Case Stories: 508 Compliance

Following the Accessible Electronic Documents Community of Practice (AED COP) guide, Edwards established standardization across Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint based files produced by contractors and stored on CMS' SharePoint.

Challenge — Section 508 Compliance for Standardization and Accessibility

Section 508 mandates all electronic federal government artifacts be accessible to those with disabilities, per the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The implementation of this nondiscriminatory law drives consistency and standardization for software, documentation, and websites, as well as other internal and external government artifacts. In supporting internal operations and external beneficiaries for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), 508 compliance cannot be overlooked.

Edwards Performance Solutions (Edwards) determined CMS' Office of Information Technology (OIT) needed to establish a practice to confirm no obstacles precluded interaction with or access to artifacts on the CMS SharePoint site for those with disabilities. When documents are correctly categorized, labelled, tagged, titled, and formatted using standardized conventions; every team member has equal access to information.

Solution — Operational Compliance Mechanism

After determining non-compliant artifacts, new file naming conventions – eliminating underscores – were pursued for all CMS SharePoint documents. Edwards created an 'Authoring and Evaluation Guide,' or cheat sheet, to meet CMS and Health and Human Services business requirements. This cheat sheet allows users to easily create and tag documents using 508 standards. Following stringent quality assurance practices, Edwards also leveraged the JAWS (Job Access with Speech) screen reader tool – certifying blind and visually impaired users can easily access documents using its text to speech output.

Contractor team members were made aware of 508 requirements via knowledge management sessions, ensuring consistent document and content management processes (i.e., accurately posting and labelling artifacts on CMS SharePoint sites). Edwards worked with CMS to create content rich SharePoint based storage with proper template and artifact categorization; making document libraries readily available based on 508 principles and standards.

In addition to document accessibility, web-based content/applications necessitate supplemental development and distribution requirements. As a developer of eLearning courseware, Edwards followed and implemented Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Standard web-based compliance includes voice recordings, searchable text, textual description of images, and integration with keyboard shortcuts; however, CMS also mandates specific guidelines regarding browser availability and operating system constraints. Per Edwards' endorsement, CMS also requires independent desktop accessibility testing to verify section 508 adherence before courseware is distributed agency-wide.

Benefit — Advocacy and Enterprise-Wide Compliance

Edwards created, standardized, distributed, and furnished How To guides and tip sheets to assist contractor and sub-contractors in maintaining compliance; also equipping them with tools and processes for better tracking and reporting. Advocacy for using Edwards established authoring guides, cheat sheets, and document checklists provide standardization throughout CMS and enable users to easily create accessible documents.

Standardized templates and naming conventions allow for further development and improvement, while maintaining consistency for future programs. Similar practices were observed and implemented in other Edwards CMS programs, including CMMI and CPI projects, Digital Mail, as well as CAPMS and Project Management eLearning courses.

About Edwards

Edwards Performance Solutions helps clients increase operational performance by finding ways to improve productivity, profitability, and security. With two decades of experience working with both government and commercial clients, we ensure operational excellence to drive overall mission success.

Take Note

- Basic Authoring and Testing Guidelines/Checklists as established by section508.gov were used to test Microsoft Word documents

- Recyclable accessible format templates were generated to decrease the level of effort in creating accessible electronic content in the future

- Knowledge Management sessions advocated authoring tools and cheat sheets, empowering users to effortlessly craft accessible formatted documents

- WCAG drove Edwards' web-based technical approach, development tools, and courseware functionality to support accessibility

- During our 508 compliance review, Edwards also upgraded CMS' existing tools (e.g., Microsoft Office or Adobe Acrobat) to the latest version

EDWARDS
PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS