HOW TO MAKE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESSIBLE

Making your social media more accessible should be a no-brainer - why wouldn't you want more people to be engaging with your brand online?

While accessibility policies can be wide-ranging and complex, they don't have to be. And the first step in making your online communications more accessible is to simply get started.

On top of this, it's entirely likely that people who require help in making social media more accessible will already have their own tools such as text-to-speech software, screen readers, etc. As such, focussing on making small changes to help ensure that your posts reach as many people as possible will be extremely beneficial.

With all of that in mind, we've put together some tips and tricks below on how to make your social media more accessible.

ADD IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Describing the images/photos that you post on social media (or blog posts), or putting alternative text (also known as 'alt text'), allows people who may not be able to fully see the images in question to create a mental picture of what a sighted person would see automatically.

If your images contain high levels of text, then including a link to your website where the text of the image can be read in full will be helpful.

However, this doesn't mean that you have to describe every single detail of the image. It would be frustrating for anyone to listen to a voiceover reading out an extremely long description, which details every single thing within an image when not all details will be relevant. Stick to the key details to help paint the picture.

ADDING IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS ON FACEBOOK / INSTAGRAM / TWITTER

Facebook: Upload your photo, then click 'edit photo' and write your description in the 'Alternative text' box. Then just click save and you're ready to publish.

Instagram: For feed posts, upload your photo, click next, then 'advanced settings' and then click 'write alt text'. Then simply add your description and click done before sharing as normal. Currently Instagram Stories don't have the option to add image descriptions, so instead write a description in your post if possible.

Twitter: It's possible to add a separate image description to an image on Twitter; saving you crucial time and characters. You need to activate the 'Image Descriptions' feature, which you can find in 'Twitter Settings', under the 'Accessibility' tab. After that, simply attach your image as normal and then click 'Alt' to add your description, and post as normal.

USE CAMELCASE IN HASHTAGS

When you're using hashtags in your social media posts, it is important to use CamelCase and capitalise the first letter of every word. This allows screen readers to read out the words in the hashtag correctly. As a bonus, it will also make them easier for everybody else to read. For example, you would write #TheBetterBusinessNetwork, rather than #thebetterbusinessnetwork.

LESS EMOJIS

Text-to-speech software reads out a description for every single emoji which is used, so be careful with the amount of emojis you include. For example, if someone puts four smiley face emojis, the software will read out: "smiley face smiley face smiley face smiley face ".

VIDEOS: AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

So long as videos are audio-led they don't need to be audio described. This means that the audio must be equally as important as what is on the screen, ie: the video should contain the same message, both audibly and visually. If it doesn't, try adding a description of what is happening within the video either as a follow-up tweet, or as part of the caption / video description.

VIDEOS: SUBTITLES

Where possible, in order to make them fully accessible, videos should have subtitles. There are a variety of free apps available which make adding subtitles to your videos simple – have a browse via Google and you're sure to find one that works for you.

NEW FEATURES

The above tips and tricks are the basics of accessibility within social media. But this is a constantly evolving process and new tools, resources, etc. are always becoming available and so it's worth regularly checking for new accessibility features on the relevant platforms you use.

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The UK government have a useful website that provides a large amount of information on accessibility policies, tools, tips, tricks and resources that's certainly worth your time as well: https://accessibility.blog.gov.uk/

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