

Conducting Accessibility Market Research

Buyers in federal agencies are required by law and regulation to conduct market research. Market research is a means of ensuring that what we want to purchase is in fact actually available. For ensuring accessibility and compliance with Section 508 when the planned purchase is for an Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) product or service, market research is absolutely essential¹ and needs to be documented in writing².

What this means is that Federal agencies must:

- Identify their technical requirements and associated Section 508 accessibility requirements;
- Determine if there are commercial products that meet both their technical and accessibility requirements; and,
- Document the accessibility market research process, including why they may have chosen a product that does not fully meet Section 508 standards.

Conducting market research is easy, if information is available. There are several existing paths to achieve quality market research. One option is to use the BuyAccessible Wizard, a free web-based tool that helps in the acquisition of EIT products and services. The Wizard provides a simple, effective and repeatable process for identifying requirements, conducting market research and ultimately creating the requirements needed for inclusion in the procurement document.

BuyAccessible Wizard

The Wizard, through the BuyAccessible Product and Services Directory, has access to accessibility information on more than 2,300 products and services.

Once you have described your requirements through the Wizard, you are ready to start your market research. You can browse through categories by selecting a category name, and you can search for accessibility information within the current category at any time by selecting the Search button. You can further restrict your search by entering an optional product or vendor keyword. The Wizard search displays a list of possible vendors for your acquisition. To conduct accessibility market research, review the values in the View Accessibility Information column. This column indicates vendor claims about how well their service supports accessibility standards

If the buyer is looking for a specific product and it is not in the Directory, the user should conduct additional market research external from the Wizard in order to document this process.

¹ FAR Part [10.000\(a\)\(3\)\(vii\)](#) states that agencies must use the results of market research to “assess the availability of electronic and information technology that meets all or part of the applicable accessibility standards issued by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board at 36 CFR Part 1194 (see Subpart 39.2).

² [FAR 39.203\(c\)\(2\)](#) states that “the requiring official must document in writing the nonavailability, including a description of market research performed and which standards cannot be met, and provide documentation to the contracting officer for inclusion in the contract file.”

External Market Research Results

Conducting external market research is actually fairly easy to perform using simple keyword entries into your web browser search field. There are several steps, but the whole process doesn't really take that long. The following are suggested steps to follow until you find relevant accessibility information:

1. Search on the exact product name that the user has provided and the exact term "Voluntary Product Accessibility Template".
2. Search on the vendor name and the exact term "Voluntary Product Accessibility Template".
3. Search on the exact product name and the exact term "VPAT."
4. Search on the vendor name and the exact term "VPAT."
5. Search on the vendor name and the exact term "Section 508."
6. Search on the vendor name and the term "accessibility". If you get a hit at this point, it is generally not a VPAT. It is either rather general statements or a contact for buyers to ask for accessibility information. If there is a contact listed on the website, ask them for a VPAT. If the contact does not have a VPAT, use the Wizard to generate a Government Product/Services Accessibility Template and send it to the vendor contact.
7. Go to the vendor site and use the site search capability, if any, following steps 1 to 6.
8. If there is no information from the vendor site, ask whatever vendor representative you can find from any source for accessibility information in the form of a VPAT. If they don't have a VPAT, provide them with a GPAT generated by the BuyAccessible Wizard.

What to do if you can't find Accessibility Information on a Specific Product or Service?

If there is no information on the specific product or service you are interested in buying or if the product or service is not fully conformant, you should search for accessibility information on comparable products. The easiest way to do this is an internet search on alternative products following the above process, starting with the BuyAccessible Product and Services Directory. If you don't have a particular product in mind, search on a commonly accepted name (e.g. inkjet printer, laptop) for the product or service and the exact term "Voluntary Product Accessibility Template", "VPAT", and "Section 508".

About GSA's Section 508 Guidance Documents

GSA is issuing these documents as a means to provide technical assistance for Section 508. For additional help, please refer to www.Section508.gov and www.buyaccessible.gov.