



PeopleSoft and Section 508

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE

PEOPLESOFT WHITE PAPER
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PeopleSoft and Section 508: An Overview of Our Accessibility Initiative



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Document Purpose and Scope

This document discusses how PeopleSoft has addressed and is continuing to improve the accessibility of the PeopleSoft applications. It is written for a non-technical audience and is intended to provide a high-level overview and roadmap, rather than an in-depth technical dissertation.

This paper contains the following sections:

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Background Information on Software Accessibility

Approximately 20 percent of the United States population reports a physical, sensory, or cognitive disability.¹ To use a software program or the Internet, people with disabilities may require the use of assistive technologies, such as screen readers. Assistive technologies, however, can only perform optimally when web pages are designed with accessibility standards in mind.

This document explains some of the steps PeopleSoft has taken to improve the accessibility and usability of PeopleSoft applications.²

Federal Requirements

PeopleSoft began focusing on making its PeopleSoft 8 products accessible to people with disabilities in early 2000. This put PeopleSoft in an excellent position to evaluate new federal accessibility requirements that took effect in 2001, and to analyze how to best aid our clients in complying with the new requirements.

¹ Statistics from McNeil, John M., 1997, Census Brief 97-5: Disabilities Affect One-Fifth of All Americans, US Dep't. of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census. This document can be found at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/3/97pubs/cenbr975.pdf>

² Note that this White Paper is referring to accessibility issues addressed in PeopleSoft 8.x and future releases. PeopleSoft is not providing the enhanced accessibility features in PeopleSoft 7.x and prior releases.

Reviewed New Regulations

US federal legislation (“Section 508”³) generally requires Federal agencies to take into account the needs of all end-users – including people with disabilities. Section 508 requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by Federal agencies be accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public who use an agency’s services. In addition, states that receive Federal funds under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 may be required to comply with Section 508.

Section 508 itself did not set forth technical standards. There are two regulations that implement Section 508: the Access Board’s Standards and the FAR Rule .

1. The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (referred to as the “Access Board”) established the “Access Board’s Standards”⁴. The Access Board is an independent federal agency whose primary mission is to promote accessibility for the disabled. The Access Board’s Standards define the technical and functional performance criteria necessary for technology to comply with Section 508.
2. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (the “FAR”) was amended by the *FAR Rule for Implementing Section 508 of the Rehab Act Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities* (the “FAR Rule”⁵) to ensure that Federal agency acquisitions of electronic and information technology comply with the Access Board’s Standards.

Consulted with Experts

While Section 508 does not directly apply to private vendors, such as PeopleSoft, we have closely analyzed the Section 508 guidelines. Specifically, PeopleSoft is focusing on the web accessibility standards found in Subpart B, Technical Standards: 1194.22 Web-based intranet and internet information and applications.

PeopleSoft has reviewed the standards with consultants who are experts in Section 508 compliance. For example, PeopleSoft worked closely with SSB Technologies (www.ssbtechnologies.com), a consulting company specializing in accessibility, to evaluate the accessibility of the PeopleTools product. PeopleSoft has also consulted with legal experts to evaluate the accessibility standards.

Based on our consultations and analysis, we believe our products will substantially achieve the goals of the accessibility standards.

³ Section 508 refers specifically to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by Public Law 106-246, July 13, 2000, codified at U.S.C §794d. The statutory language of Section 508 can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/508/508law.html>.

⁴ The Access Board's Standards (“Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards”) were published along with an explanatory preamble in the *Federal Register*, as a final rule, on December 21, 2000 (65 Fed. Reg. 80500). The standards are codified at 36 C.F.R. Part 1194 and can be found at <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/508standards.pdf>

⁵ The FAR Rule was published with an explanatory preamble in the *Federal Register*, as a final rule, on April 25, 2001 (66 Fed. Reg. 20894). The entire FAR is codified at 48 C.F.R. Chapter 1. Both the FAR Rule and the entire FAR can be found at <http://www.arnet.gov/far/>

Technical Enhancements

To improve accessibility, PeopleSoft made many enhancements of a technical nature.

Browser-based Applications

All PeopleSoft 8 applications are browser-based. This means that end users interact with PeopleSoft applications the same way they interact with any website. This is beneficial to the end user who will not have to learn a proprietary means of navigation and interaction to use PeopleSoft 8 applications. This improves accessibility for anyone who has experience using a web browser.

Metadata-driven Architecture

The PeopleSoft Internet Architecture (PIA) of PeopleSoft 8 is a metadata-driven architecture. PIA generates all of the HTML for our browser-based applications in one place. This means that the HTML does not have to be manually changed to meet accessibility requirements. Instead the HTML generation engine modifies the HTML generation code so that we can provide uniform HTML for the PeopleSoft 8 applications. This greatly improves our ability to deliver applications that adhere to uniform guidelines across all product lines.

Also, only one version of each page must be defined, versus multiple. With most websites, which are not metadata-driven, multiple copies of each page must be defined and maintained (one accessible, one not). PeopleSoft 8 applications offer a mode that is optimized for use with assistive technologies like screen readers. The pages displayed in this mode are generated from the same metadata as the application running in the normal mode.

PeopleSoft Power HTML Enhancements

In PeopleTools 8.12 (December 2000), PeopleSoft made a huge step towards accessibility with the introduction of numerous power user enhancements. See the *PeopleSoft Power HTML* white paper for details on these enhancements.

The primary enhancements related to accessibility deal with mouse-less data entry. Prior to PeopleTools 8.12, end users had to use a mix of the keyboard and mouse for interacting with PeopleSoft 8 applications. Starting with PeopleTools 8.12, the PeopleSoft 8 applications can be completely controlled through the keyboard.

Thorough Testing

PeopleSoft has conducted a specialized testing effort to identify and resolve issues related to accessibility for visually impaired users. The most interesting are detailed below.

Leveraged Analytical Software to Identify and Correct Accessibility Issues

PeopleSoft licensed InFocus™ from SSB Technologies to help identify accessibility requirements that they could assist us in meeting and eliminate those that are no longer relevant. InFocus™ was an extremely helpful tool in evaluating how to proceed.

Used Assistive Technologies to Test PeopleSoft 8 Applications

Throughout the development and testing process, PeopleSoft has tested our products for accessibility using assistive technologies. This effort included examining individual product transactions and making updates where necessary to adhere to PeopleSoft's accessibility standards.

Conducted Usability Testing with Visually-Impaired Persons

PeopleSoft conducted several rounds of usability testing with visually impaired users employing the leading assistive technology products. We plan to continue this testing process for future releases.

Company-Wide Training

PeopleSoft has taken proactive steps to educate the organization on accessibility. Highlights are listed below.

Incorporate Development Guidelines for Accessibility

We have incorporated internal accessibility guidelines in PeopleSoft's development documentation used by both PeopleTools and application developers. In addition, developers are provided with accessibility training. This training sets forth our development expectations and standards and provides developers with a better understanding of how a person with a disability uses an application.

Provide Training for Quality Assurance

Our quality assurance testers also complete an accessibility training course. This course highlights our accessibility standards, provides an explanation of how assistive technology functions and sets forth our internal testing expectations.

Company-Wide Accessibility Training

PeopleSoft encourages all employees to take our internal accessibility training course. This course highlights what a disability is, sets forth the moral and legal reasoning behind developing applications with accessibility in mind and highlights steps that we have taken toward delivering accessible applications. Training on the use of assistive technologies is also available.

Keeping Up the Momentum

PeopleSoft has made a large investment to enhance the accessibility of our applications. We expect the accessibility technologies and guidelines to evolve over time and we will continue to enhance our technology and applications to assist our customers in adhering to the newest guidelines and to maximize the user experience for the disabled user. Improving accessibility and usability for non-impaired and impaired users remains an ongoing initiative and priority.

Alliance with a Leading Assistive Technology Supplier

We have formed a strong alliance with GW Micro, creator of Window-Eyes 4.11 and Window-Eyes Professional, with the goal of helping our joint customers implement accessible software solutions. We work closely to ensure the compatibility of Window-Eyes with PeopleSoft applications. PeopleSoft elected to form this alliance based on GW Micro's firm commitment to customer satisfaction and high quality reliable software.

Improved PeopleSoft 8.4 Application Accessibility

Starting with PeopleTools 8.14, customers may create applications, which adhere to the Section 508 guidelines as PeopleSoft interprets the guidelines. In addition, the PeopleSoft 8.4 applications have been developed following standards intended to enhance the user experience for people with disabilities.

These enhancements include: the addition of alt-text to images; the addition or relocation of labels to ensure that data entry fields have labels near the entry field; and assurance that if color is used to convey meaning, the same information is presented in another way as well (e.g. with text or shapes). Customers may further enhance the accessibility of the PeopleSoft 8.4 applications using PeopleTools 8.4.

Formed Internal Accessibility Taskforce

PeopleSoft formed an internal accessibility task force, including representatives from all areas of the company. This group works together to keep momentum strong in terms of improving the accessibility of our applications. The taskforce has worked closely with several government clients to ensure that the applications meet the needs of visually impaired users.

Joined Accessibility Forum

PeopleSoft is also a member of the Accessibility Forum, an organization that was founded to assist stakeholders impacted by Section 508 in the implementation of the provisions of the accessibility standards. The Accessibility Forum has a diverse membership, including users of electronic and information technology products, industry representatives and government procurement officials.

Prepared to Assist Customers with Issues

If any accessibility problems are found in PeopleSoft 8 applications, customers should report issues to the PeopleSoft GSC. Accessibility issues will be addressed like any other issue reported through the GSC.