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EDIT 526

Accessibility of www.espn.com

ESPN Homepage

The home page for ESPN is packed with clusters of content in three columns. A person with ADD or ADHD might have trouble navigating to their originally intended destination because there are so many things to look at on the opening page. However, the advertising itself is not too distracting as there is no movement or flashing, just additional text and pictures. Also, the advertising is contained at the top and bottom of the pages, so the main content of the page is sandwiched between which makes the advertisements easier to ignore. I do think that the size and number of tabs and links might be a problem for someone with a motor skills deficit, although they could probably help this by enlarging the font or navigating with the keyboard instead of a jittery mouse and cursor.

The homepage seems easy to navigate if you recognize that the tabs will take you where you want to go. A header for each page reached via the tabs tells the user to where they have navigated. The main page uses headers, but there are so many boxes with content that the headers are not as effective as they would be for a simpler set of web pages. The navigation menu uses a bulleted list, although it makes the page really long. The double rows of tabs themselves are hyperlinks and the drop-down sub-menus have bulleted lists, although these are not available with styles turned off. The article links are all in bulleted lists as well.

The embedded news video is a Flash object. It is possible to tab to the controls. Much of the information is audio only, so it would not be accessible to a deaf person. I don't think the

video clips necessarily have written equivalent elsewhere. It is possible to understand just by listening, so a blind person should be fine. The video screen is also small and I do not think it can be enlarged which might cause problems for some with visual impairments. In addition, there is so much text packed into the homepage that this might also cause problems for low vision users. At the largest font setting, the headlines are readable, as are the featured article teasers, but some of the picture boxes are not able to scale up, and some of the text is hidden. These also fail to have appropriate alt text. The College Bass Fishing championship picture says only “College”, which is succinct, but not accurate. There are several other picture boxes that have no alt text, including ads for upcoming ESPN television programming. It does not seem like the colors of the site would make it difficult for a color blind person to find things on the page. It is hard for me to tell if there is enough contrast. The site uses colored background and different colors for text to aid, sometimes for style, sometimes for navigation. I think it might cause issues for some users.

One note about browsers: Explorer has a clearly labeled ‘Accessibility’ setting tab, but Firefox seems to have those same options scattered around different tabs. Opera has a brilliant set of options under View-Style for page viewing wherein a user can tailor the web pages to meet their individual preferences or needs. It seems like the most accessibility friendly browser out of the box.

There is a Flash object that is showing a picture slide show automatically. It is possible to pause the slides and this button can be accessed using the keyboard. There are so many buttons on this page, it is time consuming to tab through all of them. This could be an issue for someone with ADD or a memory deficit. The one noticeably inaccessible thing when navigating

with the keyboard is the drop-down sub-menus which are not available without the mouse. The only option is to actually go to the page linked by the tab and then see what is there.

For the text entry boxes at the top of the screen, if the screen reader recognizes the adjacent words, then it should be able to identify the member login and search boxes, but these don't seem to be labeled explicitly in the source code. This could pose a problem for a visually impaired user, but one who was web savvy could problem work around it.

The site <http://espn.go.com> did not pass any of the validators. It was hammered by the W3C validator: 901 errors came up. It is interesting that there can be so many 'errors' while from the user's perspective (at least a user with no accessibility issues) the website seems to function well.

Wave detected 11 errors. The difference in how these two sites show the errors in interesting, in that the Wave site's method has more options to make the information more useful to a range of expertise; there is not an assumption of high level of skill. Most of these errors were no alt text for images and linked images.

Cynthiasays was different in that it provided options to relate information on the accessibility to associated laws and standards. One error description pointed out that users prone to seizures can be protected by having no flashing images between 2hz and 55hz. Knowing this gives a webmaster a very specific guideline to follow. I don't think that most people consciously notice a flicker above about 30 frames per second since that about the rate of film projectors in theaters. So a visual check of a webpage might not reveal the 30-55hz range that could set off a seizure.

Main Page Tennis

The tennis page has about as much going on as the home page. The same issues with finding content apply, as does the advertising sandwich and the absent alt text for pictures. The way tabs aid in navigation may become apparent once off of the home page as headers that match tabs appear above the tab. I suppose the presence of tabs might help people with memory deficits because they would act as reminders about what else is contained elsewhere in the sight. There is the same potential problem with screen readers identifying search and member login boxes because those boxes appear to be in a header found on every page.

Hovering the mouse over the tennis news headlines results in a pop-up of the first few lines of the article. This feature is not available if the keyboard alone is used to navigate the page. Enlarging the font creates some problems with text overlap in the section with the “Must Read” header. The links to the articles in this same section overlap the teaser text when styles are turned off even with the font back to medium.

There is a flash video player that is accessible via the keyboard. The video is the same size and place as the on the homepage. There is commentary on the video, but the commentary cannot keep pace with the action shown, so the commentary would leave a blind user not knowing what was happening.

The W3C validator found 328 errors in the Tennis page. There are so many errors, it is difficult for me to get a sense of what type of errors are the most prominent. I certainly cannot tell which errors are related to accessibility.

Wave found 10 errors. They are mostly alt text issues again. It’s funny that they use the international divers below the water symbol to represent the alt text that should be ‘submerged’ below the image, ready to surface when necessary.

After using Cynthiasays a couple of times, I think I prefer it because the errors are listed beside the plain language standards. The emphasis, or at least an equivalency of importance, is on the user's needs rather than the requirements of the programming language, as it is with the W3C validator.

Tennis Schedule

This page is very neatly laid out. It has the same header and footer with sign-in and search boxes as the other pages. This time, there is some advertising sandwiched between content. There are multiple schedule and results tables, but they all have the same format and are stacked such that the reader can flow from table to table without looking at the column and row headings. Even at the largest font, the cell content is pretty readable with the exception of the first few that are partially covered by an advertisement that is to the right of the content. This is the only time the advertising is really a problem. It frames the content top, bottom, and right side, but does not seem distracting. There are no table headers `<th>` in the tennis page's source code, but everything seems to be labeled clearly. A screen reader should be able to navigate the table using arrow keys, and it seems like the content would be self-explanatory. There is a row of pictures that are links to articles, but there is no alt text for the pictures.

The W3C validator found 384 errors on the Tennis schedule page. Wave found 7 errors with alt text again. More problems with Cynthiasays.

Tennis Player's Page

The headers here are much more functional as there is only one column of content. The tables here are simple, although this table has no table header either.

The advertising is becoming distracting because I'm becoming nauseated by the "Goodbye to Yellow Teeth" link. There is also some content that has split by this block of ads as it was on the Tennis schedule page. Again, this page did not pass with any of the validators and the same problems came up.

Tennis News Story Page

There is a header on this page, as well as a title. The site overall has good titles and headers. On this page, the two are identical because the body of the article is the only content on this page. Enlarging the font works well on this page. The only thing I notice is that the bullets themselves do not enlarge along with the text and so are comparatively quite small. I think it would be useful to change this because without them being visible, it creates confusion about where each headline begins. Again, this page did not pass with any of the validators.

Although the site is pretty well laid out and I didn't have much trouble finding anything I looked for, I think it might be difficult to navigate for many users with accessibility issues. What is difficult for me to do is to try to recognize what makes up my own web navigating skills, the skills that I use automatically and unconsciously, and then figure out whether I am using those skills to make up for a poorly designed site or not. My second question is how long it would someone with accessibility issues to become familiar with the site so they can, if even possible, work around the problems with the site.