



June 2009



Empowering Independent Living for the Visually Impaired

Upcoming Events

Computer Training at Ensign

Ensign Skills Center strives to help visually-impaired individuals develop the skills and strategies necessary to accomplish their goals in all stages of life. Our mission is to provide these individuals with the opportunity to enhance their life skills, independence, and self-confidence in a safe environment through training and adaptive technology. One of the needs that has been identified is basic computer instruction, such as learning how to use e-mail, how to access the internet, applying Zoom-Text magnification software, etc. Computer and assistive technology training is going to become a regular part of Ensign's services to our clients with low-vision. We will inform everyone in the coming months about specific classes and training opportunities. If you're interested or want more information, please give us a call at 303-757-4500.



Enightful Tips

Make Your Website Accessible To The Visually Impaired

By Julie Howell, RNIB

The growth of the World Wide Web has meant that many people with serious sight problems are now able to enjoy a wealth of information that was previously unavailable to them. With the help of synthesized speech and Braille display technology, even completely blind people can use the internet. But for these technologies to work properly, Web pages must be written in correct HTML (hypertext mark-up language).

Most people with sight problems have some useful vision, and read online text in exactly the same way as fully sighted people -- with their eyes.

However, the needs of people with poor sight vary, depending on how their eye condition affects their vision. Some people require large text, while others can only read smaller letters. Many people with sight problems need a highly contrasting color scheme, while some can only read yellow text on a black background.

To cater to everyone, websites should be flexible in design, enabling the individual to adjust the text and color settings to suit their needs and circumstances. In contrast, people with very little or no vision read web pages with the help of access technology installed on their computer. Synthesized speech software reads the content of web pages aloud through a speaker, while Braille software outputs to a retractable display so that the website can be read by touch.

Careful design is paramount for people accessing the web in these ways, as inappropriate use of HTML can render a site unreadable.

An accessible website is one that can be visited by anybody. It is perfectly possible to produce an attractive, dynamic design that remains fully accessible. Websites that are designed intelligently benefit everyone, not only people with disabilities.

Tips

1. Is the text legible?

Contrast is the most important factor to consider when designing sites that everyone can use. Go for text and background color combinations that offer maximum contrast.

2. Is the design flexible?

Is it easy to change the colors and the size of the text by adjusting browser settings?

3. Does every image have 'alt-text'?

The alternative text attribute of the image tag exists to provide a description of the image for people accessing the site via speech synthesis software.

4. Is there a site map?

A site map will help visitors to get an impression of the layout of the site quickly, and will make it easier to navigate.

5. Do links make sense out of context?

Sighted people scan screens of information to locate the parts that interest them. If you cannot see, and rely on synthesized speech technology to 'hear' websites, you need another way to get a quick impression of the content of a page. Commonly, the access software used by visually impaired people will provide a list of all the links on a page as a means of getting the 'flavor' of the content. If a link contains only the words 'click here', its function will not be obvious if it is presented out of context.

6. Are image maps accompanied by text links?

Some of the software packages that visually impaired people use cannot read image maps, so it is important to make text links available as well.

7. Do frames have titles, or is 'noframes' used?

Some visually impaired people may be using software that cannot read frames. It is vital that the NOFRAMES tag is used to offer these people alternative frames-free versions of your pages.

8. Are alternatives offered for JavaScript, applets, Flash or plug-ins?

If you are writing pages in anything other than HTML, you may be excluding some people from your site.

Products

Visikey Enhanced Keyboard

The VisiKey Enhanced Visibility Internet Keyboard is the first keyboard of its kind. It combines the visibility of large white on black print for increased visibility and contrast, with the internet and media center functionality of today's best keyboards. The Enhanced Visibility lettering system is rated at 20/300 on the Snellen Visual Acuity Scale; most other keyboards are rated at 20/70. USB and PS/2 compatibility ensures that it can be used with almost any computer configuration. Plug and play with Windows 2000 and XP, and compatible with Mac OS X 10.1-10.4x. Mac users will appreciate the Apple/option keys when using standard keyboard shortcuts. Power Center gives you fingertip control of sleep wake and powering your computer off, without ever moving your hands from the keyboard!



Available through Enight Skills Center.

Enightful People

Scott MacIntyre



Twenty-three year old Scott MacIntyre was one of the finalists of the eighth season of American Idol. This pianist, vocalist, and songwriter not only has an amazing voice, but also has inspired many living with disabilities to never give up on their dreams. He is the show's first ever visually-impaired contestant; while he is not blind, he suffers from Leber's Congenital Amaurosis—a rare inherited eye disease—that has given him two degrees of tunnel vision. In other words, he sees the world through a straw.

Although visually impaired since birth, he began playing the piano at the tender age of three. His parents used to put him to bed with music, but instead of going to bed, he'd sneak off to the family piano to figure out the melodies he just heard. This happened quite often, and his parents soon discovered there was definitely an interest in music.

Despite his condition, he started training in classical music when he was six years old. He has trained at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, and Arizona State University in Phoenix, and was later named by USA Today as one of its College Academic All-Stars, having been admitted to ASU at age 14. He graduated summa cum laude with a BM in Piano Performance at age 19. After recovering from a kidney disease, he obtained a Marshall Scholarship and got his masters degree in Performance Studies from the Royal College of Music and Royal Holloway University of London. He has also released five albums, two of which are classical, and was a guest performer for the Phoenix Symphony.

MacIntyre joined American Idol through auditions held in Phoenix, Arizona. While viewers recognize him for his visual impairment, he was also known for his prowess with the piano, which he showed as he went past the Hollywood auditions and into the Top 10. With his limited vision, he can literally only see one to two notes at a time on a sheet of music. And on the piano, he can only see the width of one key. Over the years, he has trained his ears to hear the harmonies and the individual notes in the patterns.

If you're not wowed yet, here's more reason to be. Scott also skis, dances, and plays the guitar and drums, too. There is no stopping him from doing the things he loves!

Support Groups

Aurora Senior Center

30 Del Mar Circle
Aurora, CO 80011

Barbara Meyer

303-831-0117

2nd Monday--1pm

Dayton Place

2000 S. Dayton Place
Denver, CO 80247

George Beard

303-831-0117

2nd Thursday--2pm

Eye Spy Support Group

Christian Living Center
2479 S. Clermont St.
Denver, CO

Marilyn Wytulka

720-974-3908

1st Thursday--1pm

Oakhurst Towers

8030 E. Girard Avenue
Denver, CO 80231

Sue Fenniman

303-831-0117

2nd Monday-10:30am

The mission of Enight Skills Center is to provide low-vision clients with the opportunity to enhance their life skills, increase their levels of confidence and independence, and enrich their lives through adaptive training and technology.

Enight is a non-profit organization that relies on funding from grants, fundraising, and donations. These funds allow us to keep our doors open and provide the best possible care to our patients.

Please consider helping!

If you would like to make a donation, please call us at 303-757-4500. We are an IRS 501(c)3 non-profit corporation and all donations are tax deductible. Thank you for your support!

Please let us know if you would like to share a personal Enight Skills Center experience; we'd love to publish it in the newsletter!

Enight Skills Center • 6000 E. Evans, Bldg. 3, Ste. 012 • Denver, CO 80222
Phone 303-757-4500 • Fax 303-757-4600