

The Essentials of Section 508 Compliance: ADA, Requirements, and Checkers

What is Section 508 compliance?

[Section 508 compliance](#) is the legal requirement that federal agencies and federally funded organizations ensure that the information and communication technology (ICT) they create, acquire, maintain, or use allows people with disabilities to access information and data.



Section 508 compliance versus ADA compliance

Understanding the essentials of Section 508 compliance requires some background knowledge about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a civil rights law that was signed into law on July 26, 1990, and prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

The ADA is divided into three titles: the first one concerns employment, the second one concerns state and local governments, and the third one refers to public accommodations and commercial facilities. More generally, the ADA sets out rules prohibiting discrimination in all areas of public life. It aims to ensure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

The ADA was enacted after people with disabilities began to challenge the societal barriers that cause them to be excluded from society because of their disabilities and when parents of children with disabilities started fighting against the exclusion of their children. As a ground-breaking civil rights law, the ADA sets rules to help guarantee that people with disabilities enjoy the same guarantees as everyone else in terms of employee rights, but also establishes rules regarding the responsibilities of employers.

Section 508 applies to federal agencies and any organization that receives funding from the federal government, including suppliers and contractors. It mandates organizations to ensure that all of their digital communications meet Section 508's compliance levels, which in practice means that they must conform to Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

While the ADA and Section 508 exist to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities, they are not the same legislation. The most important distinction between the ADA and Section 508 is that the ADA applies to businesses open to the public as well as state and local governments, whereas Section 508 applies to federal organizations.

Though both pieces of legislation apply to accessibility, being Section 508-compliant does not automatically mean your product or service is ADA-compliant, and vice versa. That is why, as a business owner or leader of a federal organization or entity that receives federal funding, you need to know about meeting compliance requirements for both the ADA and Section 508.

How to achieve Section 508 compliance

Unlike the ADA, Section 508 has a clear standard for compliance. For example, if you want your business or organization to comply with Section 508, you should ensure that your ICT products or services conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA. It is noteworthy to point out that under Section 508, organizations are required to document their ICT products or services' level of conformance by completing a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT).

Many businesses and organizations strive to achieve ADA compliance as well as conform to [Section 508 accessibility](#) requirements. ADA compliance 508 consciousness ensures an organization or business does not get caught up with the risks associated with a lack of compliance with any of the legislation.

Working with accessibility consultants who understand how to deliver the Americans with Disabilities Act Section 508 compliance intricacies can help you avoid the legal consequences of not conforming to the ADA while enhancing your opportunities for working with federal organizations because of conformance with Section 508.

Do we have ADA Section 508 web accessibility requirements?

While the ADA does not have its own web accessibility guidelines outlined in law, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has suggested that the WCAG 2.1 Level AA is the gold standard websites should reach in order to be considered accessible. Unlike the ADA, which uses the most recent WCAG 2.1 standards, Section 508 requires websites to meet Level AA from the earlier WCAG 2.0 version.

With the exception of federal government websites or websites of government contractors, most organizations do not have to meet Section 508 web accessibility requirements. However, the good news is that if your website is meeting WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards as recommended by the ADA, you are already meeting Section 508 standards as well. That is because the WCAG 2.1 standards are built upon the WCAG 2.0 standards.

Need help testing your product or service for ADA compliance 508?

You can test your website or any of your ICT products or services for ADA compliance or for Section 508 compliance using appropriate approaches drawn from three categories: manual, automated, or hybrid.

If your product or service is online, you can use an ADA Section 508 compliance checker that your peers have favorably rated and by relying on expert service providers, like ADACP. Begin the discussion about ADA Section 508 compliance needs by calling ADACP at (626) 486-2201 today so as to schedule a free consultation on the same.

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