

TEDICORE submission

to

Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts Discussion Paper on a Review of the structure and operation of the .au Internet domain

Background

TEDICORE (Telecommunications and Disability Consumer Representation) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper on the review of the structure and operation of the .au Internet domain.

TEDICORE is the voice on telecommunications of Australia's peak organisations of people with disabilities and is supported by the Commonwealth through the "Grants to Fund Telecommunications Consumer Representations" program of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. TEDICORE is administered by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. It represents the interests of people with a disability in relation to telecommunications issues and promotes equity and accessibility. A Project Advisory Body with members from peak disability bodies such as Australian Association of the Deaf, Deafness Forum of Australia, Physical Disability Council of Australia, Women with Disabilities Australia, Blind Citizens Australia and Communication Aid Users Society ensure that there is broad representation.

Introduction

TEDICORE believes that .au Domain Administration (auDA) is well-run and offers value to the Internet industry and community in Australia.

TEDICORE's submission will focus on particular strategies that auDA could undertake in future in order to assist in making the Internet more accessible for people with disabilities.

This is timely as the United Nations marks 3rd December each year as the International Day of People with a Disability and this year's theme is e-accessibility.

(<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/iddp2006.htm>)

One of the key areas is accessibility to websites. There are international web content accessibility guidelines as well as authoring tool accessibility guidelines developed by W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium. (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>)

These web content accessibility guidelines are referred to in the Australian Government's Minimum Website Standards for Australian Government agency websites.

(<http://www.agimo.gov.au/practice/mws/accessibility>)

auDA has the possibility of assisting to further promote website accessibility in Australia. TEDICORE will address this issue under question 3f.

Question 3f Do auDA's principal purposes and activities, as codified in the auDA Constitution, fully reflect the needs of the Australian Internet community, and position auDA to best deliver on these needs?

People with disabilities comprise 20% of the population according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. As our population ages, the number of people with functional limitations will increase.

People with disabilities live in all areas of Australia, conduct their own businesses, work in the government, commercial and community sector and span a broad range of occupations and interests. People with disabilities are students, employees and employers. In other words, people with disabilities are an integral part of Australian society and contribute significantly to Australia's economy and are keen to participate in the digital economy.

However, there are barriers for people with disabilities in accessing IT and communications products and services. For example, some websites do not yet meet the international web content accessibility guidelines. This means that blind people cannot read (through speech output) the information on their screens. There are people with other disabilities who may be locked out from particular websites by poor design.

A well-known complaint of discrimination was successfully brought against the Sydney Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (SOCOG) under the Disability Discrimination Act because a blind person was unable to use the Sydney Olympics website.

To ensure that this type of situation is lessened, proactive strategies for achieving web accessibility in the private sector are important.

TEDICORE recommends that auDA develop a policy together with AusRegistry to promote, raise awareness and positively encourage website accessibility.

auDA and AusRegistry are in a unique position to do this. This can be a policy set by auDA and delivered by AusRegistry to all domain name registrars and resellers. Through this process, registrars and resellers would provide information about the importance of website accessibility as part of the registration process. It means that developers of websites are alerted to website accessibility at the initial stages of website design and construction when a new domain is being registered.

TEDICORE believes that this is a positive and proactive approach to increase website accessibility in Australia.

Conclusion

TEDICORE will be pleased to offer assistance in developing this new policy so that the Australian Internet community including people with disabilities may derive maximum benefit from website usage.

The United Nations Secretary-General's message on the International Day of People with a Disability this year stated "Access to information and communication technologies creates opportunities for all people, perhaps none more so than persons with disabilities."

TEDICORE endorses this message and believes that auDA can, through inclusive policies, create further opportunities for people with disabilities.

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