



Accessibility Advocates Sign Open Letter Urging People Not To Use AccessiBe and Other Overlay Products

[Sarah Gooding](#) · May 13, 2021 · [11 Comments](#)

AccessiBe and other similar tools are coming under fire after more than 400 accessibility advocates and developers signed an [open letter](#) calling on the industry to unite against the use of accessibility overlay products. These overlay “widgets” are technologies that apply third-party code to the front end in an attempt to automate repairs after sites launch without having accessibility baked in from the design phase.

A major part of the complaint is that these products are often marketed as quick-fix solutions that will make a website ADA compliant and immune from legal action. For example, the [accessiBe](#) website advertises the product as: “*The #1 Automated Web Accessibility Solution for ADA & WCAG Compliance...A single line of code for 24/7 automated compliance.*” Similarly, [EqualWeb](#)

advertises making sites accessible by inserting “one line of code” to gain “compliance with WCAG 2.1, ADA, Section 508, AODA, EN 301549 and IS 5568.”

Sponsors and signatories have published a four-part statement condemning the use of these products as anything more than a temporary solution:

1. *We will never advocate, recommend, or integrate an overlay which deceptively markets itself as providing automated compliance with laws or standards.*
2. *We will always advocate for the remediation of accessibility issues at the source of the original error.*
3. *We will refuse to stay silent when overlay vendors use deception to market their products.*
4. *More specifically, we hereby advocate for the removal of accessiBe, AudioEye, UserWay, User1st, MK-Sense, MaxAccess, FACIL’iti, and all similar products and encourage the site owners who’ve implemented these products to use more robust, independent, and permanent strategies to making their sites more accessible.*

Accessibility practitioners are urging developers and site owners to abandon any overlay solutions they put in place, in favor of those that address inaccessibility at the root of the problem.

The document lists numerous first-hand accounts of people with disabilities struggling to use websites that have implemented overlays. Although the letter includes various products like Userway, EqualWeb, AudioEye, User1st, MaxAccess, FACIL'iti, and Purple Lens, nearly every struggling person cited accessiBe as the problem.

 **Amanda J. Rush** @cswordpr... · Feb 26, 2021 
Replying to @WilfSplodNokit
I don't even want to think about it.

 **Richie**
@WilfSplodNokit

I finally managed to gain access to my [@NameCheap](#) account by blocking [#AccessiBe](#) in my Windows Hosts file. I should not need to do this to use the Internet. AccessiBe needs to [AccessiBeGone](#)

8:46 PM · Feb 26, 2021 

 **Holly Scott-Gardner**  @CatchTheseWords · Feb 25, 2021 
Replying to @CatchTheseWords
Neither version of the page, with screen-reader mode on using [#AccessiBe](#), or off using the default settings, is great. There are significant problems with both of them.

 **Holly Scott-Gardner** 
@CatchTheseWords

When [#AccessiBe](#) is enabled, the page is flooded with headings. Lots of heading level 2's. The title of each phone remains a heading in both versions of the page, but with it enabled, things like cost, display, and all the other

components of the tables become headings as well.

7:31 AM · Feb 25, 2021



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AccessiBe is one of the more widely known overlay products after the company [raised \\$28 million](#) earlier this year. It is also the subject of a cogent exposition on the [dangers of using overlay products and expecting not to get sued](#), an article cited in the document. More recently, accessiBe gained notoriety in the WordPress world after [WordPress.org removed a collection of fake reviews](#) from the plugin's page. The plugin is currently installed on approximately 4,000 websites. Competitors UserWay and EqualWeb have 40,000 and 1,000 active installs of their WordPress plugins but don't seem to be as well known when compared to accessiBe's aggressive marketing.

The creators of the document began adding signatures in March 2021. Several prominent WordPress accessibility contributors and experts are signatories on the document, including Joe Dolson, Rian Rietveld, Amanda Rush, Luc Poupard, and Gary Jones. Check out the full [document](#) for a more in-depth history of web accessibility overlays and why experts believe they are negatively impacting user experience on websites that implement them.

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11 Comments



Jakob

[May 13, 2021, 10:42 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

Nice article, thanks Sarah

So as Joe Dolson has signed the document, I can assume that I do nothing wrong having his plugin “WP Accessibility” installed?

Thanks

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Joe Dolson

[Report](#)

[May 21, 2021, 1:44 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

WP Accessibility does act as an overlay, but only in very WordPress-specific ways, and they’re only applied if the problem is definitely there. That said, WP Accessibility should

be treated as a stopgap; if it's fixing problems on your site, the ideal path is to fix the problems.

WP Accessibility is definitely not an overlay that should cause accessibility problems (although I won't claim it's impossible), but accessibility is best fixed at the source, and there are a lot of things WP Accessibility does that fix problems after the fact, like an overlay.

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Guido

[May 14, 2021, 8:35 AM](#) · [Reply](#)

So why are plugins such as AccessiBe still listed at wp dot org?

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Ryan Bradford

[May 14, 2021, 1:14 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

One issue that's driving the popularity of programs like this is CA rulings allowing companies to be sued for damages for the lack of accessibility. Companies are either having to use expensive

services to analyze their sites for compliance or potentially be sued by bad actors. The overall goal really should be for individuals to provide accessibility feedback to companies, allow companies to implement changes, and only allow further actions against those who don't take the necessary actions to resolve issues. Damages for individuals should never be involved if the ultimate goal is for an individual to seek for accessibility

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Ruth

[Report](#)

[May 15, 2021, 10:33 AM](#) · [Reply](#)

Agree but unfortunately many companies still don't want to foot the added expense of becoming compliant unless legality is involved. Many talk a good talk until the numbers are shown and ironically it's often the large organizations. Agree there are ambulance chasers out there that make accessibility in general as our note to some. Unfortunate situation.

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▶ [In reply to Ruth](#)

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Jaeson

[May 16, 2021, 9:29 AM](#) · [Reply](#)

no offense, but there are MANY sue happy persons with disabilities. While applaud the community for trying to make

websites and building and whatnot accessible, being sue-happy just makes business owners poor and angry. There needs to be a way to ask to change things without the threat of a lawsuit. Some people end up going out of business due to this kind of nonsense. How does that benefit anyone? It doesn't!

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John Crenner

[May 14, 2021, 2:04 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

Irresponsibly and HORRIBLY written article on such an important topic!! The article correctly mentions the importance of accessibility and positions that accessibility should be baked into the website itself, but yet the article focuses only on the shortcomings of overlays vs actually proposing real, actionable solutions for web developers.

Accessibility is a real problem that must be addressed – correctly. But we will never resolve the problem by irresponsibly publishing woefully incomplete articles that offer no solutions or alternatives to the current poor practice of overlays.

Disappointing.

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Brent

[May 14, 2021, 2:57 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

The article doesn't give solutions because the alternative to an automated solution is a manual one. For most website owners that means every time they put up a new page, they have to pay their dev to make sure the page follows all the rules. And it's not just when they add content, just editing the layout of a page can kill compliance.

To compound the problem, as Ryan Bradford pointed out, the rash of ADA compliance law suits by bad actors is skyrocketing. Business owners have to protect themselves as best they can.

It's also fairly important to point out that users had issues with certain websites, not all websites that use this type of overlay technology. Garbage in, garbage out. Most websites using these services don't have the issues mentioned here. The sites that do have issues should be reported to the site owner or to the service provider so they can fix the issues.

These services are not going away unless someone figures out a better way to automate the process. Better to help fix the issues

they have and make the UX better on those sites than to try to kill the services themselves.

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Val

[May 14, 2021, 3:01 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

For all of the commenters doom posting that accessibility is so hard and expensive or that heaven forbid, this article expect web developers be able to Google and figure out topics on their own, there are plenty of resources!

Deque is world class in the a11y space, here is their open source library to run tests! <https://github.com/dequelabs/axe-core>
Even easier, Lighthouse is a usability tool in Google Dev Tools built on top of it, with lots of actionable accessibility audits!

<https://web.dev/accessibility-scoring/>

The w3 has a bunch of specs on web accessibility!

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/>

This is all very doable if you just put in the time.

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Bev Willis

[May 14, 2021, 4:08 PM](#) · [Reply](#)

Please provide the names of the companies that we can use to be ADA compliant.

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Raghavendra Satish Peri

[Report](#)

[May 15, 2021, 7:44 AM](#) · [Reply](#)

Hello,

Here are lists of accessibility companies that provide variety of services,

<https://www.digitala11y.com/digital-accessibility-agencies-roundup/>

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Thank you Justin for pointing that out....



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Thank you for your observation, this has...

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