Screen Reader Survey Nets an Overwhelming Response

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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February 25, 2009 by Jo Lynne Lyon

When a team of WebAIM specialists asked screen reader users what they liked, they would have been happy with 100 responses. They received 1100. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents were people with disabilities, and they made several hundred pages of open-ended comments that will keep the team busy analyzing for a long time.

The overwhelming response underscores a theme that comes up often in accessibility: the people who need accessible features should be the ones who decide whether they work. In this case, the survey targeted people who use assistive technology to read computer screens. The Center for Persons with Disabilities’ WebAIM team wanted to know the habits and preferences of that group, in order to advise Web designers on how to make their pages accessible.

They also wanted to know if the screen reader users who responded used the technology because of a disability. The distinction is important because some users are technology evaluators who do not need a reader to access the Internet.

The researchers expected some of the survey’s findings, and they were surprised by others. They discuss it in more depth in this featured story. The survey’s preliminary results are also available.