IPSOS VIEWS

ACCESSIBLE ONLINE BANKING

Closing the compliance gap and winning new customers

Yana Beranek

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Introduction

Many banks are encouraging customers to use their websites and apps to learn about, apply for, and manage their financial products. This digital transformation has been good for businesses by reducing costs related to live customer support and retail footprints. In some cases, however, it has made access to banking more difficult for people with disabilities. If online banking is not designed to use the built-in accessibility features of smartphones and doesn't work well with assistive technology, people who rely on these tools to access websites and apps are effectively blocked from using them. Data shows that 57% of people with disabilities rate the accessibility of a provider's website as a top consideration in their choice of provider and accounts for personal banking and insurance.[1]

In this paper, we outline the importance of accessible online banking for people with disabilities, the risks associated with non-compliance, and provide recommendations for banks to create more inclusive digital experiences.

In less than six months, on June 28th, 2025, the **European Accessibility Act (EAA)** comes into force and banks who do business in the EU will have to make sure that their online banking websites and apps are accessible for everyone. Yet, statistics show that 96% of homepages have accessibility issues that create obstacles to usage for people with disabilities.[2] The guidelines for digital accessibility are laid out in the **Web Consortium Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2)** and are broken down into four attributes: **perceivable, operable, understandable** and **robust** (POUR).

WCAG 2.2 Requirement	What it means	Example
PERCEIVABLE	Information and interactions must be presented in ways that users can discern	Assistive technology should be able to find each interactive element on a webpage
OPERABLE	All UI components and navigation must be usable for people with disabilities	All checkboxes should be able to be activated with a keyboard stroke or combination of keystrokes
UNDERSTANDABLE	Users must be able to figure out the content and operation of the site or app	The reading level of the content should not be too advanced for the intended audience
ROBUST	Content should be able to be interpreted by a wide variety of assistive technology and other user agents	Assistive technology should be able to identify the function of a button and allow the user to select the button to take action

Current accessibility audits fail to find many of the issues

To determine if a digital asset like a website or app complies with the WCAG 2.2 requirements, many businesses rely on automated accessibility scanners to audit the individual pages of their websites or apps and find errors that should be remediated. Unfortunately, these types of scanners only catch 20-40% of the accessibility errors on webpages because they do not effectively check for all the requirements of WCAG due to how their rules are written to review the code. The best automated audits will use multiple rules sets to capture more of the issues but there are still going to be gaps.

Those gaps occur, in some part, because automated scanners check individual pages for errors, but they can't examine multi-step processes that take place across different pages. That means that processes like applying for a credit card or registering for an online account are often not evaluated by scanners. Scanners also fail to account for individual context of use like the interactions of more than one type of assistive technology being used at the same time which can create issues of incompatibility. To understand these types of accessibility issues, you also need to gather real, human insights, or risk falling short in creating accessible experiences.

Brands can deepen customer relationships, drive referrals and build positive public perception by addressing gaps in the accessibility of their digital experiences.

The risks of non-compliance with EAA can be costly

The upcoming EAA regulatory enforcement adds urgency to the need for accessibility research. With the new rules, people in the EU will have formal means to report accessibility issues they experience to the compliance authorities in each member state. And the penalties can be steep. Here are some examples of the penalties that different countries have developed.[3]

- **Belgium:** fines ranging from €1,000 to €50,000. Continuous non-compliance could lead to business suspension.
- **France:** penalties of up to €250,000 for failing to make public-facing platforms accessible.
- **Italy:** penalties of up to 5% of the non-compliant organisation's turnover, or between €5,000 and €40,000.
- **Germany:** failure to comply with the EAA can lead to fines of up to €100,000.

These penalties are just one risk for businesses dealing with the new EAA rules. Other risks include damage to brand perception through bad reviews or press about accessibility failures.

A recent Ipsos survey showed that while only 36% of respondents say they are familiar with the issues faced by people with disabilities who try to use websites and apps, a sizeable majority (75%) feel that it's an important issue for brands to address, including 41% who say it's very important.[4] Brands can deepen customer relationships, drive referrals and build positive public perception by addressing gaps in the accessibility of their digital experiences.

There is also the possibility of losing market share if competitors are delivering an accessible online banking experience. According to the World Health Organization, over 16% of people globally live with a disability.[5] In Europe, the percentage is even higher at 26.8%[6] and continues to grow as the population ages. People with disabilities have upwards of $2.6 trillion[7] in disposable income in North America and Europe alone and often choose where to do business based on whether products and services are accessible. They also use recommendations from other people with similar disabilities to identify brands that provide accessible experiences.

Accessible research has not been the mainstay

Historically, people with disabilities have not been widely included in product research as companies build their digital experiences. Common reasons included a failure to plan for the time and costs needed to include people with disabilities, challenges with recruiting and conducting research, and a lack of accessibility expertise in research and design teams. Without inclusive research, there will be gaps in how well businesses understand what they need to deliver to ensure that digital experiences are inclusive for all users.

At Ipsos, we strive to create inclusive research experiences that bring a diverse array of lived experiences to our insights. These efforts include conducting research with people with disabilities to explore how websites and apps can be designed better for people who use assistive technology and other accommodations to access online experiences. This type of research is becoming critical for businesses as more countries implement regulations that require online experiences to be accessible to all users.

Critical barriers in online banking reduce usage by people with disabilities

To understand what financial services companies can do to create more accessible experiences, we tested two online banking sites with people who are blind/low vision, d/Deaf and hard of hearing, mobility impaired and neurodivergent. We asked them to complete common, critical banking tasks using popular banking websites in the US and UK and we found recurring pain points that make it hard for people with different types of disabilities to use online services.

For people who rely on screen readers or voice controls, five common problems occurred that can be traced back to the WCAG 2.2 requirements:

1 **Choosing products was overcomplicated:** Users had to click through multiple screens to find and compare products, such as credit cards and savings accounts, before completing the application process. Extra clicks mean extra time and more work for people who use assistive tech which could stop them from completing tasks, and cause them to drop out before applying. **(Understandable)**

2 **Lack of standard common controls**: When common controls did not have standard interactions, users lost confidence and could not anticipate how their assistive tech will work with the site. For example, on one site, links to additional information containing terms and conditions, interest rates and benefits weren't always labelled so it was not always clear when the user would be able to take action from a link. This could result in users lacking understanding about the financial implication of the products they're interested in. **(Operable)**

3 **Cluttered pages mix new product offers with critical banking tasks:** Too much content and cluttered page layouts resulted in overwhelming chatter from screen readers reading all the extra content. Users struggled to understand what content is most important and what the critical 'calls-to-action' were to complete their tasks. Too much content also made it difficult for neurodivergent users to focus on the critical workflows. **(Understandable)**

4 **Lack of colour contrast:** The colour contrast on the sites did not make it easy for users with low vision to see the content and controls to customise the experience, like changing the background or font colours in the websites, were not easy to access if they were even available on a site. **(Perceivable)**

5 **Basic HTML for accessibility:** Websites still lack the correct computer coding to help users navigate and operate the sites. Users with disabilities will struggle to have an experience equal to users who are not disabled unless the HTML of the site, which controls what is displayed on a user's computer or smartphone

screen, is architected to support screen readers and other assistive tech. Here are examples of issues caused by poorly coded sites.

- Carousel tiles are hard to control because they move without warning and tiles don't have labels so users don't know what they are interacting with. This results in users with disabilities missing out on important calls-to-action, such as pre-approval checks and sign-up bonuses. **(Robust and Operable)**

- Images lack alt-text or have inadequate descriptions that fail to convey the important information the image contributes to the content. This is a common problem when graphs and charts are used to convey complex financial information. **(Perceivable and Understandable)**

- Headers are not used in a clear and systematic way which makes navigation hard because the assistive technology cannot help the user understand how content on the site or app is organised. **(Operable)**

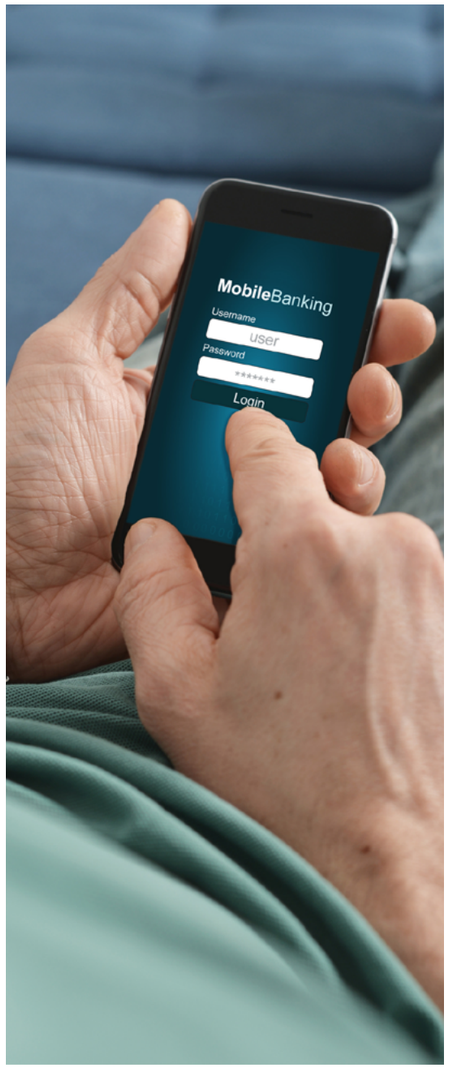
For users whose first language is any form of sign language, two issues were common and need to be accounted for in the overall design of the banking websites.

1 **Banking terms are hard for users who speak English as a second language:** English and written languages are second languages for people who sign, so it is important that written content is stripped back, and word choice is simple to aid comprehension. Financial terminology and account details should be delivered in clear, simple language to help users make informed product choices. **(Understandable)**

2 **Accessible sign language support needs to be available for online banking:** For users who needed support in sign language, assistance was hard to find and access. People with disabilities that reduce their mobility may not be able to go into a retail banking location for assistance so online assistance should be provided for those who need it. **(Robust)**

SEVEN WAYS

to make digital banking experiences more accessible



1

Engage people with disabilities during the product development process to make sure that issues around accessibility are addressed before they become problematic. At Ipsos, we start by co-creating research with people with disabilities and building in time and budget for accommodating diverse sample in our studies.

2

Prioritise the most important content, like product features and comparisons, prominently on each page, to help users find the right banking product for their needs. Make less important content available on demand. For example, provide a clear, accessible comparison of credit card rewards, fees, and interest rates, with expandable sections for detailed terms. This approach allows users to focus on critical information while accessing additional content as needed.

3

Establish uniform interaction patterns across all site pages and tasks. For instance, if assistive technology users navigate a loan application using keyboard shortcuts or voice commands, ensure these same methods apply throughout the site, including when accessing account settings or contacting customer support. Consistency helps users efficiently interact with the website.

4

If possible, give the user controls to let them manage colour contrast and font size but avoid accessibility overlays as the solution. Most accessibility overlays interact badly with custom settings and assistive technology so user controls should be independently managed rather than part of an overlay solution.

5

Make sure your web development teams are trained in how to write accessible code and have support from the product team to ensure alt-text for images, buttons and other critical screen elements are written to provide users with useful content in the context of the tasks they are trying to complete. For example, include descriptive alt-text for images of financial graphs, explaining what the graph illustrates, to make the content understandable for screen reader users.

6

Lean into new developments in accessible technologies and build in functionality into the features of the site or app rather than making users rely on supplemental assistive tech. Features like text-to-voice, on-demand sign language services and tools that let users customise the user interface can reduce barriers and issues for people with disabilities and decrease calls for customer support.

7

Make it easy to access human help. Sometimes, even the best intentions to make a website or app accessible don't match up to the needs of people with disabilities. Or assistive technology can create technical glitches that block users from completing common or critical tasks, like filling out applications or resolving account issues. In those cases, nothing helps like a real person and making it easy to connect with live support will improve conversion rates and increase customer retention and referrals. Ipsos Competition and Markets Authority data[8] shows that consumers perceptions of higher overall service quality can be correlated to a strong branch experience and this is true not just for older customers. Financial Research Survey data shows that this is also important to younger banking customers.

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In summary

Banks need to understand the accessibility gaps in their online banking experiences so improvements can be made to help people with disabilities access services and products. The need is greater than ever as the EAA regulations come into force and businesses must deliver on the promise of accessible digital experiences for all. While accessibility scanners can help provide some visibility to accessibility barriers in online banking experiences, banks need to go further and gather human insights through accessible UX testing.

Our UX team at Ipsos has the experience and expertise you need to tackle this challenge. We've conducted interviews with hundreds of users of assistive technology to learn about the challenges they experience online. And we have the specialist skills required to recruit for, and moderate research with, sensitive populations that require extra time and accommodation when they are sharing their feedback.

Ipsos UX offers a range of accessible UX services, including comprehensive automated + manual audits, testing and research with assistive technology users and those with disabilities. Our expertise goes beyond basic compliance checks to deliver real-world insights and create genuinely inclusive digital experiences, ensuring your business is not only compliant but also truly serves everyone.

Endnotes

1 Business Disability Forum. Banking and Insurance: What disabled consumers choose to buy and why, 2022

2 WebAim. The WebAim Million, 2024

3 Recite Me. European Accessibility Act Fines: How to Mitigate against an EAA lawsuit

4 Ipsos. The Ipsos Consumer Tracker, fielded October 29 – 30, 2024 among 1,085 US adults.

5 World Health Organization. Disability factsheet

6 Eurostat. EU statistics on income and living conditions, 2023

7 The Return on Disability Group. The Global Economics of Disability Report, 2024

8 Ipsos. Personal banking service quality survey, 2024

Further Reading

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AUTHOR

Yana Beranek,
Global Head of UX,
Ipsos

CONTRIBUTORS

Imogen Brickman,
Global UX Director,
Ipsos

Tim Francis,
Head of Financial Services,
Ipsos in the UK

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