

**IMPROVING EXPERIENCE WITH A
NEW ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT**



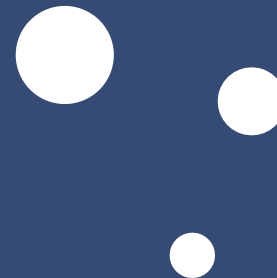
NHS DIGITAL

CLIENT STATEMENT

“When we first started working on the NHS Digital website we faced challenges, both in terms of overall content management and delivering accessibility compliance. We used Sitemorse’s automation to measure where we were and benchmark ourselves against other NHS sites, helping us realise how big our task was.

Using Sitemorse’s assessments over a year allowed us to identify all the tickets we needed to work upon to ensure our site templates and our content deliver AA compliance as well as improving content quality. Now we lead in accessibility and user experience and continue to use Sitemorse to identify issues that are quickly resolved as they come up.”

*Head of Digital Service
Delivery at NHS Digital*





ABOUT NHS DIGITAL

NHS Digital is the national information and technology partner for the NHS and other aspects of health and social care in the UK. It operates a range of different services including providing information, data and IT systems for the NHS, making sure that information flows freely and securely. It also provides best practice guidelines.

As a leader in technology and information management, many in the NHS and beyond look to NHS Digital to be setting the gold standard in various digital practices. But when it came to the main corporate website, NHS Digital's own digital practices were less than robust. Head of Digital Service Delivery, NHS Digital comments

"There were definite issues with the old website. There was a lack of site structure and content standardisation, broken links and colour schemes that didn't make sense, all of which resulted in the site not meeting accessibility regulations. We knew we had a long road ahead of us."

This state of affairs often resulted in poor findability and variation in content quality across the site, while essential elements such as accessibility compliance with WCAG 2.1 standards weren't being met. Considering NHS Digital's role both as a leader in information standards and as a UK government organisation, getting accessibility right was a key challenge.

Lead Product Owner, NHS Digital, explains *"We're responsible for information governance and data standards. The rest of the NHS is supposed to look to us for best practice. It's really important to practice what we preach; that consistency of action is really important for me on a professional level."*

PUBLISHING INTEGRATION

Sitemorse can operate 'invisibly' on content both in the publishing process, automating sign off before release as well as across your differing digital channels.

Content Control - automation ahead publishing

- Alert to experience improvements, content optimizations
- Highlight compliance rules - adherence required

Change Management

- Search and task allocation automated
- Progress reporting (audit) reporting
- One update, globally deployed change

Visual Archive

- Continual recording, [by team | Individual | provider] of actual published page
- Proof of what was on line, what was removed and when

Actions

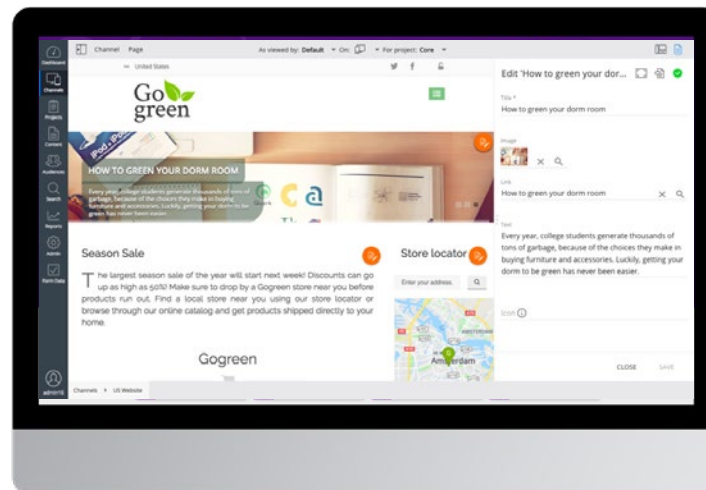
- Prioritization intelligence to feed task panel
- Editor reporting, capabilities | training needs
- Naturally improved brand, service exposure | single service

"People do not tend to deliberately make mistakes, get it wrong more often than not they do not know how to get it right. It's both impossible and impractical to keep everyone publishing up to date with all the standards, all the time."

*With **INCMS** from Sitemorse, Experience is measured, compliance requirements adhered to whilst reducing time and lowering costs."*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvqikOJDlpE>

Global Director
Bloomreach



A NEW WEBSITE AND A NEW COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

It was clear that something had to be done, and subsequently NHS Digital have been prime movers in creating a new website that leads in areas such as accessibility and content quality. *“We’ve been pushing accessibility updates and improvements and banging the accessibility drum across the business.”*

The move to improve accessibility and standards formed part of a bigger project around a new website that involved combining three websites into one using a single CMS (Bloomreach).

“We wanted one consistent website which told one consistent message. As an absolute baseline this had to be accessible.”

“The website project was user-led, with usability at the heart. And for us, usability is accessibility and accessibility is usability; those two things go together hand in glove. If you’ve made it accessible, there’s a good chance it’ll be usable and vice versa.”

THE POWER OF MEASUREMENT

From the very beginning of the website project, measurement and data have been crucial to track progress and judge success, including knowing the “baseline” metrics of the starting point.

The digital team at NHS Digital suggests this approach was important to engage management. *“Everyone likes metrics and measurement. We have senior management going ‘We’re going to give you money to build a new website, but what is it you’re going to do to improve and make things better?’ For accessibility and usability, we wanted to know what the baseline was. We wanted to try and benchmark ourselves, in fact not just for accessibility but content quality too.”*

“We wanted to ensure what we had content management covered in all kinds of performance measures, accessibility being one of them. Using automation, we wanted to police any content published so that it forced people to make it accessible, readable and understandable.”

USING SITEMORSE TO BENCHMARK THE WEBSITE

One of the first jobs for Sitemorse was to provide baseline data on levels of accessibility and identify the work that needed to be done.

“Sitemorse has supported our view that accessibility was going to be a fundamental part of our platform.”

The team used Sitemorse’s automated assessment capability on the old website to score on various criteria such as accessibility. They also carried out a bespoke benchmarking exercise using Sitemorse’s INDEX, comparing their scores with other NHS websites. As expected, the website showed definite room for improvement.

“We used Sitemorse’s automation to measure where we were and benchmark ourselves against other NHS sites, helping us realise how big our task was. That gave us a benchmark position and also helped us to target some of our content to redesign.” R and O added that the issues that Sitemorse identified were about *“half development and coding and half content”*.

Later down the line this benchmark information also allowed the team to demonstrate the progress they had made *“We performed two ad-hoc benchmarks against other NHS websites, and we were really pleased at the scale of our improvement when the two assessments were compared.”*

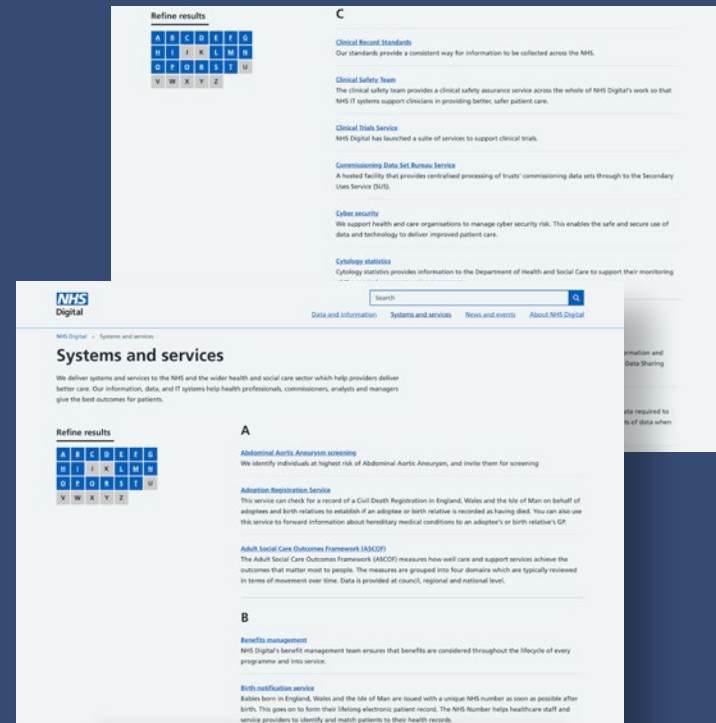


TRANSFORMING CONTENT

Another key approach in the project was their 'content transformation exercise' which helped remove swathes of content that was either out of date, hard to understand or duplicated. Carried out before the new CMS was developed, this involved reducing 20,000 pages to about 8,000 by enabling the team to understand what content was on the site and then also shortening the length of many of the pages. "We threw a lot of material away that because it wasn't adding value or parts of it were repetition or just needlessly wordy."

Another important part of their approach was to dramatically reduce the number of content editors, leveraging core expertise and making sure content contributors were more focused and working to a common set of guidelines. It also allowed the central team to gain control and effectively vet content so that it met the required standards.

"Sitemorse's automation helped us to target some of our content to redesign."



USING AUTOMATION TO ASSESS CONTENT

The team continued to use Sitemorse's automation as they developed the new CMS, testing all the templates for accessibility in the development environment. However, when they pushed the site to the production environment and imported the website content, Sitemorse identified there was more work to do.

"We developed all our templates really carefully with accessibility in mind and when we tested we were achieving AAA compliance, but when we pushed it to live we had our first contact with real content and although the scores went up from the old site it was nowhere near the step change jump we were expecting!"

Realising that there was still a significant amount of work to do, the team used Sitemorse's export functionality to download all the identified issues into a spreadsheet and then import these into Jira, creating thousands of tickets to burn through. While the most significant were resolved for launch, there was so much content the team have spent almost a year working through the tickets, continuing to add issues identified by Sitemorse.

"Using Sitemorse's assessments over a year allowed us to identify all the tickets we needed to work upon to ensure our site templates and our content deliver AA compliance as well as dramatically improve content quality. Now we lead in accessibility and user experience and continue to use Sitemorse to identify issues that are quickly resolved as they come up."

"We look at our weekly reports and see what's changed. Probably two weeks out of three, there is something new that pops up, that needs fixing, for example, missing alt text." Sitemorse's performance dashboard is also reviewed at a monthly meeting as well as shown to different stakeholders to demonstrate progress.

In approaching fixes, the team continue to prioritise the most important issues. *"We focus on priorities and the relative importance. With accessibility, some elements are obviously part of the standard but they have less of an impact on real users so we try to work out which of the things coming up in the report are things that really makes a difference to users compared to those which are a relatively technical fail."*

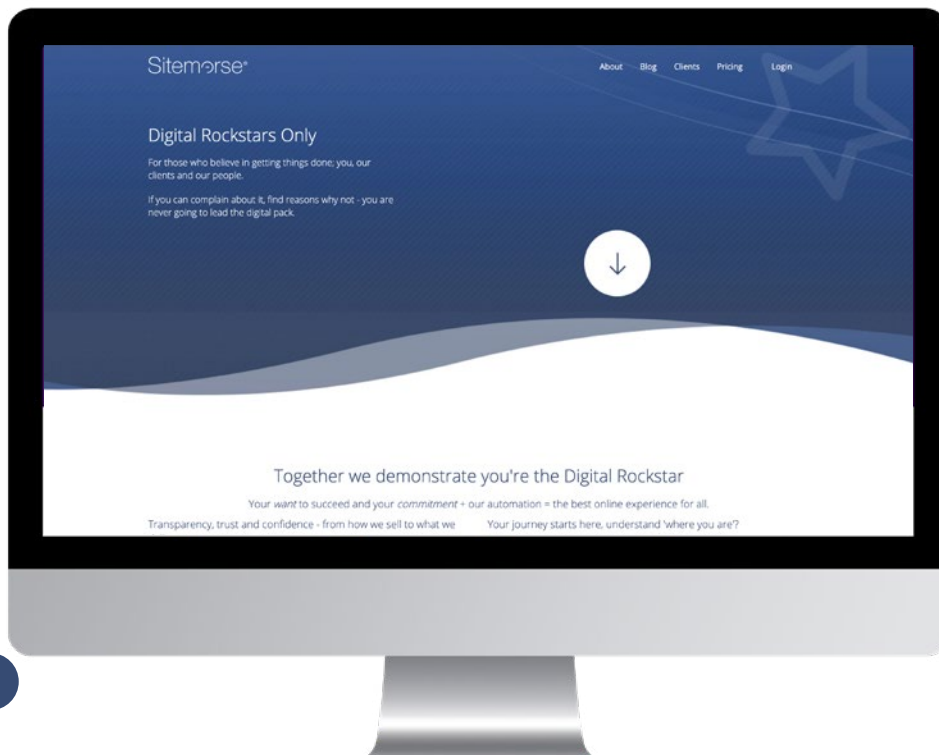


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MEASUREMENT, AUTOMATION AND PERSISTENCE: THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR A LEADING WEBSITE

Lawrence Shaw, CEO of Sitemorse, is impressed with the work carried out by the NHS Digital web team. *“What the team at NHS Digital have achieved is highly impressive. When it comes to accessibility compliance and site quality, the new NHS Digital site excels. This has been achieved by taking a methodological approach rooted in automation, measurement and benchmarking and then driving a steady programme of continuous improvement. The hard work the team have carried out and their persistence has really paid off and we’re delighted that Sitemorse has helped them achieve such great results.”*

Lawrence Shaw
Sitemorse CEO



When asked what advice they would give an organisation hoping to improve accessibility on their website, the team at NHS Digital stress the importance of measurement.

“Measure what you’re doing. Without the constantly changing number around accessibility to tell you how well you’re doing you get no idea of how far through the journey you are.” The team are aware though that whilst testing is important, learning is also key.

“It’s a learning process. We focused on the major accessibility requirements, which we’ve done pretty well now, but there’s always new things to learn. Testing remains an important part of what we do. We need ongoing monitoring to help prevent us slipping back into those old ways.”

“We identified tens of thousands of issues. That’s a lot to deal with but when you actually do the work it proves to be easier than you think. An automation tool like Sitemorse makes it much easier to do. You can see the types of things that have been broken, you can look at the big problem areas and start to break it down. It’s like eating an elephant one chunk at a time!”

Lead Product Owner (Website development) at NHS Digital



NHS

Digital

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