



# Virtual Vision Technologies

[www.VirtualVisionTech.com](http://www.VirtualVisionTech.com)

Since 1991 Incorporated as Young Opportunities, Ltd

Workplace accessibility for people with disabilities  
Access solutions that *work*.

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## Defining Accessibility:

**“Compliance”... “Accessibility”... “Usability”**

What is **Accessibility**? Of the Three Words, this one is most common and generally understood. It can be the “umbrella” under which the other two are located, but it has its own particular connotations too. Specifically, accessibility, means ensuring that a technology or Content-type is usable and Consumable by all audiences. Normally, Websites and computer applications are described as **accessible** or **inaccessible**.

In the simplest terms, **Accessibility** means ensuring access to the degree that it is possible.

**“Digital Accessibility”** refers to computer applications and digital media, either commercial or proprietary (“Proprietary application” refers to a computer application designed and developed by an employer for specific and particular needs of the work place to gather, save and distribute data.)

Drilling down into digital accessibility, the term **“Web Accessibility”** then means that people with disabilities can use Web content and applications. More specifically, Web Accessibility means that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web or Websites, and that they can contribute to the Web.

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## What is “Compliance?”

The word *Compliance* is used for the purpose of this discussion, but realize that it refers to a technical standard (Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act), which is set by the US Federal government. Further analysis of the Section 508 standards can be found at the official website:

<http://www.access-board.gov/508.htm>

**What is Section508?**

Section 508 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the Federal government be accessible to people with disabilities.

On August 7, 1998, the President signed into law the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which includes the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Section 508 was originally added to the Rehabilitation Act in 1986; the 1998 amendments significantly expand and strengthen the technology access requirements in Section 508. See:

- [Section508 FAQ](#) from [www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov)
- [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov) web site

The following is an excerpt from the Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards Web site [www.access-board.gov/sec508/508standards.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/508standards.htm):

"Section 508 requires that when Federal agencies develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology, they shall ensure that the electronic and information technology allows Federal employees with disabilities to have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of information and data by Federal employees who are not individuals with disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency. Section 508 also requires that individuals with disabilities, who are members of the public seeking information or services from a Federal agency, have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to that provided to the public who are not individuals with disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency."

In its barest form, **Compliance** refers to the federal government standards set forth in this Section of the Rehabilitation Act, and its amendments. Compliance then is the basic standard for **Accessibility** so that a minimum standard is described by law. The definitions of compliance are periodically examined and adjusted, but compliance is the basic minimum definition of Accessibility and should not be understood as anything but the **basic foundation** upon which so much more can and should be constructed.

**Important Note** – The preceding information about **508 Compliance** applies to all federal government agencies only, but then on September, 2006 "508 Compliance" standards were pushed into the private sector by a class action suit against Target brought by the National Federation of the Blind in a California District Court. Therefore, since that decision, all of the **Compliance** standards now apply to the private sector too.

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## What is “Usability?”

“**Usability**” means making products and systems easier to use, and matching them more closely to user needs and requirements.

The international standard, [ISO 9241-11](#), provides guidance on usability and defines it as: “The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use.”

### Usability is about:

- Effectiveness - can user’s complete tasks achieve goals with the product, i.e. do what they want to do?
- Efficiency - how much effort do users require to do this? (Often measured in time)
- Satisfaction – what do users think about the products ease of use?

....which is all affected by:

The users - who is using the product? E.g. are they highly trained and experienced users, or novices?

Their goals - what are the users trying to do with the product - does it support what they want to do with it?

The usage situation (or 'context of use') - where and how is the product being used?

**Usability** is the level of accessibility that should be the goal of all product design and development. It allows the disabled user to operate at a level of efficiency and productivity that is competitive with the non-disabled user. This is desirable in all circumstances and a necessity in the mainstream workplace. As an example, an accessible or compliant web page may allow the disabled user to find a desired link by tabbing sequentially through the links, but adding appropriate headers to the web page allows the disabled user to quickly isolate and identify the target link.

**Usability** should not be confused with 'functionality', however, as this is purely concerned with the functions and features of the product and has no bearing on whether users are able to use them or not. Increased functionality does not mean improved usability!

See also: [http://www.usabilitynet.org/management/b\\_what.htm](http://www.usabilitynet.org/management/b_what.htm)

Again, the primary word **Accessibility** can really be broken down into three words, *compliance, accessibility, and usability*—each bringing something different to the table. **Compliance** introduces the basic (minimum) standard for access. **Accessibility** presumes a given content type can technically be completely accessed, though it may not be effective or efficient access. **Usability** refines the definition of access to the fullest extent from the real-world performance perspective of the actual user of access technology (screen magnification, screen reading, alternative input devices, etc).