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# New technology drives an accessible content future

An innovative toolbar that revolutionises the ease and speed of creating accessible documents in Microsoft Word has been launched, on International Day of People with Disability.

Created by Vision Australia, a leading national provider of blindness and low vision services in Australia, with funding from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), the Document Accessibility Toolbar (DAT) supports organisations to embrace accessibility as ‘business as usual’ at no cost.

Vision Australia’s National Manager of Digital Access, Neil King said the DAT is a technological advancement that will help to address the growing demand for accessible information, by putting the power of accessible functionality into the hands of content authors.

“Equal access to information, regardless of ability, is a human right and is essential for all individuals to participate fully in society. With over one billion people with disability around the world, and a global ageing population, organisations have to find smarter ways of delivering their information so that their audiences can access it,” said Neil.

“Organisations primarily use Microsoft Word to create documents and share information. Microsoft Word contains a number of accessibility features however people may not know what they are or how they should use them to respond to their audiences’ accessibility needs.

“The DAT, which is free to download, takes accessibility to a new level by building on Microsoft Word’s existing accessibility features to make the process of creating a truly accessible document, simpler and faster.”

When downloaded, the DAT sits as a dedicated ribbon tab in Microsoft Word. As a content author creates a document, they can work through each of the hand-picked and custom-built functions within the ribbon to ensure accessibility of the final document. Once the document is completed, the content author can then validate its accessibility in real time.

A document created with the DAT also contains the essential components required for easy conversion to accessible PDF or HTML, thereby extending the reach of accessible information and reducing remediation efforts.

Microsoft Australia’s Corporate Affairs Manager, David Masters sees the DAT playing an important role in raising awareness of accessibility within organisations.

“Microsoft Office has had a strong focus on supporting the creation of accessible documents for many years,” said David.

“The DAT helps to expose many of the accessibility features in Microsoft Word and demonstrates just how easy it is to make documents accessible to everyone.”

“Technology is levelling the playing field for people with disabilities or age-related impairment. The DAT gives a content author confidence that the information they are communicating is accessible to any person who may need to receive and action it. The DAT is yet another leading innovation from Vision Australia that enables greater inclusion,” concluded Neil.

# Further information

## About the DAT

* The DAT has been released as a fully functional and stable beta version.
* The final release of the DAT will coincide with the launch of the accompanying eLearning course in early 2016.
* Key features include:
* A built-in screen reader that enables a content author to simulate the experience of a person who is blind or has low vision.
* A table wizard that automates header column and row mark-up.
* An alternative text wizard that prompts a content author to apply alternative text when an image is inserted.
* A colour contrast tool that helps a content author to find colour combinations with insufficient colour contrast and rectify them.
* A Word-to-HTML converter that produces HTML without Microsoft’s proprietary code and facilitates conversion to accessible HTML.

## About Vision Australia

Vision Australia is a leading national provider of blindness and low vision services in Australia. We work in partnership with Australians who are blind or have low vision to help them achieve the possibilities they choose in life.

Our Digital Access consultancy is internationally-recognised as an industry leader in online accessibility. Specialising in web accessibility consulting, training, and testing, Digital Access helps organisations to understand the importance of accessibility, and how to successfully and sustainably implement it in their digital projects.

Digital Access consultancy is:

* A long-standing member of the W3C (World Web Consortium) and contributor to the WCAG 2.0 specification.
* An Australian Founding Member of the IAAP (International Association of Accessibility Professionals).
* The creator of the internationally renowned Web Accessibility Toolbar for Internet Explorer.
* The author of the The Australian Government’s study into the Accessibility of the Portable Document Format for People with a Disability (2010 and 2013).

## About ACCAN

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](http://www.accan.org.au/)) represents individual, not-for-profit organisations and small business consumers in the telecommunications marketplace. ACCAN focuses on goods and services in the converging areas of telecommunications, the internet and broadcasting, including both current and emerging technologies.

The Document Accessibility Toolbar project was funded under the competitive ACCAN [Grants Scheme](http://www.accan.org.au/grants).