ACCESSIBILITY

GUIDE TO CREATING ACCESSIBLE EMAILINGS, NEWSLETTERS AND LEADPAGES

INTRODUCTION

The Barrier-Free Strengthening Act (BFSG), which comes into force in Germany on June 28, 2025, is a significant step towards improving accessibility and inclusion. It aims to improve the accessibility of products and services for people with disabilities. This law is based on the EU Directive on accessibility requirements for products and services (EU Directive 2019/882), also known as the European Accessibility Act (EAA).

In the context of email marketing, the BFSG means that companies must ensure that their digital communication tools are accessible to all users. By complying with these guidelines, companies can ensure that their email marketing campaigns meet the requirements of the BFSG and thus reach a broad target group. The BFSG not only provides a legal framework, but also an opportunity to improve the customer experience and promote more diverse and inclusive communication.

Below we explain in the form of an extended checklist what users need to pay attention to when creating emails and lead pages to ensure accessibility. Our latest templates are specially designed for accessibility and offer numerous functions so that you can also ensure accessibility.

Accessibility in newsletters is not only a legal requirement, but also an opportunity to make your content accessible to a wider audience. This step-by-step checklist will help you create accessible newsletters and lead pages that can be easily read and understood by all recipients. SC-Networks provides everything you need to create accessible newsletters and lead pages.

Our latest PowerSets offers you templates that meet the technical requirements of accessibility. We guarantee that our templates are continuously tested and optimized. Your email campaigns therefore comply with the latest accessibility standards. We focus on a continuous improvement process and regularly check the accessibility guidelines for updates. The main components of the tests include:

- Screen reader tests.
- Display in various e-mail clients.
- Keyboard operation tests.
- Checking keyboard navigation.
- Checking and validating HTML code.

With SC-Networks, you are therefore ideally equipped to ensure barrier-free communication with your recipients. We take care of the code and all technical aspects so that your emails are accessible to everyone. As an editor, you play a crucial role in the implementation of accessible digital communication. This includes, in particular, writing simple, comprehensible texts, creating clear content with a logical structure, writing alternative texts for images and paying attention to contrasts and colors.

Legal notice

SC-Networks has compiled this guide to accessibility in email marketing to the best of its knowledge and belief for you as a customer. We make no claim to completeness and do not offer legal advice. This document is intended to provide assistance and does not offer any legal certainty. To be on the safe side in legal matters, we recommend consulting an appropriate specialist lawyer.

IMPORTANT FIRST QUESTIONS

When creating accessible newsletters and lead pages, it is advisable to observe and follow the following checklist and explanations. As an editor, you can help to ensure that people with physical or cognitive impairments can use online media reliably.

As a general rule, digital communication should be well organized and structured. The following questions can be a good starting point:

- Where am I currently located?
- Does the central content immediately catch the recipient's eye?
- Is the e-mailing easy to understand and logically structured?

The guiding principle should be: "Comfort before aesthetics". Texts are to be regarded as a priority, with visuals taking second place. Images should therefore be used to complement texts and not replace them. Digital communication should also be comprehensible without images. Everything that can be seen must also be described in writing. This is the only way to make it audible. So-called screen readers make it possible for blind or visually impaired people to understand the newsletter auditorily by means of a read-aloud function.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Accessible design

Emails should be designed so that they can be easily read by screen readers and other assistive devices. This includes the use of semantically correct HTML, descriptive alt texts for images and a clear, logical structure.

Text alternatives

Every piece of visual information should be supplemented by a textual alternative. This means that images, graphics and videos must be accompanied by appropriate descriptions.

Contrasts and font sizes

To ensure that texts are easy to read, sufficiently high contrasts between text and background should be used. The font size should also be large enough to accommodate users with visual impairments.

Easy to navigate

Navigation within the email should be intuitive and simple. Use clear and understandable links and avoid complex layouts that could make navigation more difficult.

Simple language

Use simple, inclusive and respectful language that speaks to all recipients and does not exclude anyone.

Checking and testing

Before sending emails, it is important to test them for accessibility. There are various tools and software solutions that can help to check emails for accessibility.

CHECKLIST

STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION AND LAYOUT

A clear structure is the basis for accessible digital communication channels such as newsletters or lead pages. A well-structured newsletter, for example, makes it easier for all users to navigate and understand. Especially for people with visual impairments or cognitive limitations. You should therefore ensure a clear structure and layout.

Structured content also makes reading easier. By using paragraphs, for example, thoughts can be presented more clearly and concisely. Structure your newsletter like a well-organized article with a main heading, subheadings and clearly defined sections.

The following points should be noted:

Assign a meaningful page title (Page Title).

Use a preheader (short text in the e-mail preview that supplements the content and is intended to arouse interest).

Assign meaningful document titles (HTML variant).

Make sure that the content is arranged in a logical reading order (heading, introduction, main content, conclusion, etc.).

Use a table of contents. It is advisable to use the anchor function.

Write a meaningful editorial that clearly summarizes the content.

Use well thought-out, meaningful headings to organize the content in the best possible way.

> **NOTE:** Assign a general main headline for the eMailing and individual headlines for each article. Meaningful category headlines or subheadlines in the articles can also contribute to a better structure.

Use short paragraphs to structure the content.

Use bullet points and numbered lists for a better overview.

Use sufficient white space and spacing between elements. This improves readability and helps to visually separate content.

Avoid complex layouts with multiple columns.

Ensure consistent formatting.

Mark quotations with HTML structural elements (blockquote).

Make sure that the newsletter is also readable in text-only format. This is important for screen reader users and when images are deactivated.

- o **NOTE:** Evalanche sends all e-mailings in HTML and text format by default.

Provide a clear unsubscribe function.

FONT AND TEXT FORMATTING

Font and text formatting play a crucial role in the design of accessible digital communication. A well thought-out selection and application of these elements ensures that the content is accessible and easy to read for the widest possible audience.

Accessible newsletters and lead pages take into account the needs of people with various disabilities, such as visual impairments or reading difficulties. The right choice of font and formatting therefore make a significant contribution to readability.

Use a sans serif font that is easy to read (e.g. Arial, Verdana). Avoid cursive or decorative fonts.

Use a font size of at least 15px.

Ensure sufficient contrast between text and background. Use contrast checking tools to ensure a ratio of at least 4.5:1.

The line spacing should be approx. 150%.

Set text flush left, avoid justified text.

Avoid capital letters (capitals) in continuous text.

Use punctuation marks at the end of bullet points and sentences.

(optional) Use a media dot instead of a hyphen. This is usually not read aloud by screen readers and therefore improves comprehensibility. People with visual impairments or reading difficulties can also benefit from this. The Unicode for the medial dot is U+00B7.

Leave extra space around headings and between paragraphs.

Avoid the exclusive use of colors to convey information. Supplement color highlighting with symbols or text.

Use typographic highlighting (bold, italics) instead of colors or underlining. Use highlighting sparingly and selectively.
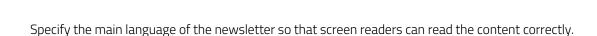
Avoid Roman numerals.

SIMPLE LANGUAGE, CLARITY AND COMPREHENSIBILITY

Simple language enables people with limited cognitive abilities in particular to better understand information and participate in social, economic and political processes. Texts in simple language use clear, short sentences and simple words, which facilitates communication and reduces misunderstandings. This increases comprehensibility and accessibility, which ultimately benefits all recipients.

Clear, understandable language benefits all readers, especially people with cognitive impairments or learning disabilities. Comprehensibility is a key element of accessibility.

Checklist for simple language:

Use the read-aloud function of our templates.

Specify the main language of the newsletter so that screen readers can read the content correctly.

Use inclusive and respectful language.

Use short, simple sentences (60-70 characters).

Use paragraphs for structuring. Structure information logically and consistently in short paragraphs and bulleted lists.

Structure texts clearly to make it easier for screen reader users.

Position important information at the beginning.

Use meaningful headings that describe the following content.

Each sentence follows only one thought (no leaps of thought in paragraphs).

Use a simple vocabulary.

Avoid foreign words. Explain them if it cannot be avoided.

Explain technical terms in simple language.

Avoid technical jargon and explain complex terms.

Avoid nested sentences and complex sentence structures.

Give concrete examples to illustrate difficult topics.

Get to the point as quickly as possible.

Use a good and simple newsletter subject.

If words and sections of text on a page are in a different language, these should be marked using the lang attribute.

Use concrete language (avoid abstraction).

Use a direct, personal form of address.

Avoid irony, sarcasm and ambiguity.

State figures and data clearly and concisely.

Avoid abbreviations and double negatives.

Use simple tenses.

Use positive formulations instead of negative ones.

Use concrete examples as explanations.

Always use consistent terms.

Use simple grammar.

Use repetition for clarity.

Avoid double negatives.

AI-based translations into simple language can help. However, they should always be checked and, if necessary, rewritten and adapted.

Offer summaries for long texts.

Avoid emoticons.

EXAMPLE SENTENCES IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE:

Instead of "The implementation of the new system is expected to take place in the next quarter" better "We will introduce the new system in April."

Instead of "Our AI-based ML solution optimizes your CX", write "Our artificial intelligence-based machine learning solution improves your customer experience".

GENDER AND ACCESSIBILITY:

Gendering and accessibility are complex topics that are not easy to reconcile. Gender-inclusive language aims to make all gender identities visible. However, this can lead to longer and more complex formulations that can compromise accessibility.

There is currently no gender method that is completely barrier-free. A balance must therefore be struck between gender equality and accessibility. Experts recommend using gender-neutral wording wherever possible and using the gender colon where necessary.

The discussion about barrier-free gendering is still ongoing. It remains to be seen whether new, more suitable solutions will develop in the future.

HANDLING IMAGES, GRAPHICS AND MULTIMEDIA

Visual elements can enrich the newsletter, but must be accessible to all users. Pay particular attention to the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments. Visual elements must be understandable for all users and should not be used excessively.

Important information should (also) be available as text, not as graphics or images. Text-based content is easily accessible for screen readers and other assistive technologies, while images or graphics without appropriate alternative text remain inaccessible for many users with visual impairments. Prioritizing text content ensures that information is equally available and understandable for all visitors.

Add meaningful alternative texts for all images and graphics.

EXAMPLE: Instead of "Picture1.jpg" better "Smiling woman with red hat in the sunshine"

Do not use too many images.

Pay attention to contrast ratios for images. The contrast between images and their background should be sufficient. Graphics must be clearly recognizable to ensure that they can be perceived by all users.

NOTE: Certain color combinations should be avoided for people with color vision deficiencies. Red and green: This combination should always be avoided as it is indistinguishable for people with red-green deficiency. Brown and green: These colors can also be difficult to differentiate. Blue and purple: This combination can also be problematic as they often have similar brightness values.

Do not use placeholder graphics (with the exception of logos).

Avoid using images as text (with the exception of logos).

Avoid images and graphics with overlaying text.

NOTE: If you use these, describe in text form what can be seen in the image and what the image says. Ideally, repeat the text in the alt text and in the main content.

If an image serves an informative purpose, be sure to include a written, detailed description.

NOTE: Describe complex graphics and diagrams additionally in text form.
Example: Instead of "Image1.jpg" as alternative text, describe the content: "Graphic shows 15% increase in newsletter subscribers in the last quarter".

Avoid animated GIFs, fast-moving images, flickering, flashing and blinking (max. 3 flashes per second).

Provide alternative texts and audio descriptions for visual media that convey important information.

Provide subtitles, transcripts and audio descriptions for videos.

NOTE: YouTube, for example, offers tools for the simple creation of subtitles.

Provide transcripts for audio content. Example: Add a complete transcript to a podcast excerpt in the newsletter.

Avoid media that plays automatically.

Do not send any PDF attachments. If you link PDFs, these must also meet the accessibility requirements.

COLORS AND CONTRASTS

Accessibility in web design is a crucial aspect that enables all users to have equal access to information and functions. A particularly important area here is the use of colors and contrasts. An accessible email design should also be accessible without the use of colors. This means that all information that is primarily conveyed by colors must also be understandable for people who cannot perceive colors.

The right choice of colors and sufficient contrasts are not only important for people with visual impairments, but improve the user experience for everyone. A well-thought-out color scheme that takes accessibility into account can lead to a more aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly design.

The interplay of colors plays a central role in the design. It is not about avoiding certain colors, but rather about creating color combinations with sufficient contrast. A good contrast between text and background makes it easier to read and helps to emphasize important elements.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) provide concrete specifications for contrast ratios that should be adhered to in order to ensure barrier-free use. These guidelines take into account various aspects such as font size and color combinations to ensure that content is easily perceivable for all users.

Make sure that the newsletter can also be used without colors.

Use high-contrast colors.

Don't just use color to convey information.

Consider red-green weaknesses.

Avoid complementary colors.

Cream-colored backgrounds can improve readability.

(optional) A high-contrast mode is useful to further improve accessibility.

Note the following contrast ratios:

Normal text to background under 18px: 4.5:1 (minimum requirement) / increased requirement 7:1.

Large text from 18px to background: 3:1 (minimum requirement) / increased requirement: 4.5:1.

Control elements: 3:1 (minimum requirement) / increased requirement 4.5:1.

Graphic elements: 3:1 (minimum requirement) / increased requirement 4.5:1.

EXAMPLE: Black text (#000000) on a cream-colored background (#FFFDD0) meets the contrast ratio of 7:1

CALL-TO-ACTION BUTTONS AND LINKS

Well-designed links and clear navigation help all users to find their way around the newsletter.
This is particularly important for people who use screen readers or other assistive technologies.

Do not use images for Call To Action buttons.

Use large, easy-to-read buttons with sufficient contrast. The text on the button must have a contrast of at least 4.5:1 to the background of the button. The button itself must stand out from the surrounding background with a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.

For ease of use, the button size should be at least 44x44 pixels.

Use descriptive and descriptive link texts. The aim or purpose of the link must be clearly recognizable from the link text.

EXAMPLE: "Learn more about accessibility" instead of 'Click here'.Or instead of "Click here", "Find out more about accessible newsletters".

Do not use only colors for highlighting. If you want to use highlighting, it is recommended that you also format the corresponding text in bold.

NOTE: If you want to address the specific challenges of dyslexics, you should avoid underlining or italics for emphasis. Use bold type instead. To increase user-friendliness for dyslexics, links should also be emphasized in bold type.

Links should not be highlighted exclusively by color. If you use color, underline the link. Emphasized text should stand out from the rest of the text with a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.

Clearly mark external links so that users know that they will be leaving the current website. This creates additional security and trust.

Specify the file format in the link text (for non-HTML pages).

EXAMPLE: " Download leaflet (PDF)"

TESTING AND FEEDBACK

A comprehensive review and gathering feedback is crucial to ensure that your newsletter is consistently accessible. Regular testing is strongly recommended to ensure accessibility.

SC-Networks provides everything you need to create accessible newsletters and lead pages. Our current templates form the technical foundation for accessible communication. However, you as the editor play the decisive role in the implementation of accessible emails. We therefore recommend that you as a user implement a continuous improvement process:

By considering the following aspects, you can ensure that your email marketing campaigns are not only effective, but also remain accessible to all users:

Internal audit and testing

Use tools to check accessibility (contrast and legibility).

- o Use special accessibility testing tools.
- o Use readability tools such as the Flesch index.
- o Test with screen readers.

Test on different end devices.

Carry out internal checks.

- o Ask colleagues with different skills for feedback.
- o Use our checklist.

External testing and user feedback

Get feedback from users with various restrictions.

Carry out usability tests with people with disabilities.

Encourage all subscribers to provide feedback on accessibility.

- o Insert a feedback link.
- o Conduct regular accessibility surveys.

Continuous improvement

Analyze the collected feedback regularly.
- o Identify recurring problems and opportunities for improvement.

Implement improvements and communicate them.
- o Inform your subscribers about accessibility changes.

Stay up to date on new standards and best practices.

- o Take part in training courses and webinars.
- o Follow current developments in the field of barrier-free communication.

HELPFUL TOOLS

Google Chrome plugin for testing websites according to WCAG

https://silktide.com/toolbar/

Readability check (german): Use the tool to check the readability of your texts

https://www.fleschindex.de/berechnen/

Video on the topic of easy language and AI (german):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVDvO5S0Y0M&list=PLZMG0jeh5HNzeJrI-D57TgiZxlQ2EsZCN&index=3

Contrast testing tool: Make sure your colors are easy to read

https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/

Source code testing: Check the source code with these tools

https://wave.webaim.org/

https://validator.w3.org/nu/