Karlen Communications
Alt Text Survey 2021

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Introduction

There is so much conflicting information about what Alt Text is, how to use it, how to write it and how long it should be. Some say you are confined to 10 words; others say it is 1250 words. Some say 70 characters, some say you can't use punctuation. There are no standards or guidelines for adding Alt text to graphics, especially complex graphics such as charts and diagrams, maps, or plans.

Additionally, there is no way to structure Alt Text or have multiple languages in an Alt text attribute.

This is the first iteration of the Alt text Survey intended to get feedback from those who depend on Alt Text to provide information on graphics in content.

Results of the Survey

What do you like about Alt Text?

ID	Response
001	Gives info on images if it is properly written
002	No response.
003	1. Overall, I like alt text because it gives me a more complete connection with the document - close to what sighted audiences experience.2. Also it enriches my visual vocabulary -- it helps me understand the way in which images enhance a text or convey meaning, and also just how things look in the world. 3. The best alt text is short and conveys the essence. 4. One excellent example of using alt text is the blog of Vu Li. He writes creative and engaging alt text intended for his whole audience (including those who can also see the image). While his alt text may be slightly more descriptive than I would normally like in a typical document, nonetheless, I love how he's fully integrated alt text and made it something that everyone can appreciate. https://nonprofitaf.com/2021/10/scary-nonprofit-stories-to-tell-in-the-dark-2021/
004	1. Knowing that there is an image. 2. Know what is on the image or which functionality it has.
005	Short and concise. I usually recommend no longer than 140 characters.
006	In most cases Alt Text provides secondary information that is not critical in understanding content, but helpful in understanding the attitude/emotion of the web page expression. For most cases, I ignore image Alt Text as it is unnecessary screen reader verbosity.
007	Long enough to provide an equivalent but not too long.
008	provided it is descriptive, meaningful and purposeful, proper tagging gives me the "visual" information i miss due to being blind.
009	It makes images more accessible to blind users like myself. Alt text hopefully provides just enough information to describe the image in relation to how it supplements the written or auditory content. It can provide additional information and help to set the tone and mood of the content.
010	descriptive text of the foreground and the background; something that paints a picture on my visual cortex
011	Mostly, I don't like it. It's just one more thing I have to read before I get to the information that I really want. Part of this is that I was born completely blind and knowing what's in the pictures is nice, especially if I'm reading about people that I know and they're doing interesting things. but it doesn't usually add to my understanding of what I'm trying to read or help me remember it any better it's just information I have to filter out.
012	I like when they are short and concise . When the image is explained straight forward.

013	At least with the alt text I can better understand or have the sense / information on what is the image is about. In the social media such as Instagram or Facebook I rely on alt text
014	Alt text, if used correctly, can bring images and documents to life for people with visual impairments.
015	alt text support those who are otherwise able to clearly see or understand the image. Those benefiting may include those with vision impairments, colour blindness, cognitive impairments, or those preferring to listen to reading of reports etc. while undertaking other activities like driving on their commute or on their morning run
016	The level of liking depends on the level of communication with accessibility in mind. It is difficult to script every considered situation. Descriptions are good. How to achieve outcomes are useful, if that is the purpose of the tag.
017	Reading alt text that accurately paints the same picture that is shown in the true image is refreshing for me. It is enjoyable to know that the non-sighted or visually limited person is going to be able to interpret correct context (if needed) and emotion (if shown). Alt text creates an opportunity for the differently abled to comprehend items that might otherwise be missed, and can enrich the sighted persons' experience if they choose to utilize that option.
018	Alt Text is important because it ensures that those who cannot see an image have an equivalent understanding of its content compared to those who can see it. It encourages inclusiveness.
019	I like hearing descriptions that are short clear and that give context to the paragraph text that it sits within.
020	when it is a good replacement for the image but is terse and to the point
021	I like when it's descriptive, simple, and concise.

What doesn't work for you when reading Alt Text?

ID	Response
001	Sometimes too wordy
002	I find it difficult to access Alt Text
003	1. when title and alt text are both used there can be a lot of replicated verbage 2. sometimes alt text intrudes on the reading of the text itself
004	Verbose alt-text which should be provided outside the image with rich semantic (heading, list, table, ...)
005	When people are way too verbose with their prose. It's enugh that I know it's a person sitting on a chair. I don't need to know what they are wearing; unless it's important to the context.

ID	Response
006	Appropriate text alternatives depend upon the purpose of the image, and should describe the information or the function. Images that graphically represent concepts and information (pictures, photos, and illustrations) should be a short description conveying the essential information presented by the image., but too often describes the function ("picture", "photo") or is too detailed. The challenge is that people do not understand the difference between Decorative, Information, and Function.
007	It is not structed and is not on-screen visually to me.
008	meaningless verbiage that is simply there to check a box for some minimal level of compliance that may be considered accessible but is not at all usable or functional in my efforts for gathering information or needed to neviagate a digital platform.
009	Alt text descriptions that are so generic that they dont relate to the content and context
010	picture of, image of, screen shot of, drawing of - basically anything that says "of" in it is duplicate information. My screen reader already tells me it is an image. i simply want the details of the image when i view alt text.
011	Just because I'm listening to someone speak in a zoom room I don't have to know what they look like, what race they are, what they're wearing. It's kind of the same way with all text. If there are several different photos if you're reading about birds in flight and there's several different pictures of birds I would be happy to have a very quick description does it general picture of birds in flight and then have it explained more in the text. I think whatever you do somebody's gonna be unhappy unhappy. Some people want more description some people want less. Some people want to be able to turn off reading of images all together as I have done on my iPhone. If a picture paints 1000 words then it's probably gonna take 1000 words to describe one picture. I guess that's what doesn't work for me is everyone perceive things differently and it's so subjective. For me, just leave it out. But I know that we can't do that. It's very difficult to generalize about all text because it's used so many different ways and I know that there are times when it really is valuable. Maybe it's too late at night and I just can't think of any right now.
012	When they have so much detailed info because alt text is read in one go by screen readers, so if a lot of details are provided, sometimes they become confuse or overwellming.
013	To me alt text is depend on the one who create the text. When expaining image of an event documentation for example, You need to give the context of the image e.g. Who is in the picture, and that is not always the case in the text provided.
014	The limitations are that it relies on the designers to use it appropriately to add information to the content produced.
015	Relevant alt text is often missing or ineffective. Alt text is also interpretive, and when completed by someone other than the creator/author, may miss the intention of the image

ID	Response
016	It would be helpful here to have some sense of the direction for this. As it is posed now, I can't answer your question completely.
017	Sometimes, when I read Alt Text, I am left wanting more. It is said that "a picture paints a thousand words," and while Alt Text is useful, it cannot always meets the needs of the differently abled user in a way that is equal to the person who interprets the picture itself. There is also the complication of over-explaining something in Alt Text, which can lead a person on a fishing expedition to find out what the picture really means. Having Alt Text entered by someone who does not know how to interpret a picture can be confusing and off-putting to potential clients and other Alt Text users.
018	It is only as good as the manually added description. The AI currently available in Office which generates Alt Text is very hit and miss.
019	If alt text is too long and wordy I find it hard to understand and want to repeat it multiple times. For example an image that has too much description or a diagram that has too much data read out for me to understand.
020	embedding links, paragraphs of text or overly verbose text equivalents and duplicates of info. Additionally lack of long description somewhere on page that supplements missing content from lack of seeing image
021	When it's too long or rambles.

If you could change anything about how Alt Text is added or read to you, what would it be? Thinking outside of the box is welcome!

ID	Response
001	No response.
002	I do not use a screen reader, as it is just some images where I can't grasp why they are there, and due to the small size of image on the screen, and am not able to zoom or enlarge.

Inspecting the underlying html is not possible in many apps, and on web pages, it can produce huge amounts of meaningless data (for me - e.g. tracking code) and if there are dozens of images on a page, spotting which image it is that I want the alt text for is hugely time-consuming!) |
| 003 | Don't know what all the downsides might be, but what if there was an option in each document to either read alt text as embedded within the document (as we do now) or to read alt text much like you would a footnote; using the second option, you could read through the document without being interrupted by alt text and you could either go back and review the images you wanted to know more about, you could read all the alt text all at once, or you could choose which images you wanted to know more about. Again, I can already see some drawbacks with this approach, but the idea is to find a way to let readers just read the text without alt text interruptions. |

ID	Response
004	Instead of an empty alt-text for decoration (alt=""), an HTML5 attribute like "decorative" should be introduced. Thus it would be more intuitive for technicians without A11Y-background. But perhaps this wold invite authors too often to mark an image as decorative. (Perhaps even as default in CMS settings)
005	Have a way of adding audio to alt text content. It could bring a completely different dynamic to the experience. For example, if it's a picture of a beach, when the screen read user hits the alt text area, there could be some text describing the beach. But you could also hear the sounds fo waves crashing on the beach. You did say to think out of the box. :)
006	Possibly, the <img> tag could include an ARIA Role equals "decorative", "information", and "Function" to help content designers. The Alt Text of images enclosed in an interactive element, like Links <a>, often describe the Link purpose and not the image. Automated tool validators should identify this as an error is the Link has no accessible name label. The accessible name label should not override the Alt Text. Images that convey information (products, art, charts, graphs) should use an external web page Link or an Expand/Collapse function to access the Alt Text description.
007	Alt text needs structure and needs to be visible to low vision users.
008	hmmm... ask that the industry consider estgablishing better streamlined standards for what is enough and what is to much and what is proper for a proctol or gold standard to work from? i suppose this is purely subjective but if we could come to some concensus in this regard it would help corporations better provide clear descriptive tags that are menaingful and useful for all.
009	Alt text descriptions that are auto-generated and read by screen readers are pretty good but i hope they get better. Ideally manually added alt text wont be needed because content authors will provide enough description within the content; making the computer generated alt text descriptions sufficient for full comprehension of the content as a whole. Also i hope content authors will use better discretion when marking images as decorative, because in most cases blind screen reader users dont need nor care about images. However, if undescribed images are not marked as decorative with a null value in the alt text description, it will be read as an unlabeled image, which makes blind users wonder if they are missing out on some information. Where as if images are purely decorative and are correctly marked as such, screen readers will simply ignore those images, leaving blind users unaware of the decorative images existence.
010	I like to think of alt text as an art form. I often ask my sighted colleagues to think of alt text as fun - a new "layer" of content that they are creatively designing so that folks who rely on alt text gain new context to the content of the supporting document.

ID	Response
011	I would probably want a sound to tell me that there is an image there and if I don't get enough context from the printed material and it's important to me than I could go back to that mark and say describe the image. I believe the jaws will almost do this now.
012	always think in main image purpose and convey it, not detailed info is requested to be useful.
013	It would be wonderful if alt text could give further reference of anything more detail of the image.
014	I'd love to create a screen reader that read in a more natural voice than Jaws.
015	Auto-generated alt text is rarely effective, and often providing a false sense of 'accessibility' of a document/page. Lets remove this functionality. Perhaps if there was a way for the program to recognize an image or picture was added and ask for a description at the time of its addition would help to ensure its relevance. Also, to have the alt text "locked" to the image may reduce likelihood of it becoming detached or deleted altogether when the image is moved or the document convert to pdf etc, may help further
016	These texts are informational. They should stay that way and be concise.
017	I would love to have emphasis and excitement added to Alt Text. I understand that is a long shot, especially to companies that cannot afford to hire a professional voice artist to overhaul their websites or documents that contain Alt Text, but there are always do it yourself ways to enhance Alt Text to make it more exciting and approachable for people who need that context. I wish that Adobe would allow some type of emphasis to be added to the text itself, so that if someone were to access the Alt Text information, it would either verbally or visually emphasize text in a way that was more sensational to the user.
018	It would be useful if screen reader users could read Alt Text a line, a sentence, a word at a time rather than having to hear it all in one chunk. If this was possible then Alt Text could contain more information, rather than being limited to 1 or 2 sentences.
019	If alt text could be fun but still offer context to the paragraph text.
020	structure and nodes for long descriptions of information that are linked to the image in addition to it's short text
021	Making it easier to add to objects is always welcome. It would also be nice if persons not using a screen reader could easily see the alt-text (maybe on hover?)