Challenges and possibilities when using screen readers

An end-user survey

Summary in English

The Swedish Organization of the Visually Impaired, SRF, has conducted a survey on which challenges end-users encounter when using computers, smart phones and tablets for daily tasks such as mailing, word processing, surfing on the web, using calendar apps etc. Questions regarding screen-reader usage in education and at work were also asked.

Information regarding the survey was published in an internal email newsletter from the president of SRF. The survey was also distributed through mailing lists and Facebook groups for visually impaired people in Sweden during the summer of 2019.

The respondents could either fill in a web form or submit their answers by phone. (However, no answers were submitted by phone.) 92 people from all over the country replied to the survey.

Results

Several participants in the survey claim to have lost their jobs – or to have been forced to change careers – due to inaccessible apps or systems. Similarly, some student respondents in the survey have had to personally modify their educations to compensate for lacking accessibility.

Most comments relate to changes dealing with complicated webpages and web applications rather than specific screen reader issues.

Conclusion

We believe there is a serious lack of knowledge on how to deal with assistive technology, apps etc. among a minority of the respondents. In order to prevent marginalization and unemployment, rehabilitation programs run by the regional centres for the visually impaired need to be updated and adjusted to today's digital society.

In procurement of intranet and other digital systems, public and private employers have to include mandatory accessibility requirements in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 standard and the EN 301 549 European Union standard.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities has to be a mandatory subject on UX and developer degrees.

Screen readers have to be improved and developed when new digital services and innovations arrive.

We also believe in an increased dialog and collaboration between screen reader developers, software developers, OS developers, and the disability movement worldwide.

Keywords

Disability, blind, accessibility, #a11y, digitalization, assistive technology, screenreader, rehabilitation, marginalisation

Synskadades Riksförbund
Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired