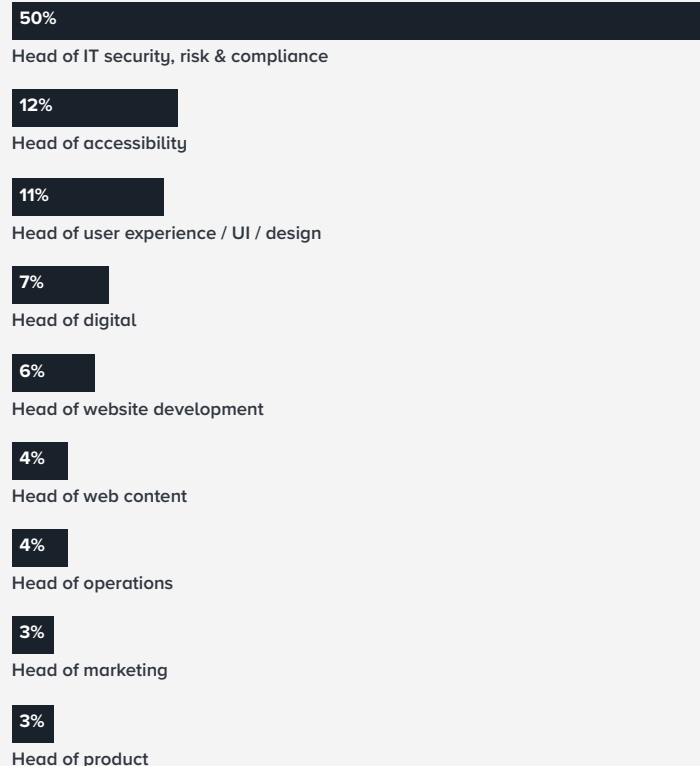


FIGURE 6

How would you describe your approach to accessibility testing?

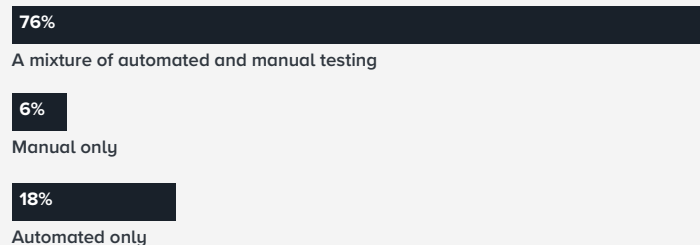
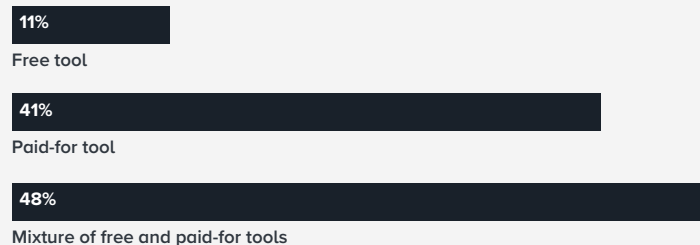


FIGURE 7

Do you use free or paid-for testing tools for accessibility?



Section 3

Overcoming challenges through investment

Section 1 showed that the vast majority of survey respondents recognize the benefits of improving website accessibility, from reducing the risk of being sued to increasing the market they can address.

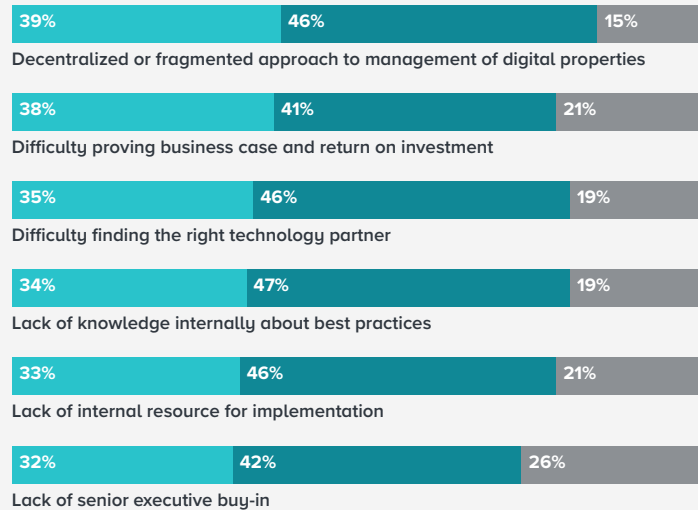
At the same time, only between a half and two-thirds describe themselves as advanced in their pursuit of these various benefits. So what's holding the others back?

A number of the barriers respondents face are shown in *Figure 8*. Top of the list is their organization having a decentralized or fragmented approach to the management of its digital properties (seen as a major challenge by 39% of respondents). Just over a third describe finding the right technology partner and the lack of internal knowledge of best practices in similar terms. But all the other barriers cited boil down to the same thing – a failure to communicate the importance of the issue to senior management. Demonstrating the business case and potential ROI should lead to executive buy-in and the release of funds for implementation. It might even help persuade the C-suite that a more coherent approach to the management of the online estate is a good idea.

FIGURE 8

What are the main challenges preventing you from having more accessible digital properties?

- Major challenge
- Minor challenge
- Not a challenge



“Getting budget for something like this is actually quite difficult. A lot of people don’t see the upside to investing in it, but I’ve been able to get a decent amount of budget in order to move forward as much as possible. For us, it’s about making our content available to as wide an audience as possible. So in gaming, there’s a significant sector of the population of disabled gamers that want to be able to access our content. We also run several health-related websites, so we really want to make sure we’re reaching the widest audience possible, especially people who we know are coming to our sites because the content is very relevant to their lives.”

Survey respondent



However, it's important to keep this in perspective. Only a third of respondents say lack of resources is a major challenge (a further 46% say it's a minor one). This corresponds to the findings shown in *Figure 9*, which looks at respondents' investment plans around accessibility.

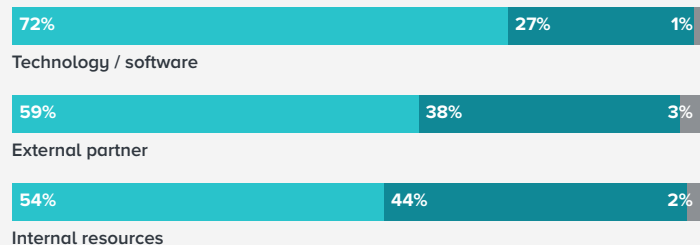
The research found that almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) plan to increase their investment in technology to improve accessibility in the next 12 months. Over half plan to spend more with external partners (59%), or to improve their internal resources (54%).

Virtually no-one plans to reduce their investment in any of these areas, which is interesting given 21% of respondents say they already meet the requirements of the EAA. This reinforces the finding that commercial considerations are indeed more important to businesses than legal compliance.

FIGURE 9

Are you planning to increase or decrease your investment in accessibility in the next 12 months?

- Increase
- Keep the same
- Decrease



Almost three-quarters (72%) of companies are planning to increase their website accessibility technology investment in the next 12 months.

Section 4

Working with accessibility partners

The previous section showed that almost two-thirds of survey respondents plan to increase the amount they spend with external accessibility partners over the next 12 months. *Figure 10* shows that three-quarters (75%) are already working with such partners, while a further fifth (21%) are planning to.

The perceived benefits of working with a specialist partner are shown in *Figure 11*. The most important is that the partnership offers the client company access to solutions that save them time and money (cited by 76% of respondents). Linked to this is the access to partners' experience and know-how (cited by 65%) and to their legal knowledge (61%).

Interestingly, two-thirds of respondents said that working with a partner gave them the ability to show commitment to – and progress towards – improved compliance. This can prove extremely important in responding to demand letters and legal claims that come in before the work is finished.

The other major benefit (cited by 62% of respondents) is that working with a partner encourages the client business to take a more strategic and less piecemeal approach to accessibility. This should come as little surprise, given that the biggest challenge organizations say they face in driving their accessibility agenda is a decentralized or fragmented approach to the management of their digital properties (*Figure 8*).

FIGURE 10

Do you currently work with a specialist accessibility or digital quality management supplier or vendor?

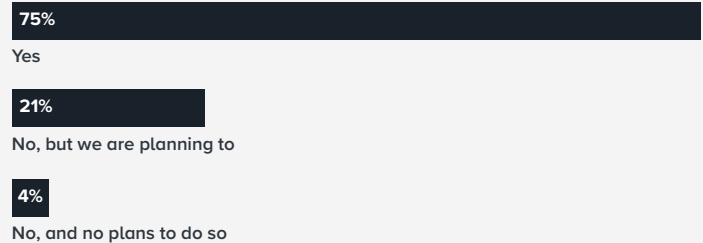
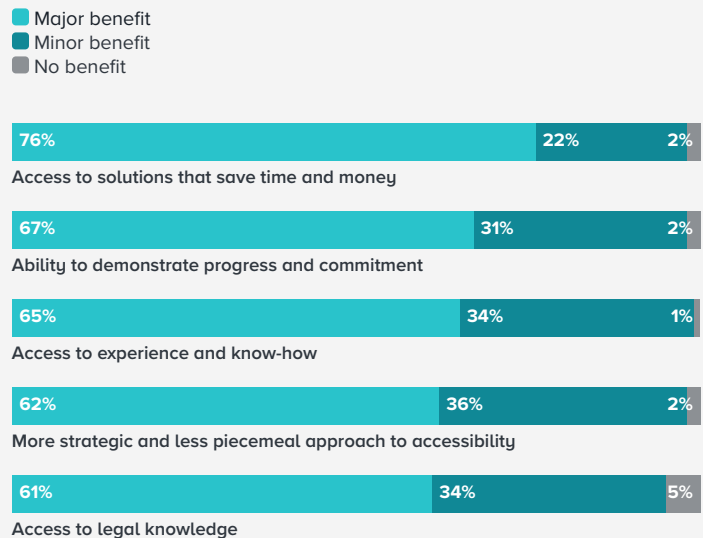


FIGURE 11

What do you see as the benefits of working with an accessibility partner?



Access to solutions that save time and money are the most widely recognized benefits of working with an accessibility partner.



Looking forward, what do those respondents who are increasing or maintaining their investment with external partners expect for their money?

The findings shown in *Figure 12* back up those from *Figure 11*. Once again they show that businesses want their partners to save them money, and to help them in areas where specialist expertise is necessary.

FIGURE 12

What do you hope to achieve with an accessibility partner?



Better SEO, user experience, and improved testing efficiency are the most widely sought-after objectives when working with an accessibility partner.

Concluding recommendations

Educate the exec. The biggest underlying challenge when improving website accessibility is lack of understanding and appreciation at the exec level. Resolving this will pave the way for greater investment, increased resourcing and, ideally, a more strategic approach. That means making sure they understand both the size of the opportunity accessibility offers, and the size of the risk they're taking by ignoring it. And it means doing so in terms they understand. Think bottom line rather than WCAG checklists.

Build the business case. Hand in hand with outlining the potential costs and benefits, you need to explain how much investment you need, how it's going to be spent, and how you'll measure success.

Encourage a strategic approach. The single biggest problem that companies face with accessibility is the fragmentation of their online estate. Restructuring the organization to unify control of accessibility makes it easier to implement solutions at scale, as well as to get maximum value out of any partners you work with.

Recognize the limits of your knowledge. Working with experienced partners should help you to comply with the appropriate regulations while also giving you access to the skills and tools you need to boost your business performance. It's also a powerful way to demonstrate your commitment to accessibility if you hit problems before you get there.

“The most important thing for teams to be mindful of is building accessibility into design, instead of having to go back and fix a bunch of issues on your sites. If you have a brand new website, or you're starting a new company, building accessibility in from the beginning makes it a lot easier. And it's just a good practice overall.”

Survey respondent

Appendix

Respondent profiles

FIGURE 13

How many web pages does your company have across its digital properties?



FIGURE 15

To what degree are you responsible for the accessibility of your company's websites?

- Fully responsible
- Partly responsible

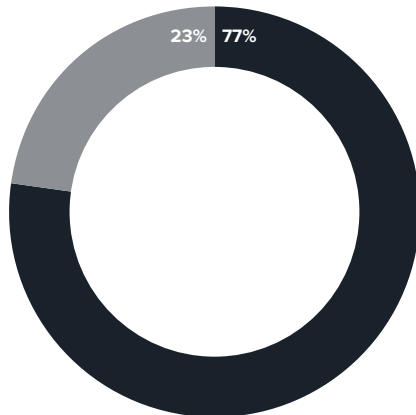


FIGURE 14

In terms of unique visitors per month, what is your level of website traffic across all digital properties?

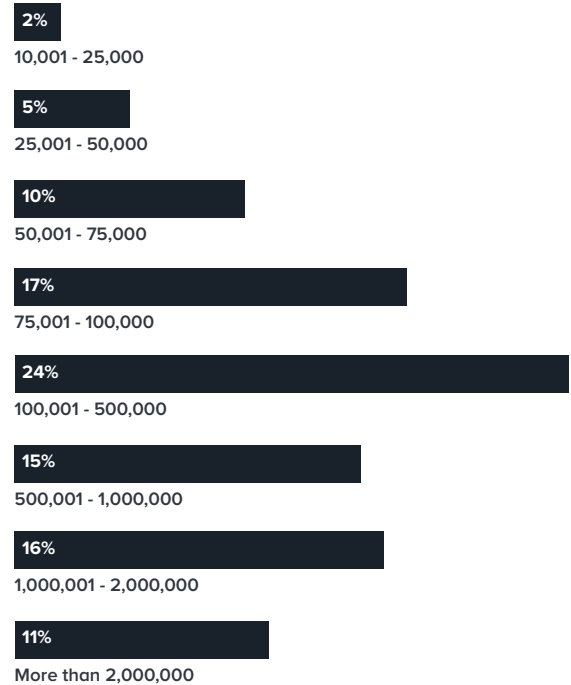


FIGURE 16

In which business sector does your company operate?

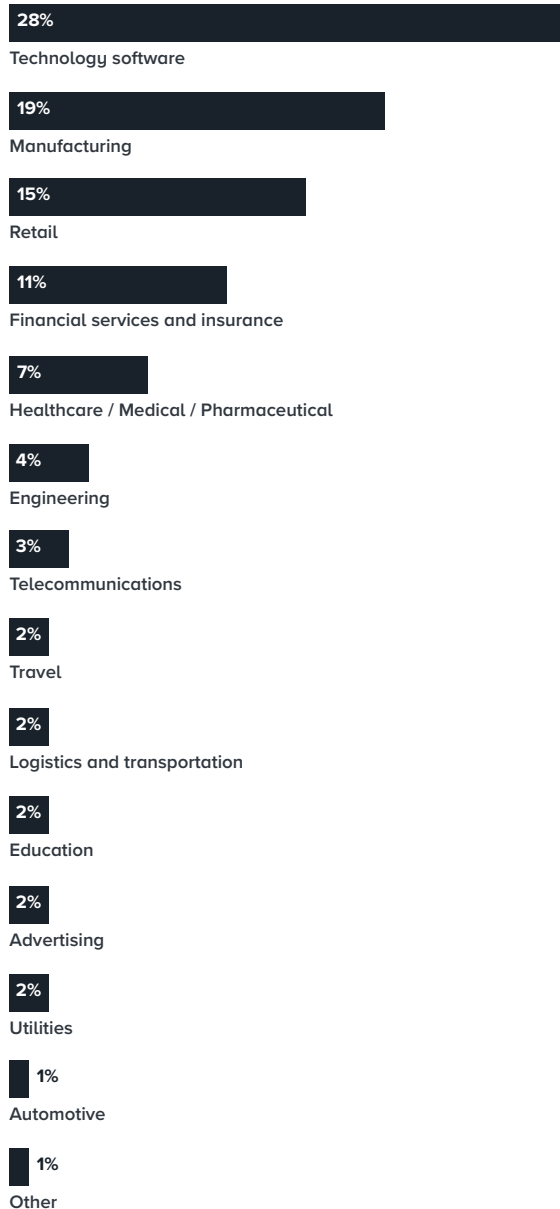


FIGURE 17

In which country are you based?

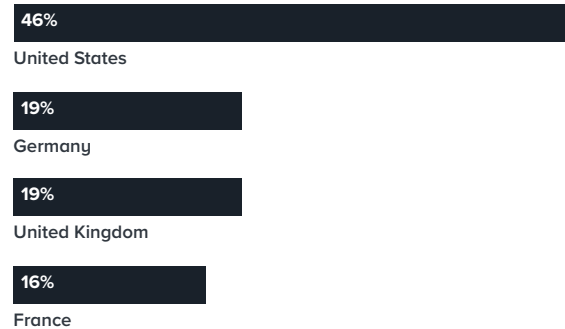


FIGURE 18

Is your business focused primarily on business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) activities?

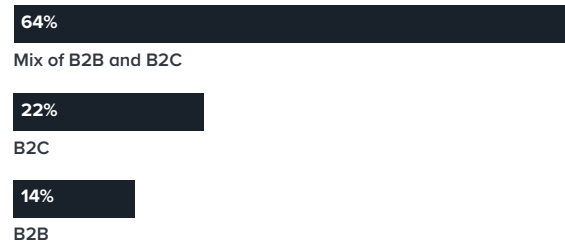


FIGURE 19

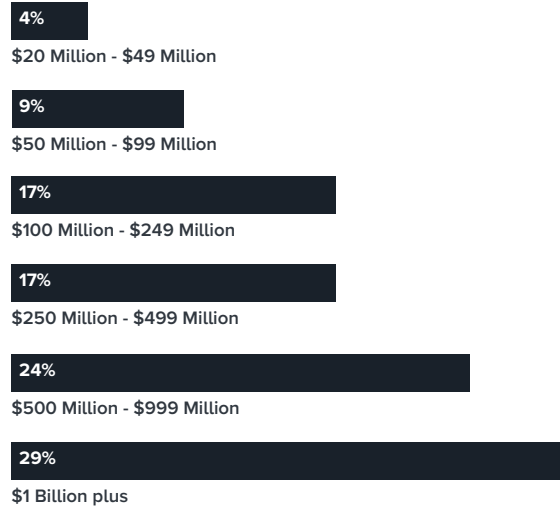
What is your annual company revenue?

FIGURE 20

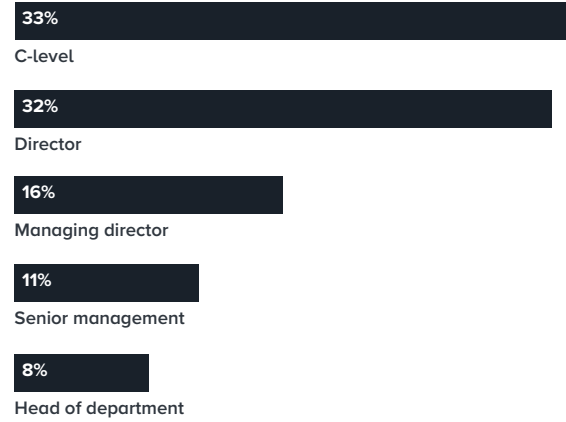
What is your level of seniority within the business?

FIGURE 21

Which business function do you work in?

About the authors



Linus Gregoriadis

Director, London Research

Linus is an experienced digital marketing analyst and business writer who co-founded London Research in 2017 as a sister company to Digital Doughnut, the world's largest community of marketers and digital professionals, and also to Demand Exchange, an advanced B2B lead generation platform. He spent more than a decade setting up and building the research function at Econsultancy, a digital research and training company now owned by Centaur Media. After leaving Econsultancy, where he oversaw the production of hundreds of survey-based trends reports, buyers' guides and best practice guides, he launched ClickZ Intelligence for B2B media company Contentive.



Michael Nutley

Digital Media and Marketing Journalist

Michael is a London Research writer specializing in digital media and marketing. He was head of content for London Research sister company Digital Doughnut between 2012 and 2016, and during that time edited the European channel of Adobe's CMO.com website.

Before that he was editor of New Media Age, the UK's leading news publication for interactive business from 2000 to 2007, and its editor-in-chief from 2007 to 2011. He has written widely about the sector, is a regular speaker in the media and at conferences, and has lectured on the future of advertising and publishing at the London College of Communications.

About us



London Research, set up by former Econsultancy research director Linus Gregoriadis, is focused on producing research-based content for B2B audiences. We are based in London, but our approach and outlook are very much international. We work predominantly, but not exclusively, with marketing technology vendors and agencies seeking to tell a compelling story based on robust research and insightful data points.

As part of Communitize Ltd, we work closely with our sister companies Digital Doughnut (a global community of more than 1.5 million marketers) and Demand Exchange (a lead generation platform), both to syndicate our research and generate high-quality leads.



Crownpeak enables customers to create tailored digital experiences, to expand their brand and grow their revenue. Clients around the world including Unilever, Bosch, Nintendo, Asos and La Redoute trust Crownpeak's cloud-native SaaS Digital Experience Platform (DXP) solutions to achieve their data-driven content goals and level up their digital experience initiatives. Founded in 2001, Crownpeak continues to expand their product suite, providing Content Management, Digital Accessibility & Quality and Product Discovery capabilities to empower customers to build their own customized and successful DXP. Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, Crownpeak has offices in cities across the globe, including Amsterdam, Dortmund, London, Münster, Newcastle and Paris. For more information, please visit www.crownpeak.com.

