



Customer communications and the demand for inclusivity

How CrawfordTech can help businesses make the most of the drive toward accessible communications

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Introduction

Aspire's research has proven that customers want relevant, personalized, and ongoing interactions on their chosen channels, but consumers and the governments representing them are now increasingly calling for accommodations for those who have difficulty accessing print or digital communications. As technology continues to evolve, allowing consumers to continue interacting with businesses well into advanced age, this demand for document accessibility will only grow stronger, especially within the healthcare, finance, insurance, and utilities sectors. In this paper, we'll dive deeper into the dynamics driving the document accessibility revolution and look at why CrawfordTech is in a unique position to help businesses embrace the inclusive future of communications.

The role of accessibility in the modern customer communications market

Oxford University defines **accessible communications** as messages that are "clear, direct, easy to understand and that can be made available in multiple formats so that all users have equal access." These communications factor in every barrier to easy interaction and either bypass them or offer alternative formats. Consumer demand for accessible communications is on the rise and is expected to increase, so providing accessible interactions to a historically underserved demographic makes good business sense. Furthermore, governments and regulatory bodies worldwide have responded to calls for action by drafting an expanding list of legislation and guidelines (including the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Accessible Canada Act, Consumer Duty in the U.K., and the European Accessibility Act in the E.U.) regulating the way businesses communicate with their customers. It is obvious, then, that accessibility is imperative,

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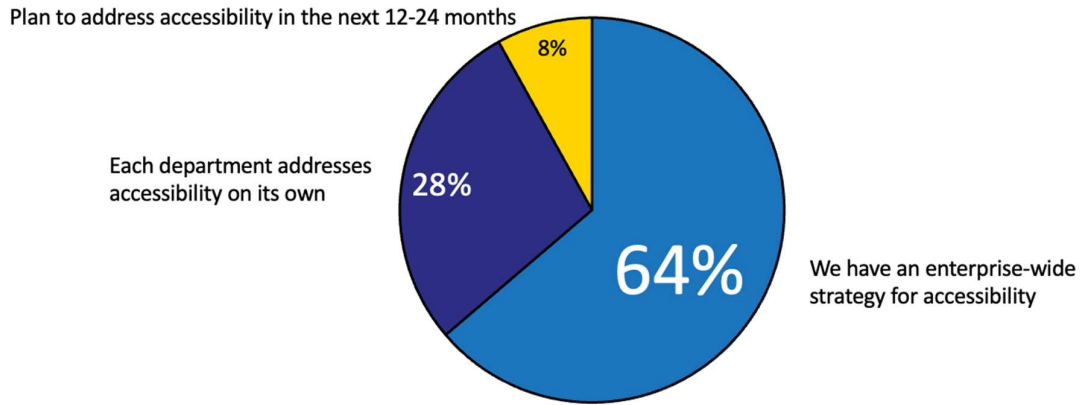
Oxford University



and our research has found that over 90% of businesses worldwide have already made at least some efforts to address it.

Figure 1: Plans to increase the accessibility of communications

Do you have a plan to increase the accessibility of your customer communications?



N = 756 enterprises worldwide

Source: Aspire, *The State of CCM-to-CXM Transformation, 2022*

Figure 1 shows that nearly two-thirds of participating businesses reported that they have developed an enterprise-wide strategy while just over a quarter address accessibility on a department-by-department basis.

Market Background

Aspire defines **Customer Communications Management (CCM)** as the creation, management, and fulfillment of data-driven, omni-channel customer communications at scale. This market has undergone an increasingly radical metamorphosis as consumers have grown accustomed to instant access to goods, services – and most of all – *information* online. As a result, **customer experience (CX)** has become an increasingly important metric not only when evaluating the success of communications but of business operations more broadly. In response, organizations have shifted their communications priorities from

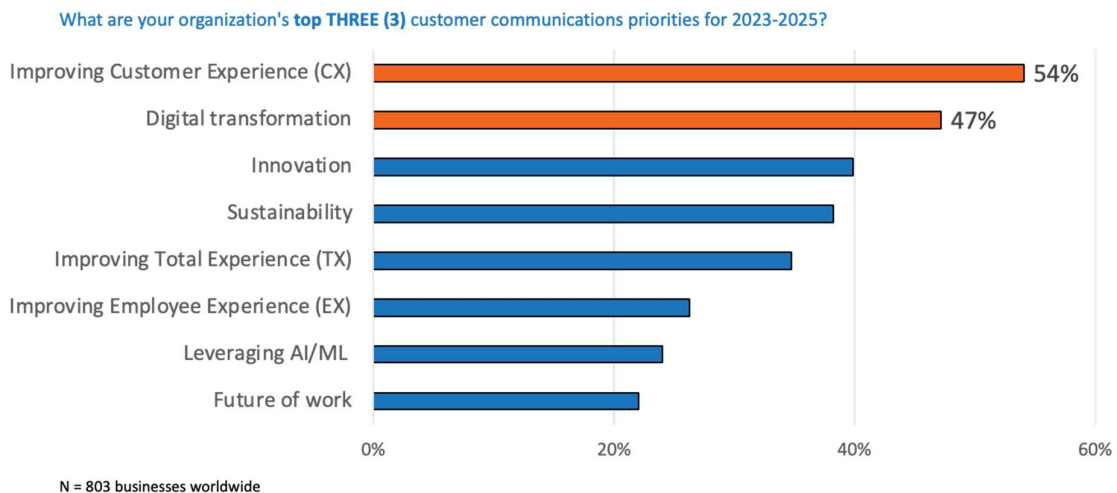


As consumers have grown accustomed to instant access to goods, services, and information online, customer experience (CX) has become an increasingly vital ingredient in the success of B2C communications and operations more broadly.

a myopic focus on minimizing cost and risk to now include efforts to increase business value through improved customer experience. The overall market effect has been to transform CCM into an element of **Customer Experience Management (CXM)**, or the practice of managing all interactions that a business conducts with the express goal of improving the perception that customers have about that organization. In order to fulfill the ultimate promise of this evolution from CCM to CXM, businesses must transition from sending static messages triggered by regulatory obligations to carrying on a conversation with individual customers – ideally through bi-directional, omni-channel interactions and in a manner dictated by the customer’s needs and preferences.

As Figure 2 illustrates, businesses worldwide place the importance of improving customer experience and achieving digital transformation at the top of their list of customer communications priorities. These two initiatives have remained unchallenged in every survey Aspire has conducted since the unprecedented market disruption in 2020.

Figure 2: Customer communications priorities



Source: Aspire, *The State of CCM-to-CXM Transformation, 2022*



If consumers cannot properly access or understand communications in the format provided, they cannot have a positive experience.

We have also found that enterprise efforts to digitally transform their communications and improve customer experience are linked. In 2022, respondents selected “shifting customers to digital channels” as the top tactic they use to improve customer communications experience while over a quarter reported that they were working to add bi-directional channels. In 2023, businesses said that their efforts to increase digital adoption are focused on improving content and boosting mobile app engagement. In other words, organizations hope to engender loyalty and ensure customer satisfaction by delivering superior interactions seamlessly linked across digital channels. However, if consumers cannot properly access or understand communications in the format provided, they cannot have a positive experience.

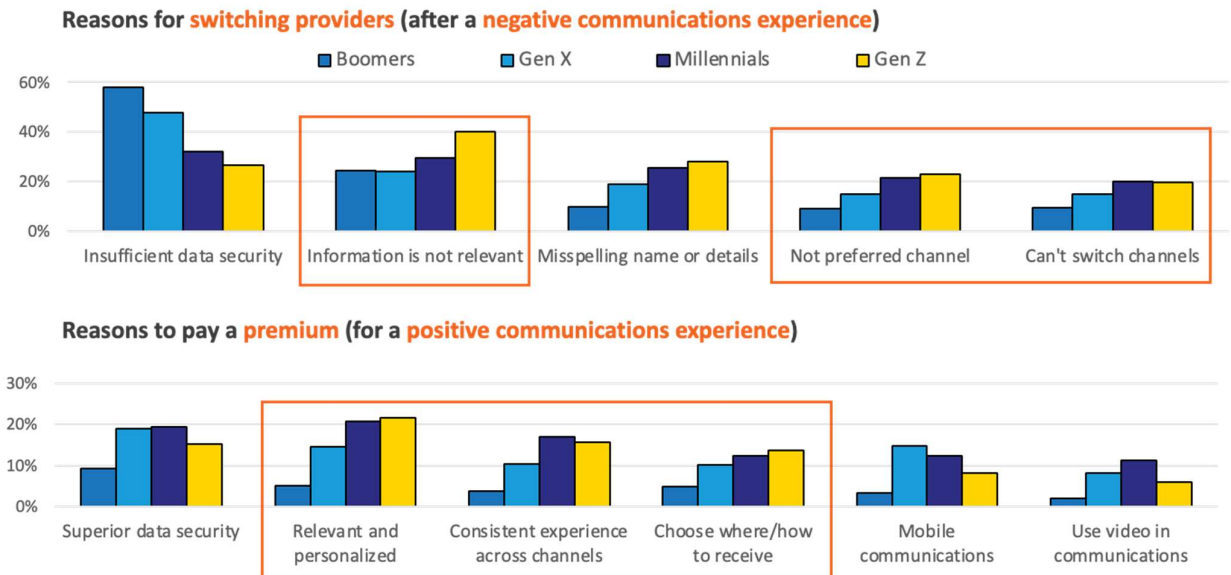
Drivers behind the push for document accessibility

Aspire’s research has shown that consumers want relevant, personalized, and ongoing interactions on their chosen channels. Furthermore, they will do what it takes to secure better communications. The young (along with the more affluent and the most technologically savvy consumers in particular) have proven to be much more likely to switch providers after a negative communications experience or pay a premium for superior experience.

The young, wealthy, and tech savvy demand relevant, personalized interactions on their preferred channel and will do what it takes to secure a superior communications experience.



Figure 3: What is important to younger consumers?



Source: Aspire, *Understanding the New Digital Reality*, 2020

These demographics are vital to the success of any business. If organizations don't respond to consumer demand for better interactions, then they will lose customers, damage their reputation and dull their competitive edge. On the other hand, when communications are clearer and easier to understand, consumers are more likely to respond in the way the sender intended without the need to reach out to a customer support team for clarification or guidance.

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The digital facilities and tools available today are much more likely to drive consumers with the need for accessible communications towards digital interactions and away from print. Nevertheless, some consumers will retain physical means of communications, including large print and braille, among others. There is also strong cultural demand for businesses to act in a way that is inclusive of everyone, including those with



special communication needs.

When we surveyed consumers concerning their need for accessible communications, we received some interesting responses. Contrary to what one might expect, Gen Z consumers in the United States (aged 18 to 27 years) were ten times more likely to report that someone in their household is legally blind compared to Boomers (consumers aged 59 and older). Aspire believes this discrepancy can be explained by the fact that younger consumers are generally more concerned with ensuring communications are accessible and inclusive of those with special needs. What's more, nearly a quarter of these same young consumers reported they had not yet requested enhanced communications but that they "expect to do so in the years ahead." Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control warns that the need for accessible communications has and will continue to increase as longer life expectancy allows consumers to purchase goods and services well into advanced age.

Consumers are increasingly interested in ensuring and safeguarding inclusivity in all interactions and the governments and regulatory bodies that represent them are beginning to address these calls with the force of law behind them.

If the desire to earn consumer goodwill and open up potentially new markets with underserved customers is not sufficient to incentivize organizations to embrace accessible communications, they will soon find additional motivation with the force of law behind it. Governments and regulatory bodies around the world are introducing measures intended to protect vulnerable populations and safeguard their right to understand their providers' communications by mandating businesses accommodate consumers on the basis of inclusivity.

Explaining approaches to accessibility

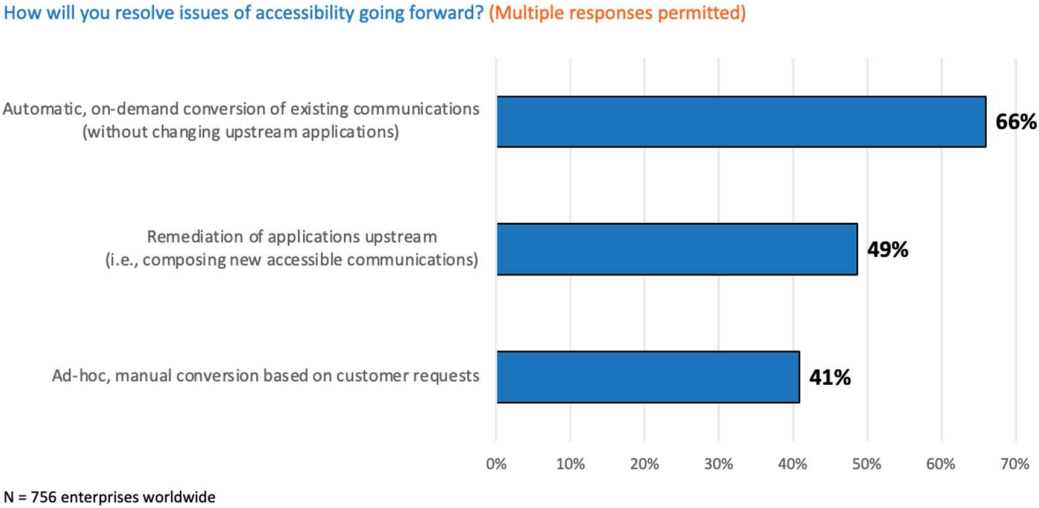
As we've seen, businesses face demand for improved accessibility from both consumers as well as the governments and regulatory bodies representing them. Let's turn now to the



distinctive characteristics of accessible communications and the tactics businesses can use to adopt them.

Two-thirds of the organizations responding to our worldwide research survey reported that, going forward, they will resolve accessibility issues through automatic, on-demand conversion of existing communications (without changing upstream applications). Half plan to enhance the user experience (UX) of applications upstream by composing new accessible communications and 40% will perform ad-hoc manual conversion when customers request it. (Note that these strategies aren't mutually exclusive and participants were permitted to select multiple responses.)

Figure 4: Addressing accessibility issues



Source: Aspire, *The State of CCM-to-CXM Transformation, 2022*

Less effective approaches

When setting out to make their content more accessible, many organizations choose to take the first easier and well-defined step by reviewing their website and bringing its content into compliance. Once that's accomplished, they should turn their focus to client-facing documents, but there are so many



different types – all written by different authors and managed by different owners with different creative processes – that many organizations don't know the best course to take.

While training authors and updating software could be considered, it's important to note that this may not be a comprehensive or sustainable solution. Even if an organization were to isolate and train every potential content creator, natural turnover and internal promotion could still make this a continuous challenge, and the approach might not lead to complete success.

Starting from scratch and creating only accessible documents from the very first step will require authors to re-write thousands or even millions of documents, which would likely prove to be prohibitively expensive both in terms of time and money. Furthermore, unless it was accomplished through automation, the process could also open up the entire library of new documents to human error. Creating a library of exclusively accessible documents at the composition level requires extensive training and knowledge which will be quite difficult to obtain when considering all the possible authors. It might also result in a completely redefined document structure, drastically changing the look and feel of documents. Finally, this approach does not address changing accessibility standards or the billions of historical documents in repositories used for online document access.

Manual remediation of high-volume transactional documents may also prove too expensive and extremely time-consuming. Since it can take several years to port applications over, it would be exceedingly difficult to deliver documents on time. Some organizations might try to accomplish accessible delivery by requiring recipients to preset their delivery preferences.

It will be difficult to adopt an accessible communications approach solely through author training, drafting an entirely new library of documents, or the manual remediation of new and existing ones.



Unfortunately, this is also time-consuming and delays the delivery process. Furthermore, some recipients may not feel comfortable singling themselves out for special delivery options.

Regulations evolve over time, so documents created to be compliant with current rules won't remain so for long. New composition software or new versions of existing software only serve to create further complications.

The concept of **compliance obsolescence** explains that regulations evolve over time, so documents created to be compliant with current rules might not remain so for long. New composition software or new versions of existing software only serve to create further complications. Over time, as businesses grow (often through acquisition) and a wider variety of stakeholders gain greater input into the communications that go out to customers, organizations can accumulate multiple composition solutions. Many will be unique to individual silos. If the silos don't coordinate and share data, an author may not have the information they need about the individual recipient, leading to potentially confusing, irrelevant, and contradictory messages going out to the customer. This can be disastrous for both customer experience and the broader bottom line. As we've seen, consumers – particularly the young, wealthy, and tech savvy – demand a better communications experience and many will switch providers over even a single negative experience.

The logical approach

The evidence we have today suggests that the most cost-effective way to apply automated accessibility standards to a digital document is *after* it's pulled from an archive *but before* it's delivered to the customer. This can be done on-demand in real-time. Remediation is done at the **moment** the customer or end user opens the document so that each recipient gets the document in a remediated, accessible, and useable form. This solution is also future-proof because whenever new regulations are introduced, the automated system can be updated and the



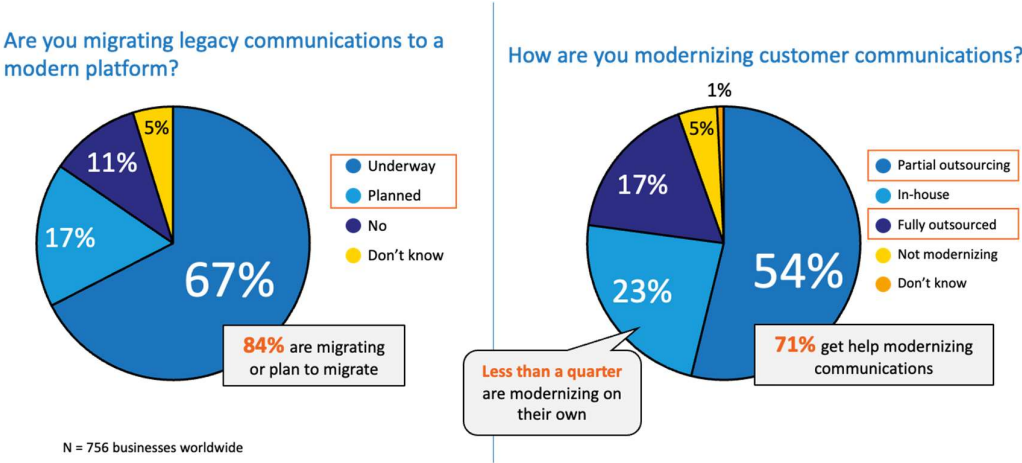
The most logical solution is to apply automated accessibility standards to a document after it's pulled from an archive but before it's delivered to the customer. This can be done on-demand or in real-time.

new standards applied to existing documents when they're requested from the archive in real-time by the individual users.

To bring documents on a company website into accessibility compliance, organizations can rely on software solutions that enable business users to search their website, catalog documents, dispose of the ones they don't need, convert old ones into accessible formats (i.e., PDF/UA, WCAG, HHS), and remediate those documents that need to be made accessible.

This dual approach to existing and newly created communications comprises a total enterprise document accessibility solution. Our research survey shows that over 80% of businesses across the globe are migrating or plan to migrate their communications away from legacy applications.

Figure 5: Businesses are modernizing and most want help



Source: Aspire, *The State of CCM-to-CXM Transformation, 2022*

More than 70% will seek help from a vendor or service provider when modernizing their customer communications. Many want a single vendor to help with all their documents – they want a single point of contact and an enterprise-wide solution. The most



important benefits of such a solution include:

- **Peace of mind:** Organizations can ensure regulatory compliance and ease of use going forward with a future-proof approach to accessibility crafted and maintained by industry experts.
- **Drive digital adoption:** The digital facilities and tools available today are likely to drive consumers with accessibility needs towards digital communications (where applicable), but businesses should also offer alternate formats for those who want them or require them. In the US, a major healthcare payer recently offered a large print option, and they were soon overwhelmed with customer demand.
- **Improve Employee Experience (EX):** Aspire’s research has shown outdated software tools are the #1 source of frustration for employees managing customer communications *and* a primary driver behind our finding that over one quarter of these employees are considering switching jobs. Giving employees better tools to manage communications and ensure accessibility will relieve this frustration while enabling them to do their jobs better, faster, and more efficiently so that they can produce superior inclusive communications and create more satisfying interactions for customers. On that note...
- **Improve Customer Experience (CX):** These better and more accessible communications experiences will improve consumer loyalty and enhance the brand’s reputation.
- **Better business outcomes:** Finally, clearer and more accessible communications will have more success in getting customers to quickly take desired actions. This can lead to faster payments and less need for

An enterprise-wide accessibility solution can offer customer communications stakeholders peace of mind while improving both CX and EX, driving consumer digital adoption, and accomplishing better business outcomes.



collections. At the same time, an enterprise-wide accessible communications solution will result in fewer calls to customer support, delivering significant potential savings and boosting the business' reputation while also shielding it from liability and the other negative consequences of non-compliance.

How Crawford Technologies can help

Crawford Technologies (**CrawfordTech**) has a unique position in the market. It combines expertise in communication processing with a strong focus on accessibility and enterprise content services. CrawfordTech is a Customer Communications and Enterprise Content Management solutions provider specializing in output management and communications processing. Based in Toronto with offices across North America and Europe, the company offers an Enterprise Communications Processing (ECP) platform that builds on strong re-engineering, channel preference management, and accessibility capabilities. It serves businesses in banking, insurance, healthcare, and other industries, and has a large share of print service providers among its clients. With more than 25 years of building enterprise solutions, CrawfordTech has developed strong capabilities across data transformation, post-composition, as well as document accessibility solutions and services. In addition to this, the company has vast experience with content services solutions and document archiving. Furthermore, it has a sizable professional services organization with deep industry expertise to ensure that customers maximize the benefits of its solutions.

CrawfordTech is in a good position to address the growing demand for document accessibility, which is, in fact, its fastest growing business.

It is, therefore, in a good position to address the growing demand for document accessibility, which is, in fact, CrawfordTech's fastest growing business. As we've discussed, many organizations struggle with accessibility compliance and



shifting to more modern ways of presenting stored legacy documents. This can be particularly true for large enterprises with extensive archives. CrawfordTech offers a range of solutions in this area (including accessibility consulting), not only for its enterprise clients, but for its service provider customers as well. Some of these providers even outsource document accessibility services to CrawfordTech, taking full advantage of its North American Accessibility Centers of Excellence sites that specialize in helping clients meet document accessibility requirements.

CrawfordTech's Enterprise Document Accessibility Platform, which includes a suite of solutions called **AccessibilityNow**[®], is designed to help organizations comply with evolving regulations governing inclusivity for those visually or hearing impaired. With an aging population and an explosion of regulatory legislation, organizations can turn to CrawfordTech to help them transform their communications into alternate accessible formats, such as WCAG, PDF/UA, HHS, Accessible HTML5, braille, large print, text-to-speech, and more. CrawfordTech also owns print facilities that can produce physical alternate formats, such as braille and large print, and provide remediation services. One of CrawfordTech's document accessibility solutions,

AccessibilityNow Gateway, integrates with leading ECM providers like IBM, Hyland (inc. Alfresco and Nuxeo), OpenText and SharePoint (among others), and can transform stored documents on the fly when they are pulled from the archive. This streamlined accessibility program for transactional documents is a key differentiator for CrawfordTech and it can be an important element in its clients' success. CrawfordTech has also formed a strategic partnership with Smart Communications. Together they can offer a greater number of end-to-end capabilities, including data normalization, upstream composition, downstream processing, and help meeting accessibility requirements.

AccessibilityNow is a streamlined accessibility solution for transactional documents. It is a key differentiator for CrawfordTech and it can be an important element in its clients' success.



CrawfordTech's solutions use artificial intelligence for a variety of applications, such as:

- Its **AutoSense** capability, which detects document elements for accessibility/tagging, assists in the creation of rules-based tagging templates. Templates that once took weeks to create can now be completed in days or even hours, making the delivery of accessible transactional documents much more efficient.
- AutoSense doubles down on these efficiency gains by automating the pre-tagging of static documents. This is the most time-consuming part of the process, but AI makes it more cost effective and realistic for clients to run millions of documents through accessibility checks.
- CrawfordTech's webcrawling solution offers clients the ability to search their website and identify documents that need to be brought into compliance. Documents can be prioritized for remediation based on usage patterns. This SaaS solution uses an automated document accessibility validation tool that identifies documents in non-compliance and provides detailed information on the findings so that users can refine their remediation process. In the future, AI functionality will also be used to assign missing alternate text to describe images in the documents.

CrawfordTech is an excellent choice for organizations that have a need for document security, accessibility, or better control of channel preferences downstream at the output management level.

CrawfordTech is focused on making communications inclusive for all, particularly beyond composition. Some of its capabilities – like transforming archived documents on-demand into accessible, compliant and usable modern communications – are market leading. It has a range of solutions to fit its clients' diverse environments, infrastructure, security requirements, and budget, including on-premises software installments, cloud-



based arrangements, SaaS offerings, and fully outsourced solutions.

CrawfordTech's **AccessibilityNow Translate** is an industry-first offering enabling high-performance language translation of massive transactional document volumes. This solution makes documents readily accessible to customers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), eliminating costly in-house systems and delays. It also automates translations within existing ECP software and helps healthcare organizations meet the CMS Final Rule on language and accessibility requirements.

After evolving from a point solution to a software platform provider, CrawfordTech has set itself up for future growth by forging partnerships with a variety of international parties in the wider CCM and ECM ecosystem. It is an excellent choice for organizations that have a need for document security, accessibility, or better control of channel preferences downstream at the output management level.

Conclusion and recommendations

Between growing consumer pressure and an increasing array of regulations intended to ensure inclusivity, businesses can no longer afford to neglect the accessibility of their customer communications. On June 28, 2025 the European Accessibility Act will go into full effect. Conceived at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities over a dozen years ago, the EAA is similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act and was designed to harmonize disparate legislation within the nations of the European Union. Any organization within the EU or marketing to its citizens will be required to craft communications accessible to “persons with disabilities [including] those who have long-term physical,



mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

While the penalties for failure to comply (including fines as high as €100,000 and subsequent required site modifications that can climb to nearly a quarter of a million Euros) should be sufficient motivation to encourage businesses to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of their communications, the incentive need not be perceived as wholly negative. Accessible interactions can also help organizations reach an underserved market of 135 million people with disabilities in the EU alone.

The incentive to comply with accessibility regulations does not have to be perceived as completely negative. Accessible interactions can also help organizations reach an underserved market of 135 million people with disabilities in the EU alone.

To reach that market, businesses can make communications accessible either at design time or after composition is complete, but the best way to ensure inclusivity in an ongoing way at scale is to *automatically* apply accessibility standards once a document has been produced or pulled from the archive, but before it’s delivered to the customer. This automated approach can be updated to accommodate new legislation, giving enterprise stakeholders peace of mind while helping to improve both customer and employee experience and promising better business outcomes.

Despite these benefits, the prospect of implementing an accessible communications strategy across an entire organization can be daunting. For this reason, Aspire recommends businesses adopt a staged approach: target the most frequent customer-facing communications of the organization and bring them into compliance first. This will help businesses stay ahead of evolving regulations and ensure that they realize the maximum benefit in the shortest amount of time.



About Crawford Technologies



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About Aspire



Aspire is a global analyst and market research firm providing independent insight and trusted advice to the Customer Communications Management (CCM) and Customer Experience Management (CXM) industries. Aspire empowers Enterprises, CCM/CXM Software, Services and Solution providers, and Business Advisories and Private Equity Firms, with unbiased guidance and actionable insights delivered through a variety of highly specialized services.



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