

The Status of using "Big Eye" Chinese Screen Reader on "Wretch" Blog in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

The "Wretch" Blog (<http://www.wretch.cc/>) is one of the most popular blogs in Taiwan. Through the Chinese screen reader "Big Eye", visual impaired users are able to interact with ordinary people on the "Wretch" Blog. They can share their experience and feeling via their personal space and forum. In general, most functionality of the "Wretch" Blog works well for visual impaired people except some perception transferred by pictures only. However, originally blog systems are developed for ordinary people, and do not concern the usability for visual impaired users. Lack of the concept of accessibility design brings some obstacle to visual impaired people.

When a blog system is designated, the principles of designing web accessibility should be included. Therefore, visual impaired users are able to surf blogs easily. Many suggestions from visual disability are illustrated below to provide the critical issues for designing blogs by referencing "Wretch" Blog. It is hoped that the suggestions are useful for developing new blogs and/or revising existing blogs.

1. Providing valid maps

No matter a real map for space or a virtual sitemap for web navigation. It is important for visual impaired users to reconstruct a temporary psychological "map" for unknown

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space in short time. They are able to "walk" through a particular space only dependent on this "map". For blind people, not like ordinary people can see obstacle by eyes, they only know obstacle exist while they hit it. In a new environment, how to construct valid guiding functionality is one of the most important issues.

Seeing through the service platform of "Wretch" Blog, there is no valid navigation mechanism. It makes the first visits visual impaired users very difficult to use it. They have to explore and experiment by no targets, and spend much more time than ordinary people. It might be good to leverage thought of navigation mechanism, i.e. sitemap, to assist blind people to reconstruct a whole map for better understanding the website. It is not necessary to be too complex. It is good enough only to describe the blocks of the major templates, as well as to explain the hierarchy and the paths of the website.

2. Positioning himself/herself

For unknown web context, visual impaired users usually loose themselves very often. "Searching cue and direction" is a lesson to train blind people who are able to walk independently. In case that they loose direction, they must have some ways to go certain "positions" in their psychological "map". Therefore, they may establish a new direction for future navigation. The idea of using accelerated keys is just the same thought.

3. Locating the major blocks

The major block of web content is usually located at the center of a webpage for most

websites. Visual impaired users may use accelerated key to reach this block directly. Using the “Blinding Scroll Bar” and “Simulating Mouse” functions of “Big Eye” screen reader, they may read the information of Web easily. If the location of the major block of web content is not precise, visual impaired users have to use “TAB” or “SHIFT+TAB” keys to sequentially surf the web content. The navigating process is become very inefficiently. Many screen readers made in Taiwan provide excellent features to read the major block of web content directly. However, not all of web designers leverage standard HTML syntaxes to design their Web. There are no <P> and </P> tags between the major block. Therefore, “Big Eye” with these excellent features is useless. Moreover, though other screen readers with similar features may ignore the hyperlinks to reach the text part directly, however, much irrelative information may be accompanied with those texts.

4. Establishing voice reading mechanism for checking registration

Voice reading mechanism to assist blind people to validate their registered accounts and preserve security issues is established on some Portals in Taiwan. It overcomes the problem that visual impaired users can not see the validate text auto created by image. They have opportunity to accomplish the registration independently, such as on google or MSN Webs. However, though the “Wretch” Blog does provide similar mechanism, its function seems not work very well. How to fix the problem may make it more accessible.

5. Adding alternative text

While surfing the web pages of the “Wretch” Blog, many hyperlinks do not have alternative texts to explain the purpose of the links. Therefore, visual impaired users are difficult to understand the complete functionality provided by webpage. It might be good to add the alternative texts for all non-text

objects.

Actually, blind people ask not much. If blog designers follow these principles to develop blogs, such as the “Wretch” Blog does, most of the functionality fulfills the requirements of accessibility Web. It is hoped that more and more websites in Taiwan can be built by this phenomena. Letting more visual impaired users navigate these websites freely. They may enjoy the convenience just like ordinary people by information technology.

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