

NetCentric

CASE STUDY: Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Summary

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) was required under Section 508 and the state's Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility (EITA) Act to ensure all online content, including Portable Document Format files (PDFs), were fully accessible to all citizens. With CommonLook Section 508 Plug-In for Adobe Acrobat from NetCentric Technologies, Inc. (www.commonlook.com), OKDHS streamlined the PDF remediation process addressing common issues related to tables and structure of PDFs and built in specific check points for EITA. Since rolling out the solution, OKDHS has saved thousands of hours and taxpayer dollars while ensuring all external-facing online content is accessible and available for anyone visiting OKDHS.org.

Customer Profile

OKDHS is the state's largest agency. It provides a wide variety of services to Oklahoma citizens as well as businesses. OKDHS has more than 8,000 employees and is responsible for the delivery of services to more than one out of three Oklahoma residents through the 40 state and federal programs it administers.

Challenge

The OKDHS Web site (www.OKDHS.org) offers a number of online services and acts as the central source of information and publications related to the Department's services. Since its inception in late 1998, the original charge to OKDHS Web site staff across the state was to communicate information that the public needed in whatever forms were available. There were no standards for function or service, just content. Today, the site has more than 10,000 HTML pages, and thousands of other types of documents including PDFs, forms and images. In 2006, OKDHS undertook a site re-launch which focused on aligning the Department's Web properties under a common online brand, navigation and appearance, and making online content accessibility compliant. The biggest project challenge was resistance to change.

As OKDHS receives federal funds, it was clear that the new site must comply with Section 508 requirements. In 2004, the state of Oklahoma passed the EITA Act and compliance was required for all state agencies by Sept. 5, 2006.

In reviewing the accessibility of the existing site, re-launch project team identified that the majority of the site, including PDF documents, were not in compliance with the EITA Act or Section 508. "It was clear that we must comply and ensure the accessibility of all content, regardless of its format. The reality is that a large number of our clients are those with disabilities, and it was important that we serve all citizens in the same manner," explained Douglas Doe, Web content manager, OKDHS.

Solution

As part of the move to make all online content accessible, the OKDHS Web Content Management team and Department divisions evaluated more than 3,700 PDF documents to establish which needed to be made accessible. The documents were placed into three groups – outdated, grandfathered in under the EITA Act and to be made accessible.

Using a combination of Microsoft Office products and Adobe Acrobat Professional, the team addressed some of the compliance issues. The team was able to successfully remediate both Microsoft Excel and simple Microsoft Word documents. Despite being able to address some fixes for PDFs in the source documents, the complex structure of some PDFs made the process of manually remediating each page in Adobe Acrobat time intensive, and in some cases impossible.



Douglas Doe

"While we had other types of documents under control, we were struggling with PDFs," said Doe. "It was taking about eight hours per page to ensure that tables and all of the content would be accessible, and this was a huge drain on our human resources."

With this in mind, Doe began to look for ways to streamline the process of making PDF content accessible. After some research with industry contacts, Doe saw a demonstration of CommonLook Section 508 for Adobe Acrobat from NetCentric Technologies, Inc. and decided to try the product.

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**-Douglas Doe
OKDHS**

After the trial period with the product, Doe and his team quickly saw the benefits of the NetCentric solution. "The product is so easy to use and the physical representation of the tag structure enables our team to really see what they are manipulating," explained Doe. "We've been able overcome a lot of the challenges we had working with Adobe Acrobat, such as the tree structure. Everything is just so intuitive and logical".

Additionally, NetCentric built in custom checkpoints to meet the state's specific requirements that go above and beyond Section 508. "By having all of our requirements related to tables and read order addressed, we were able to avoid manual remediation and ensure we were meeting the standard," said Doe. "We would have still had holes using only Adobe or any other Section 508 compliance product, but now we can look at what is rendered and have confidence we are compliant."



Team Member Nickoll Kimbrell

Benefits

Since rolling out the NetCentric solution in fall 2006, OKDHS has been able to realize a number of key benefits including time savings, improved user experience on the site, and delivering truly open and accessible government to all visitors to the OKDHS Web site.

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**-Douglas Doe
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Doe's team has expedited the remediation process for PDF documents, with text only documents taking less than 10 minutes, and more complex documents taking 10 to 15 minutes per page. "We've gone from about eight hours per page, to an average of about 10 to 15 minutes with the NetCentric solution. When you look at the sheer number of documents we are dealing with, that's thousands upon thousands of hours saved. There's no way we would have been able to do this with Adobe Acrobat Professional alone. It has resulted in a tremendous savings for the taxpayers and is making more content available for persons with disabilities," said Doe.

"What's been really exciting for us is how well we did when our PDFs were evaluated by the state's Accessibility Council," said Doe. "They were among the most compliant in state government. Not only are we meeting our compliance obligations, we are mitigating the risk of the Department being involved in litigation stemming from non-compliance."

By streamlining the process of remediating and testing PDF documents, OKDHS is able to make content accessible in a matter of hours and days instead of weeks. "Ultimately, we are improving the experience for our Web site visitors and delivering on our vision of open and accessible government," concluded Doe.