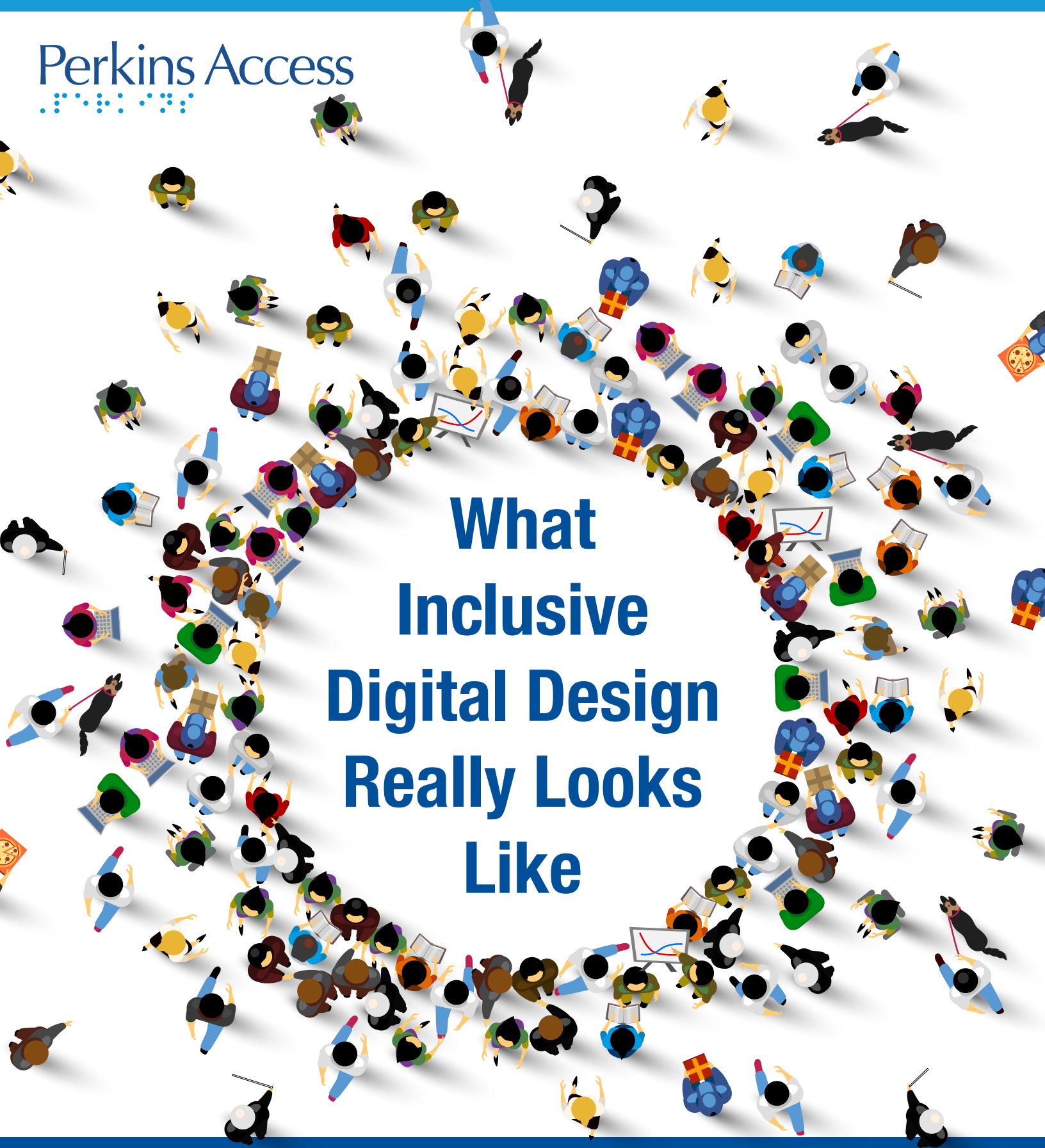
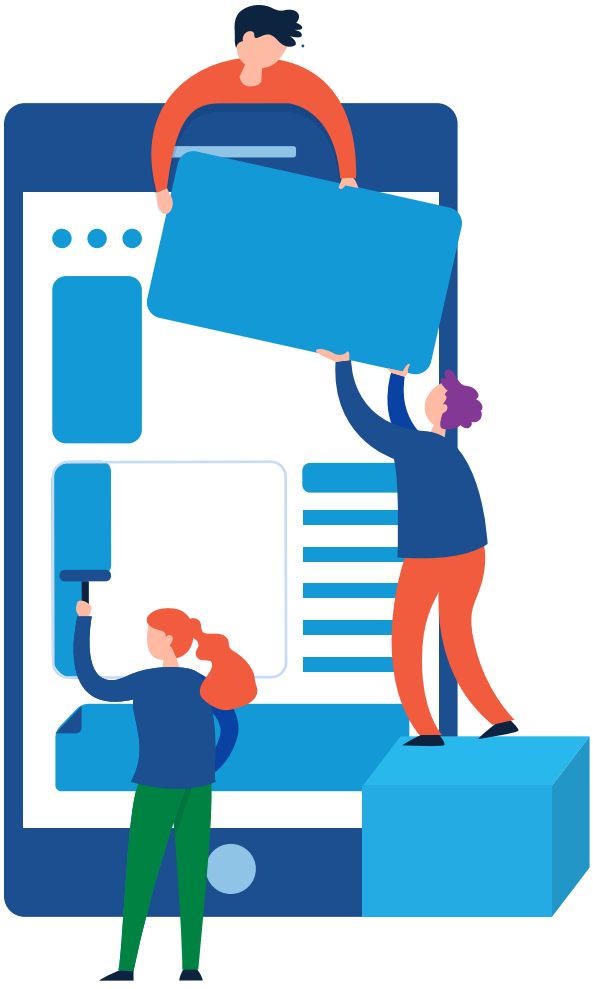
Perkins Access



What Inclusive Digital Design Really Looks Like

Six ways to create inclusive digital experiences without sacrificing great design



As digital leaders, we devote ourselves to creating **stunning, engaging digital experiences** that draw our customers closer to us. We know **digital accessibility is important**, but we often **neglect it**, or tack it on at the last second, believing it will limit our ability to create the right kind of experience for the majority of our users.

But, the truth is, **accessibility does not have to be a limitation**. In fact, we're here to show you that inclusive digital experiences can be compelling—even beautiful.

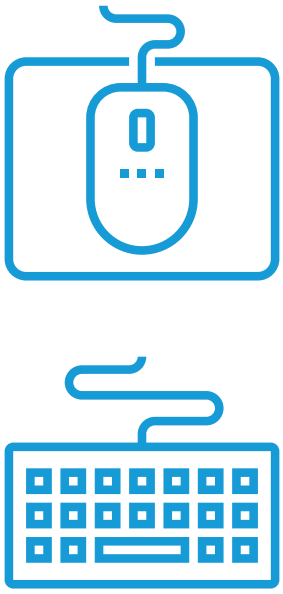
It comes down to **user goals**. Real digital accessibility means you've considered the goals of all your users, including those with disabilities, and provided clear paths for them to meet those goals, whether they're researching financial products, ordering a coffee to start their workday or kicking back to enjoy a good show.

Here are six ways to create apps, websites and other media that are as accessible as they are elegant, so everyone, of all abilities, can fully engage with them.

01 Wayfinding that Works

For people with visual or motor impairments, using a mouse to navigate your website isn't an option. That's why it's critical to make your website fully and easily navigable by **keyboard.** All it takes is proper coding.

What's great about accessible wayfinding is that it doesn't interfere with the look and feel of the site for people who prefer to navigate with a mouse; it's completely hidden for most users, but available for those who rely on it.



1 in 4

U.S. adults

have a disability that impacts major life activities, including temporary disabilities. [1]

[1] CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0816-disability.html

Here are a few basics when it comes to wayfinding through keyboard navigation:

- As users **tab or arrow key between links, buttons and content areas**, there should be a clear visible indication of focus—an outline, high-contrast change of color or other visual cue that signals where they are on the page.
- Tab stops should **follow a predictable order**, matching the order of the navigation elements on the page (typically left to right, top to bottom).
- Users should be able to **easily scan a page**, even if they're using a screen reader. Properly coded skip links make this possible. Without them, users have to tab through all of the navigation elements—including non-essentials like social media buttons or footer links—every time they access a new page. It's frustrating, time-consuming and fatiguing.

The NPR.org website is an excellent example of wayfinding that works. It allows users to easily skip over large blocks of content to get directly to the audio content, which is what most people are there for. Again, this feature is completely hidden, except from the people who need it.

02 Descriptive Voice Hints

For people who are blind or visually impaired, or who have cognitive disabilities, screen readers, which convert text to speech, are essential to engaging with any digital experience. That's why **descriptions of buttons, icons, links** and other features are a critical part of any accessibility strategy.

What's more, those descriptions have to be **intuitive** and easy to understand, so the user can tell exactly what will happen when they click. An audio label that simply reads the text on a button or link may not be enough. Is it a drop-down menu? A link? A tooltip?

Icon descriptions need to be descriptive, too. An audio description of a shopping cart icon that says "Shopping cart button" is ambiguous; "Add item to your cart" isn't.

Good audio hints are particularly important when it comes to smartphone apps, which often rely on iconography and can be frustrating to navigate even for people without disabilities.

The Starbucks App does a nice job with its audio labels: Voice hints identify not just the type of button (action, dropdown, link, etc.) but what the button does. The “Buy in store button” adds a hint that says, “Takes you to the barcode of your card”—an image that would be invisible to a screen reader.

03 Voice Search

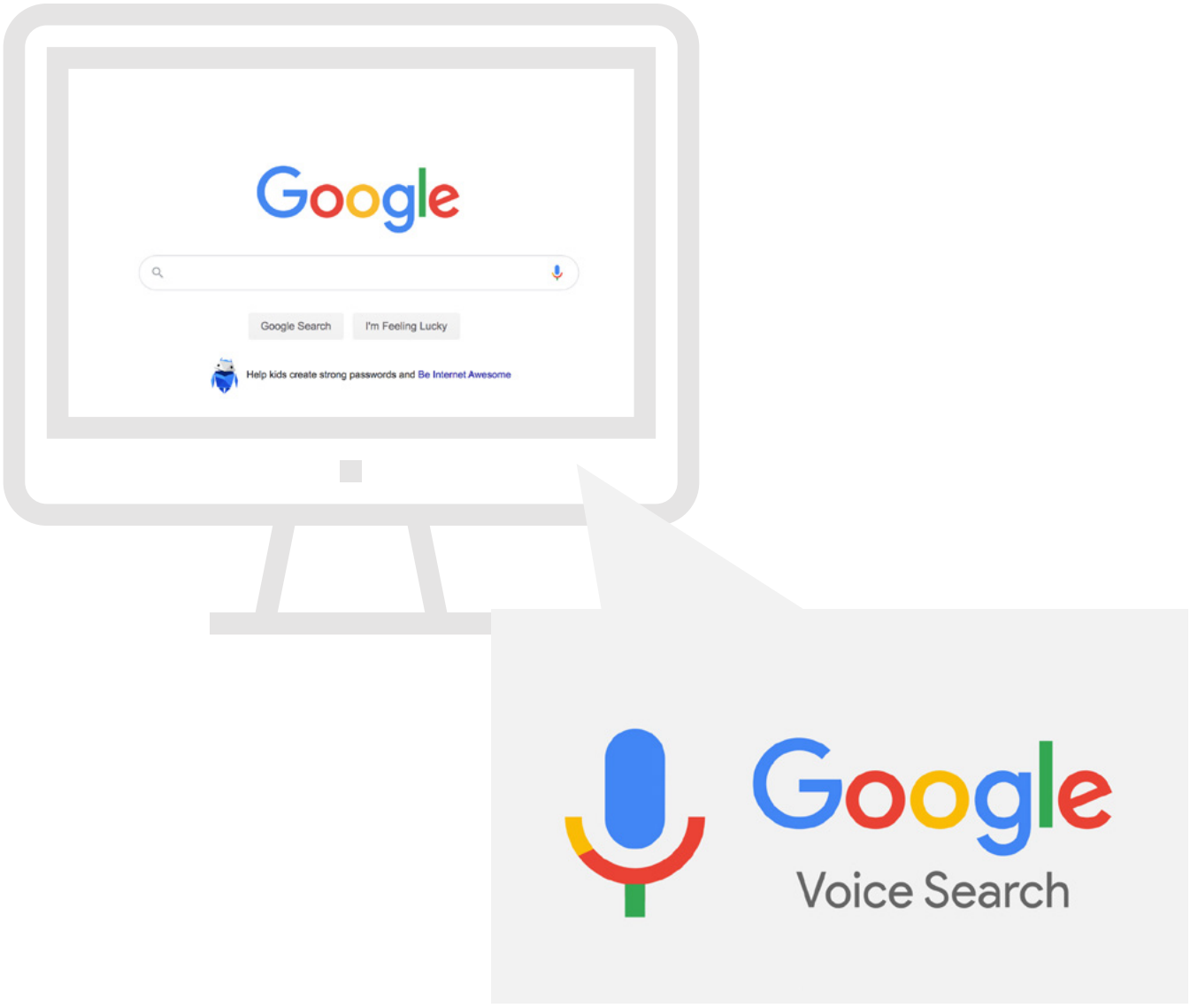
Search is one of the most basic actions people perform online. For people with disabilities it's an effective shortcut for getting straight to the content they want on websites, without having to navigate their way through the menus on the site. And when it comes to shopping online, search is indispensable.

Adding a voice search option that's native to your web page, not dependent on the platform, makes searching for content infinitely easier for users with disabilities—and will likely be appreciated by all users. And don't forget to add audio cues to indicate that search suggestions come up as the user speaks or types. Alerting them to the fact that they can navigate to the suggestions as shortcuts saves time and energy and offers users with disabilities the same convenience as all users.

People with disabilities spend

$1.2 trillion

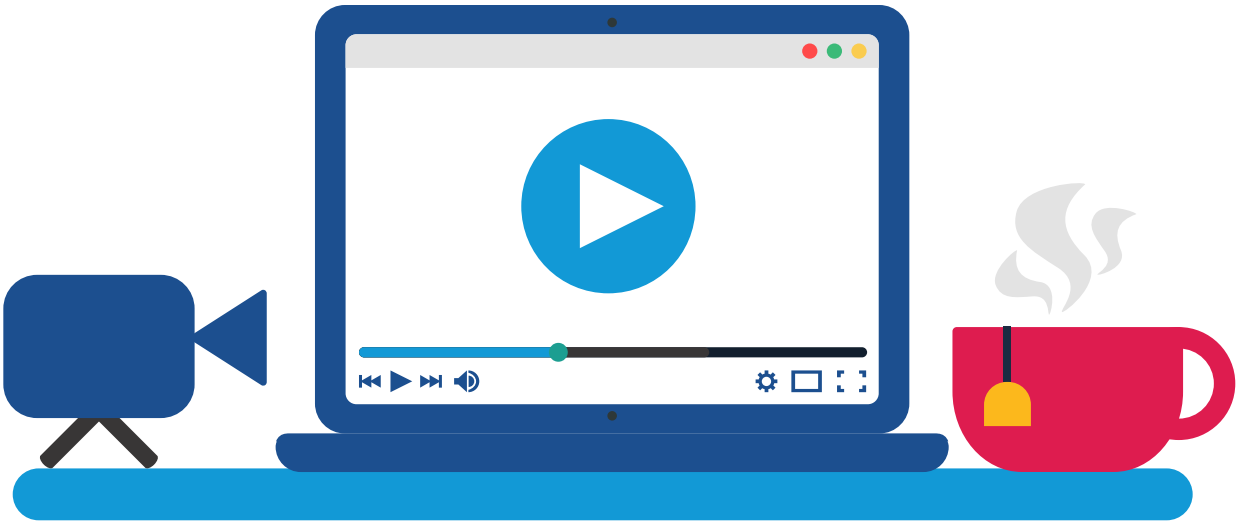
annually.



Google has incorporated an audio search option that users can tab or arrow to with their keyboard. So, not only can people with disabilities search via voice, they're alerted within two keystrokes of arriving on the page that voice search is an option.

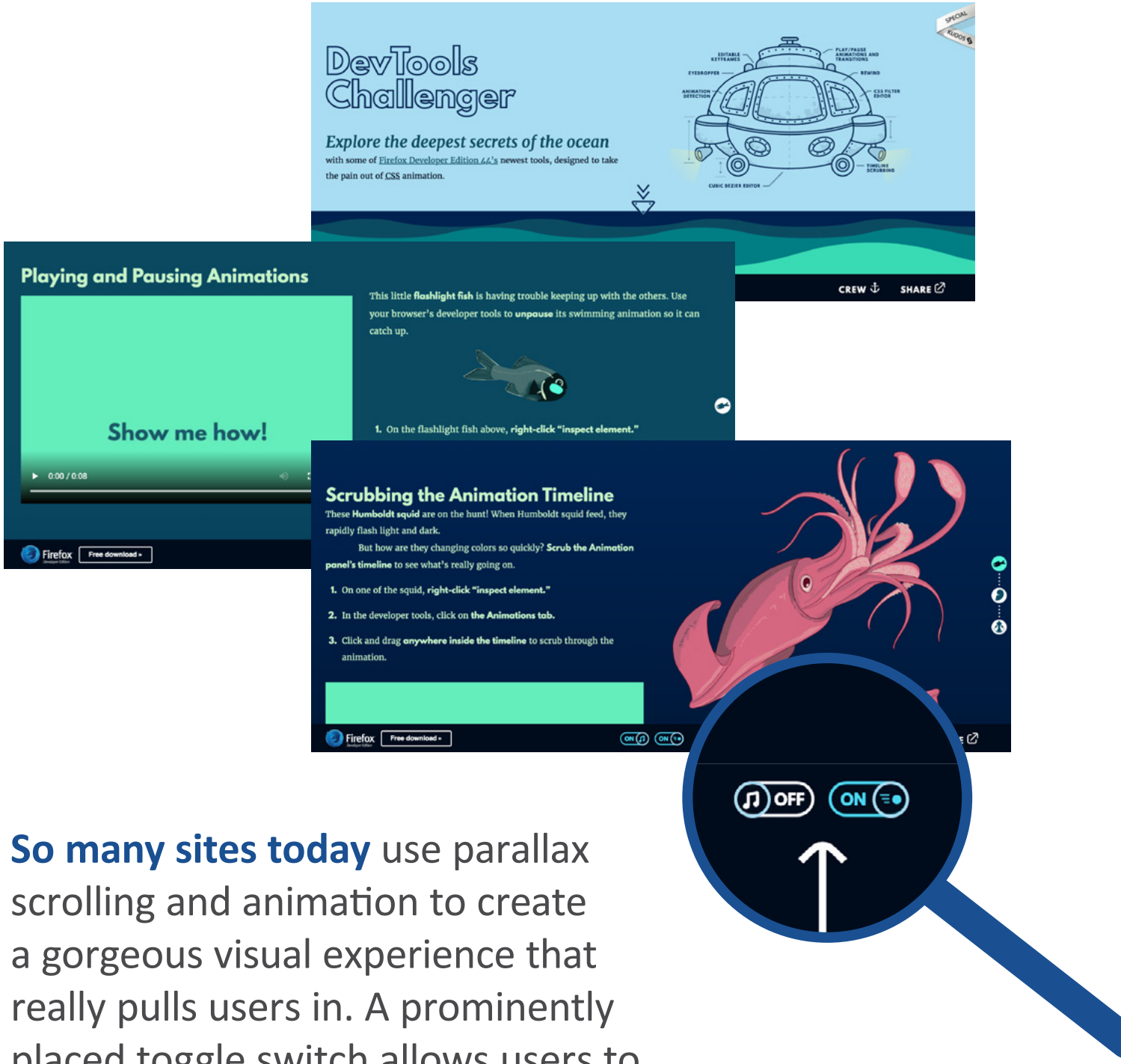
04 Movement Control

For people with auditory, visual or cognitive impairments, or issues with balance and vertigo, animations and videos can be distracting and even uncomfortable to watch. Meanwhile, features like parallax scrolling and rotating carousels with text can be difficult for assistive technologies like screen readers to scan; the text keeps appearing and disappearing, making it difficult if not impossible for the screen reader to know where to begin reading.



But don't panic: You don't have to give up movement or animation on your site altogether. Simply **allow people to have greater control** over the experience, and tailor it to their individual needs:

- Limit auto-play of videos and animations to three seconds or less and/or have an easy-to-find pause button.
- Allow users to stop, hide or pause blinking or auto-updating content.
- Provide ways to turn off animations triggered by interaction (such as parallax scrolling effects).
- Make sure all interruptions (such as pop-ups) can be easily disabled or exited by the user.

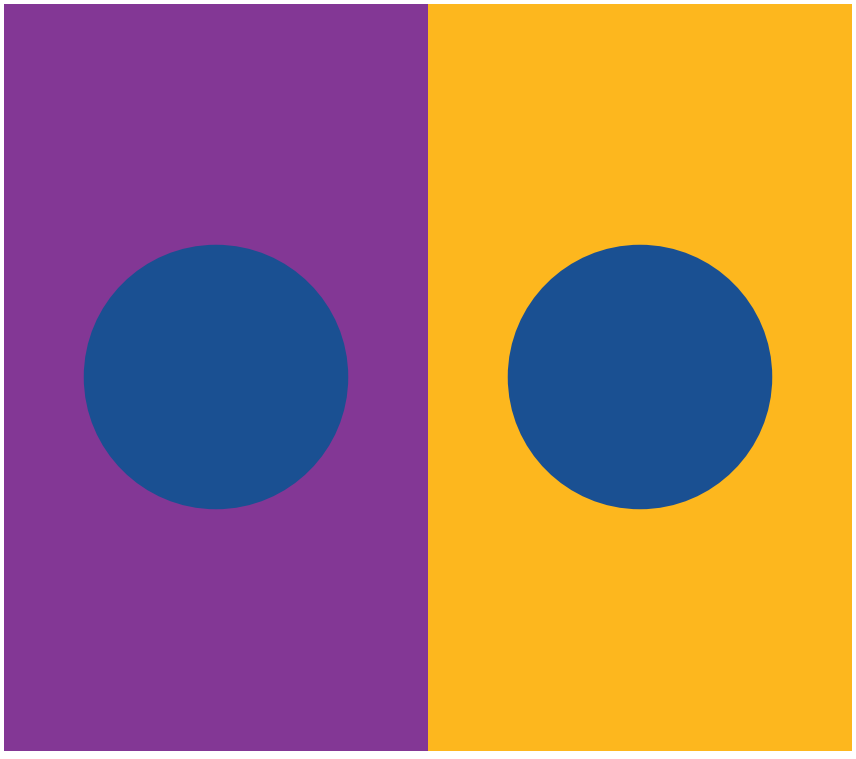


So many sites today use parallax scrolling and animation to create a gorgeous visual experience that really pulls users in. A prominently placed toggle switch allows users to turn off these animations, for static visuals and text. The switch can control the entire site, so users don't have to keep toggling again on every page they visit. This is quite easy to do in CSS and makes a big difference for users with disabilities.

05 Color for Everyone

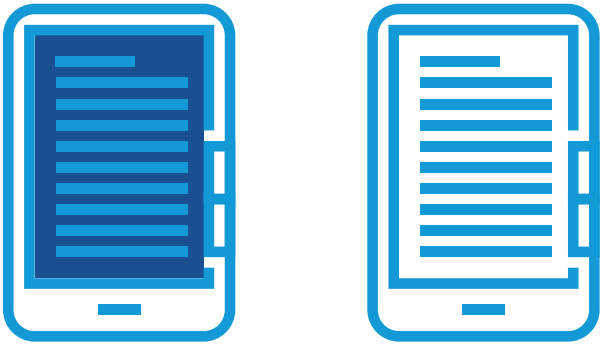
We get it: Adhering to your brand's color guidelines is a key tenet of good design. Luckily you don't have to sacrifice the elegance of your brand's color palette in order to provide an inclusive visual experience.

Color contrast has always been a key aspect of accessible design, because people with low vision or color blindness struggle to read text, discern links or see that buttons are in a highlighted state if there isn't adequate contrast in the color scheme. This is especially true if they're viewing their screen or phone in extra bright light (outdoors, for example) or dim light.

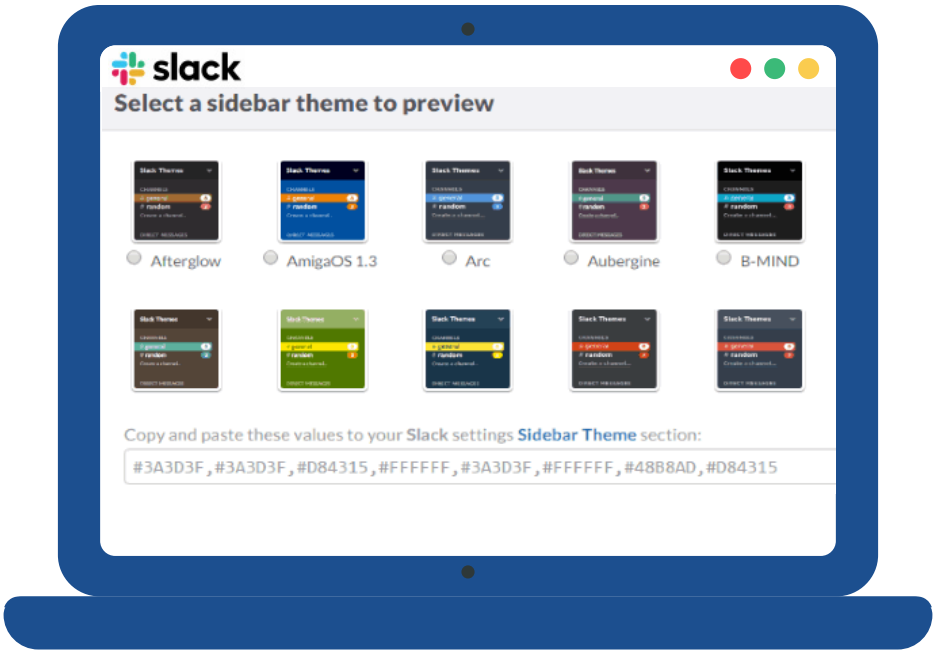


There are a few simple options:

- Make sure there's **adequate contrast** (at least 3:1) between linked text and body text.
- Add **underlines or bold styling** that indicates when links or buttons are hovered.
- Provide an easy-to-find option where users can **toggle a high-contrast** color scheme.



In some cases, this may mean reviewing your brand guidelines and making minor adjustments to your secondary colors to ensure your color palette is accessible. Often, simply deepening the shade of a chosen color is enough to make the color accessible.



Slack offers multiple color scheme options for its interface, including high contrast options and two color schemes specifically for people with the most common types of colorblindness. By providing these choices, Slack allows the organizations and groups that use their app to deliver an accessible experience for all users.

06 Video Described

Video is an increasingly big part of digital experiences—and, of course, more and more people get their movies, TV shows and news online and via apps. Captions and audio descriptions are an important tool for people who are both hearing and visually impaired, allowing them to fully experience video.

Here's where we hope to inspire you, rather than add another to-do to your video production checklist. Take a look at this fabulous example of audio description from Disney—the masters of storytelling.

Visual impairment isn't the only disability to consider. People with auditory, mobility, or cognitive challenges can also have difficulty navigating digital media.

Narrator: "The snowman puts himself back together again, and glumly considers his nose-less state."

Disney's Frozen Trailer with Audio Description is a wonderful example of audio description for a story told almost entirely visually. There's no dialogue whatsoever in the video, only music and sounds as two animated characters, Olaf the snowman and Sven the reindeer, slip and slide over an icy pond. The narration in the accessible version not only provides a description of what's happening on screen, it's vivid and engaging, fitting the tone and spirit of the video.

Viewers with visual impairments may not see the video, but they still get as rich and entertaining an experience as everyone else—which is the ultimate goal of any audio description.

Design for everyone, **without compromise**

Meeting everyone's needs without compromising the quality, beauty and functionality of your digital media may seem daunting, but it's easier than you think—especially with the right guidance and expertise.

At **Perkins Access**, we live and breathe inclusive digital design. We know the best digital experiences are designed with accessibility in mind from the start.

When you partner with us, you'll have an end product that everyone can enjoy. We'll show your team how to insert digital accessibility into your design and development process, making sure your digital experience meets the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). And we'll bring the user perspective from people with disabilities, so you can gain real insights into how this audience experiences your mobile app or website.

Most important, we'll provide actionable solutions for making your digital experiences as inclusive as they are compelling, for everyone. Learn more at **PerkinsAccess.org**. Contact us at **Access@Perkins.org**

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