

Home & business productivity, Education

Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2021: How to ensure digital environments work for everyone

[Nuance Communications](#)

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As Global Accessibility Awareness Day reaches its 10th year, explore some of the ways you can build accessibility into your organization—for employees and customers alike.

More than 1 billion people worldwide are affected by some form of disability or impairment – in fact, up to [80% of disability is invisible](#). And though the world runs on digital services, they often aren't built or optimized with accessibility in mind, which means websites, applications, and tools underserve a considerable part of the global population.

And that's what initiatives like Global Accessibility Awareness Day are working to change.

Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD), launched in 2011, growing from an idea planted by LA-based [web developer Joe Devon on his blog](#). In his work, Joe had noticed that most websites weren't optimized for accessibility—and good information sources on how to make websites more accessible were few and far between.

So, he suggested a day where developers would test their websites, fix up any accessibility issues they encountered, and share their lessons with their fellow developers. Working with Jennison Asuncion, a Canadian digital accessibility expert, Joe turned his idea into a global movement. There are hundreds of GAAD events worldwide every year, including online courses, webinars, and fundraisers.

This year, it's GAAD's 10th anniversary. If you're ready to join the movement, here are three ways you can

start building accessibility into your organization:

Create a digital accessibility statement

A digital accessibility statement is your organization's opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to inclusion. It's a straightforward way to show your users—whether they're employees or customers—how you're ensuring your digital services are user-friendly. If you haven't already created one, it's an ideal place to start your accessibility work.

Usually, digital accessibility statements are focused on web pages and follow a standard such as the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#). But it's helpful to take this further, creating an internal document where you set out your broader plans for accessibility.

Your accessibility statement can serve as a roadmap for your organization—and a checklist to remind your teams that every new project or service should take accessibility into account.

Make your digital services simpler—for everyone

As you create your accessibility statement, take the time to assess all your existing digital services, and think about ways to make them easier to use. Be sure to talk to your employees and customers about what's missing at present.

You could start by checking your web pages, apps, and systems to make sure they're compatible with accessibility tech. For example, [screen readers like JAWS and NVDA](#) are used extensively by people with visual impairments. But without the proper HTML supporting your web page, your users might find their screen readers reading out everything from page titles to the copyright boilerplate in your footer.

Improving accessibility can be as simple as adding subtitles to your videos or upping the contrast between your background and text color. But simple changes could make a huge difference to some of your employees or customers.

Reconsider your reliance on mouse and keyboard

Using a mouse and keyboard will feel like the only way to use a computer for many people. But for others, these tools can represent a physical barrier, making writing, navigation, and collaboration a challenge.

If you take away the physical requirement to type, you can make it easier for everyone to work effectively. Speech recognition solutions—[like our Dragon products](#)—can help organizations support a broader range of working styles and accessibility needs. Instead of a mouse and keyboard, they allow people to navigate apps with their voice and to create text simply by speaking.

Digital accessibility for students

Of course, it's not just the business world that needs to be more accessible—it's the world of education. And this is another area in which speech-to-text technology can be hugely influential.

In the UK, where more than 14 million people are affected by a disability, the government offers a grant known as the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to help students access any specialist equipment and support they need.

Every student who qualifies for DSA works with an experienced assessor who helps assess their needs and find the right equipment and support to succeed during their studies. Jodie Parkes, one of the assessors, has been recommending speech recognition to students for over 20 years.

Jodie works with students who have physical impairments, cognitive difficulties, mental health conditions, and other disabilities. Over the years, he's seen the technology help students overcome difficulties using a mouse and keyboard, communicating their thoughts in written form, and issues like fatigue.

With speech recognition, the physical barrier of typing is removed. "The disability effects essentially disappear for most people," said Jodie. "It's essentially popping on a headset, start talking, and things happen. And that's all there is to it." You can read more about Jodie's work in [our case study](#).

Accessibility for all

Digital accessibility is essential for inclusivity. Ensuring your systems and services are accessible will help you hire the most promising talent, reach new customers, and support both effectively. So, what could your organization improve?

You can discover more about Global Accessibility Awareness Day and how to get involved [on the organization's website](#).

Tags: [Dragon Professional Anywhere](#), [Diversity & inclusion](#), [Global Accessibility Awareness Day](#), [Productivity tools](#)

More Information

Learn more about Dragon

If you're interested in how speech-to-text could help you build more accessibility into your organization, visit our website or get in touch with one of our Dragon experts.

[Learn more](#)