

February 14, 2014

Subject: Leading Web Sites Fail to meet Cognitive Accessibility Standards

To: 'news@internetassociation.org'

Dear Internet Association:

I am inquiring as to who I can speak to regarding the "Cognitive Accessibility" of many of your member web sites, and the seemingly lack of user information for users with "cognitive or intellectual disabilities." In particular, I take issue with the navigability of member web sites after operators update or modify the site's UI.

Over the last few months, I've seen dramatic changes to many major web sites and UIs. The new site then has the effect of restricting access by persons with "cognitive or intellectual disabilities." If they are able to use the site, it is only after considerable additional time and other assistance to achieve what they had been able to do with the previous UI. Such practices "disproportionately impact" accessibility by users with cognitive disabilities, which I believe is protected by federal law.

Some of the popular sites at issue with poor cognitive accessible designs are: Apple iTunes, LinkedIn, Symantec (NIS 2014), and Google (Play, Calendar, Contacts, Plus). I wrote to Apple and Google, but did not receive a response.

At the core of the practices, are premature introduction and over-emphasis in the marketing of internet products, with two critical misconceptions yet to be tested by civil law: 1) That users are individually responsible for the requisite knowledge and learning in the use of their web sites; and 2) That users are responsible for downloading all appropriate updates to render their sites and/or technology usable.

Today we are gathering statistical data on affected internet users with cognitive and intellectual disabilities that require "Cognitive Accessible Designs." Some common disorders include:

1. Post TBI
2. Post brain tumor
3. Post stroke
4. Hydrocephalus, NPH
5. Developmental Disabilities
6. Autism
7. ADHD
8. PTSD
9. Post concussion disorder
10. Seniors w/ early onset of dementia

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As web pages and web sites add more content and graphics, this complicates accessibility for cognitive needs users, and makes the requisite UI designs all the more critical. Many sites also incorporate aggressive "ad mechanisms" which can take control of a browser and pose extraordinary challenges for persons with intellectual, visual, and hand-eye disabilities. I believe this practice should be curtailed!

Recent updates and redesign of UIs on major web sites like Apple, Norton, and LinkedIn, also came without any notice or accompanying information for users which might have lessened the challenge of the site's new UI.

As such, it is my recommendation that when operators modify a site UI, that they provide accompanying instructions similarly to that provided by manufacturers of "boxed" products, such as: 1) User instructions & FAQ, 2) A 1-page diagram of site UI and architecture, 3) Precautions & instructions for setting privacy & user notifications.

And I'd like to propose an additional recommendation for your industry to adopt a universal design of UIs with respect to setting user privacy & email notifications, which I believe would minimize the unintended release of private information. This could entail a specific tab architecture and/or color scheme for these settings.

This correspondence is in follow up to my email of November 2, 2013, where I did not hear a response from your organization.

I look forward to hearing from you and working with your organization to make member web sites more accessible to users with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

Very Truly,

Stephen Dolle
Neuroscientist & Advocate for Brain Health
Dolle Communications
Dolle Neurosciences

About me: I suffered a brain injury in 1992 and have undergone 12 brain shunt operations since 1992, and work as a neuroscientist with drum circles & drumming therapy, hydrocephalus monitoring, and learning/cognitive accessibility. My focus in technology & accessibility is in helping web sites, product instructions, and displays with cognitive accessible designs, and in teaching how user accessibility impacts learning, productivity, and the costs associated with the use of any product or technology.