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Making Web Accessibility **Sexy**

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Introduction

Accessibility is a topic of growing importance within web design yet has not reached a status where it is actively sought after by a vast majority of clients commissioning websites. Almost all arguments in favour of web accessibility to date do not seem to factor in “sexiness” as a selling proposition for accessible websites and it seems to me this is one reason why the topic has not yet found its place into the mainstream.

Outside the World Wide Web there have been considerable paradigm shifts in consumer behaviour & culture. The term LOHAS , an acronym for Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability, has been coined to describe a growing market segment of consumers that actively seek to buy products or services considered to be sustainable, organic, eco-friendly and committed to social justice. It seems “green is the new black” and it has become smart & “sexy” to be ethical.

This paper aims to show that the a.m. trend could be a potential chance to push web accessibility further into the mainstream and make it more desirable as there is some currently untapped common ground shared by LOHAS and web accessibility. It does so by exploring what web designers and developers could learn from the LOHAS success story in order to make accessibility “sexy” but also highlights the limitations such a comparison inevitably entails.

Chapter 1 presents essential definitions of the key terminologies used within the dissertation which are essential as both web accessibility and LOHAS are constantly shifting terms in ever evolving fields and as such subject to many misconceptions. “Sexiness” as a property I am focussing on will also be further defined for this paper in order to eliminate false associations it may evoke.

Chapter 2 examines exemplary LOHAS products and principles and can hopefully thereby lay open similar approaches and underlying values shared by LOHAS and web accessibility .

Finally, chapter 3 wraps up the dissertation by drawing appropriate conclusions from the findings of the preceding chapters.

Chapter 1

1.1 Web Accessibility defined

Web accessibility is about ensuring that users with or without disabilities, regardless of the browsing technology employed, can access a website without facing unnecessary barriers that make the site difficult or even impossible to use.

In this dissertation, I will from now on use the terms "web accessibility" and "accessibility" interchangeably as it is safe to assume any mention of accessibility herein refers to the ideas regarding websites and I will clearly indicate when stepping outside of this realm.

It is also important at this stage to make clear that web accessibility is not identical to web usability. This is a misconception that seems to frequently surface, especially when commentators with little knowledge of both subjects and lack of understanding the web as a medium (e.g. as opposed to print design) talk about web design ¹. In my opinion web accessibility should in fact be seen as a prerequisite for usability, which deals among other things with sensible information architecture, navigational concepts and ease of use for a website interface. For a user to be confronted with this interface he or she needs to first of all be able to arrive at this point or in other words have managed to access the website, hence my proposition.

Nevertheless, both usability and accessibility are often mentioned in the same breath and there are dedicated chapters on accessibility in recent books by some of the most cited web usability experts like Jakob Nielsen and Steve Krug.²

I deem this appropriate to a certain extent as well designed websites should ideally combine stunning visual appeal with a highly usable interface and also be accessible to as many users employing different technologies as possible. The need to make a distinction, nonetheless, remains.

Contrary to some further widespread misunderstanding, web accessibility does not suggest it is achievable to make a website work in exactly the same way for every user with any disability imaginable. However, by taking accessibility into account and using appropriate coding techniques based on so-called web standards³ the impact of many disabilities and technical constraints relevant to the usage of a website can be overcome or at least reduced.

Blind users e.g. are by definition not able to see the visuals on a website, nevertheless meaningful image descriptions included in the underlying code have been reported, amongst others by the Royal National Institute of Blind People, to be very helpful for this user group.⁴

A meaningful description for a photograph of a person e.g. could be his or her name and surname as opposed to a generic description like e.g. "picture 1". To a blind person browsing the web using screen reading technology, these image descriptions are read out aloud thereby putting the purpose of a picture into context and thus enabling the user to form a mental model of the website and its basic structure.

At the same time, this simple measure is likewise useful for mobile phone or Palm Pilot users and people connecting to the web with a slow modem who sometimes tend to switch off the image display function within their browsing device in order to save bandwidth (and therefore often costs, depending on their contract).⁵

Although the latter are an increasing minority (due to the growing market penetration of broadband connections and flat rate contracts), at least in so-called developed countries, and applying meaningful image descriptions is one of the simpler steps towards an accessible site, I hope this example demonstrates that describing web accessibility as a one-dimensional consideration does not do it justice.

Accessibility does not exclusively aim at users either with special disabilities on one hand or certain technological parameters on the other. On the contrary, many accessibility measures tend to address mutual requirements of people and machinery.

Indeed, there are many other well documented examples and discussions of "visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive and neurological disabilities"⁶ and the most appropriate coding to tackle the web barriers these imply but it is beyond the scope and intention of this dissertation to examine these in further detail.

Instead, this paper wishes to explore the underlying values and implications of web accessibility and put these into perspective against the backdrop of an ever-growing LOHAS market which will be defined in the following chapter.

1.1 “Sexy” LOHAS – what is it all about?

LOHAS is a an acronym for Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability, a marketing term coined in the US at the beginning of the new millennium ⁷. It describes a growing market segment of consumers who are more conscious about their purchases and believe that their buying power can make a difference in many sectors.(Figures 1 and 2) Approximately 35 Million US citizens and almost 1/3 of Europeans were categorised as LOHAS consumers in 2006 ⁸, dubbed by the New York Times as

“ the biggest market you have never heard of, encompassing things like organic foods, energy-efficient appliances and solar panels as well as alternative medicine, yoga tapes and eco-tourism. “ ⁹

The ethical consumerism market is often also broken down into several different sub-categories besides LOHAS¹⁰, but it is not within the scope of this dissertation to make these finer distinctions. This paper will instead throughout use LOHAS as a synonymous expression for ethical consumerism, being aware this may seem like a slightly lose adoption of terminology.

The consciousness of this consumer group seems to be based on a very holistic view of ethical behaviour and consumption but so far inclusiveness of disabled people does not seem to be a part of this awareness and the holistic view propagated by LOHASians has not yet embraced the notion of accessibility as a measure of fairness. At least the obvious lack of relevant statements and best practise on leading websites leads to this conclusion.

Figure 3 – Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility
 (% consumer segment stating they agree completely with the following)

	Gen Pop	LOHAS	Non-LOHAS
It is important for companies to not just be profitable, but to be mindful of their impact on the environment and society	49%	82%	40%
Knowing that a company is mindful of their impact on the environment and society makes me more likely to buy their products or services	27%	68%	15%
Knowing that a company is mindful of their impact on the environment and society makes me more likely to buy their stock	18%	52%	8%

Figure 1

<p>Personal Health Natural, organic products Nutritional products Integrative Health Care Dietary supplements Mind Body Spirit products</p> <p><i>US Market--\$118.03 billion</i></p>	<p>Natural Lifestyles Indoor & outdoor furnishings Organic cleaning supplies Compact flourescent lights Social Change Philanthropy Apparel</p> <p><i>US Market--\$10.6 billion</i></p>
<p>Green Building Home certification Energy Star Appliances Sustainable Flooring Renewable Energy Systems Wood Alternatives</p> <p><i>US Market--\$50 billion</i></p>	<p>Alternative Transportation Hybrid vehicles Biodiesel fuel Car sharing programs</p> <p><i>US Market--\$6.12 billion</i></p>
<p>Eco Tourism Eco-tourism travel Eco-adventure travel</p> <p><i>US Market--\$24.17 billion</i></p>	<p>Alternative Energy Renewable Energy Credits Green Pricing</p> <p><i>US Market - \$380 million</i></p>

Figure 2

On the other hand I have not come across an approach to web accessibility yet that would see it embedded within a LOHAS framework although it would be predestined to do so which will hopefully surface throughout this paper.

Indeed, as the LOHAS trend seems to evolve and grow there is a real chance to harvest the popularity of ethical considerations for the cause of accessibility.

Robyn Waters, former Vice President of Trend, Design, and Product Development for the US retailer Target writes:

*“Trends with real staying power are often a series of smaller trends fused together. Trends that intersect and complement each other are more likely to be embraced by the consumer. When fusion occurs, it’s much easier to offer a product that is in sync with your customer’s values.”*¹¹

I believe accessibility would complement many a LOHASians outlook on the ideas of personal and universal well-being as being equally valid considerations.

Quintessentially LOHAS and accessibility are both concerned with fair and social behaviour so by Waters' rationale have the potential for “real staying power”.

In a recent presentation Susanne Köhler, a strategic consultant for the Zukunftsinstitut (Author's translation: The Institute for Future Studies) suggests a shift in socio cultural values from the restrictive and puritan morals of the 1950s and 60s, the more self-centred and hedonistic 1970s and 80s to the LOHAS lifestyle beginning in the late 1990s. LOHASians are seen to identify with values like experience, engagement, spirituality, friendship and authenticity and unite (until recently seemingly contradicting) notions of sustainability and indulgence, eco consciousness and good design, ethics and luxury¹²

Christoph Harrach, a marketing consultant and editor of one of Germany's most recognised and featured LOHAS weblogs (going by the apt title “Karma Konsum) goes further in stating what defines LOHAS consumers:

*Our consumption is consequently ecological and fair, without renouncing modernity. [...] In contrast to the “old ecofreaks” we are technology-friendly and strive for indulgence. [...] We are aware of the consequences of our consumption and try to keep these to a minimum.*¹³

In conclusion, central to LOHAS philosophy is the notion that an ethical stance can be made without aesthetic sacrifices.

Further, many LOHAS products are now perceived as being “sexy” which I would hope could rub off on accessibility if the dots are to be connected and a LOHAS approach to this subject would be taken.

It is important at this stage to define the “sexiness” I am referring to within this dissertation. I am adopting a view held by Kathy Sierra, book author, regular speaker at top web industry conferences like “SXSW interactive”¹⁴ and contributor to the recognised “Creating passionate users” weblog on which she states:

“...here I want to talk not about sex, but about the quality of sexiness [...] our brains seem to attribute sexiness to things that have nothing to do with a real breathing human.

A 45-year old programmer says, “Sure, this technology is sexier, but we can’t afford it now...”

[...]

A 32-year old graphic artist says, “That new package design is sexy.”

[...]

We're not picking it [a product] because it's sexy. We're picking it because sexiness is part of what makes it a better product!

Better to hold. Better to use. Better to look at. Better to give you a good feeling.

This “sexiness” is often just mistaken for a stunning visual design but in the case of LOHAS the essential point is that values such as sustainability, spirituality and fairness also come into the equation.

“Sexy” properties of a product are also often described as “cool” or “hip”, attributes which come quite close to (but don't substitute exactly) what I call “sexy” within this dissertation.

As the term has now been narrowed down slightly for this paper it will not appear in inverted commas anymore from this stage onwards.

The scope of this dissertation does not allow for a deeper definition of sexiness in marketing or branding terms as indeed this would justify a separate study. Cohorts of agencies and creatives aim to manufacture sexiness for products or services which, although I attempted a narrower definition, still remains a very elusive property and cannot be clearly grasped or precisely defined. In any case, sexiness is much more than just a professional and good looking design.

I would also like to stress that although sexiness is a guiding principle for the way I am looking for common ground between LOHAS and web accessibility in this dissertation it is merely a means to an end in order to boost the cause and change perceptions of accessibility. Ideally, in a not foreseeable future, there is no need to make accessibility sexy as it is just part of what is being done without mentioning it as a separate subject.

Chapter 2

2.1 Learning from successful LOHAS Brands

Brands that are successful on the LOHAS market seem to share a number of congenial properties and I suggest placing web accessibility within this bigger picture may boost its perceived sexiness and thereby make the people who commission a website actually excited about the proposition of accessibility, rather than leaving them with an undercurrent of cumbersome obligation.

Bionade e.g. is a popular German carbonated softdrink that has boosted its sales from a very humble beginning in 1995 (when it was only sold in health shops) to a hip beverage of which 70 Million bottles have been sold 2006 in Germany alone and that is now on the drinks menu of almost every trendy bar in the country.¹⁵

Almost every media account of the Bionade phenomena ¹⁶ mentions the company history – that of a nearly bankrupt brewery in provincial Bavaria inventing a method of producing alcohol-free fermented lemonade which was initially and (not overly successfully) sold as a healthy, low sugar drink for children.

It was only the efforts of Wolfgang Blum, the company's recently awarded Marketing Manager ¹⁷, that Bionade's perception as a sexy product now seems to stand unquestioned as further recent headlines in a regional newspaper and the men's magazine Penthouse also suggest. (Figures 3 and 4)



Figure 3



Figure 4

A recent article in Time Magazine (reporting on Bionade as it is now also seeking to break into the US market) mentions how Blum gave the product a “*radical makeover – a slick retro blue, white and red logo, and a new strategy, branding it as a hip lifestyle drink that happened to be healthy*”. This portrayal seems to imply that healthiness can just be a positive by-product of something hip but not necessarily the sole driving force in making the purchasing decision. While this may be true for some consumers I believe the LOHAS appeal of Bionade is precisely that it is both, hip and healthy.

Nevertheless an important lesson already seems to be surfacing for web accessibility, namely that putting all your eggs in one basket by branding the whole product based on one property, albeit very a noble one, is not sufficient.

There are currently many examples of websites focussing on accessibility that seem to make similar mistakes Bionade made when trying to solely communicate healthiness i.e. not taking visual appeal and branding into account.

I suggest that to a majority of clients who are looking for compelling reasons to include accessibility considerations for their website e.g. the published guidelines of the the World Wide Web Consortium (the de-facto governing body of the web, hereafter referred to by the common abbreviation W3C) (Figure 5) would just seem like a very dense, text overladen website lacking the same persuasiveness as Rayfields Accessibility Consultancy who declares “Stylish and Exciting Web Design can be Accessible!” but fabulously fails to provide this style and excitement on its own online presence. (Figure 6)

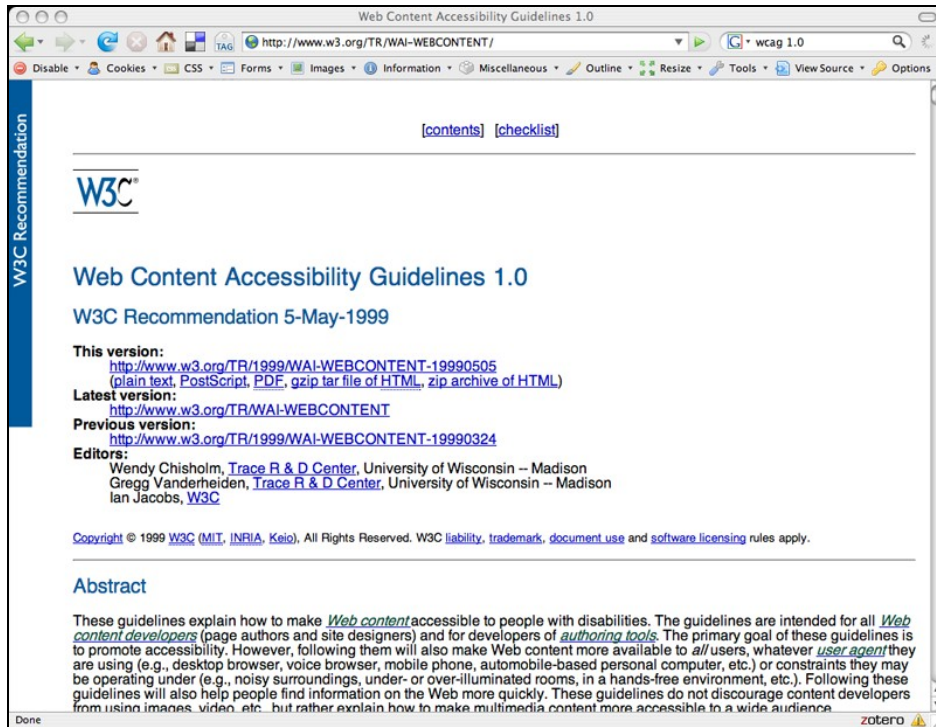


Figure 5

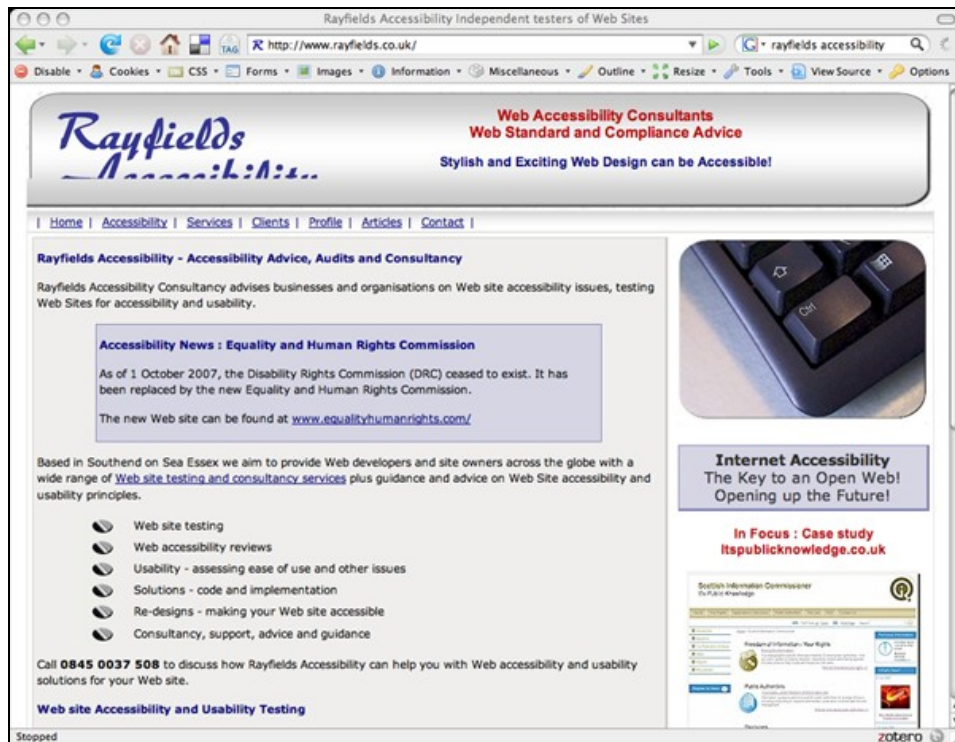


Figure 6

Further, an outspoken accessibility advocate like Joe Clark adopts an almost

LOHASian stance in the “Access Manifesto” that is part of his book

“Building Accessible Websites” by pointing out that

“...there needs to be no compromise between an accessible and and visually appealing website. Designers assume accessibility means a boring site, a myth borne out by old-school accessibility advocates, whose hostility to visual appeal is barely suppressed. Neither camp has its head screwed on right. It’s not either-or; it’s both-and.[...]I brook no compromises. Why should you?”¹⁸

However, there is a lack of current model websites of major companies demonstrating this combination of visual appeal and accessibility, a paramount prerequisite if LOHAS principles should be applied successfully.

Some commentators within the web industry have remarked on an apparent lack of coding skills (necessary for an accessible website) with many web designers coming from a more visual, graphic design lead background. A report by the Information Management Group of Manchester University's Department of Computer Science on an accessibility workshop in 2004 seems to underline this point of view:

“Most designers are focused on the creative process and perceive that accessibility will constrain their design and creativity.”

Designers thereby often stand in direct contrast to a more technically orientated clientele that may know the ins and outs of coding but is not well versed in creating visually appealing interfaces. The latter often seem to prefer the title web developers as opposed to designers which in itself seems to show a different self-perception and approach to creating a website.

What constitutes a web designer as opposed to a web developer is an ongoing argument in the industry as are ,often fiercely fought debates about which approach carries more weight and is more relevant for a good website. This is, however, not an area that can be further explored due to the scope of this dissertation. I rather

find many of these discussions being a disservice to the wider cause and perception of accessibility (as they hinder one common voice in its favour) and am with Bob Gill, founding member of the renown Pentagram design agency, when defining the quality of design:

“ There is no such thing as “good design” or “bad design”. The design is good if it does what you want it to do. It's bad if it doesn't. [...] Any rules or truths that you may have picked up about design, color [sic], balance etc., are valid only if they help you accomplish what you wish. Otherwise, forget them.”¹⁹

Notably, there are a number of showcase websites demonstrating the use of web standards, the technical backbone of an accessible website, to create visually appealing sites²⁰ but as it currently stands these examples seem to lack wider impact on the mainstream area of commercial web design. This observation seems to be clearly underpinned by recent research, undertaken by the prominent web consultancy Nomensa, concluding that *“Nearly 75 percent of FTSE 100 company websites fail to meet minimum accessibility requirements.”²¹* Adding to this, an international study conducted in 2005 by the Centre for Human Computer Interaction Design at London's City University gives some evidence that even the small number of commercial websites (4% of e-commerce sites and 12% of financial sites within the study) that do claim consideration of web accessibility are to a great extent *“not any more accessible than a random sample of websites”²²*

It may also seem contradictory that Clark himself, although he and his book are highly regarded and often cited, fails to demonstrate a model that could be mirrored for broader use in a commercial environment. I am not doubting the websites he claims authorship on²³ are well crafted or accessible but they do seem to lack relevance as best practice examples to which web developers or designers could refer to for a vast majority of business website requirements.

I suggest a typical LOHAS product does not have to deal with above mentioned issues and “in-fighting”, as by and large there is a clear division of labour in manufacturing the product and letting experts 'deal with the rest'. In comparison, with web accessibility the website is the product thereby inducing the a.m. debates and discussions about its design.

Nevertheless lessons that I believe can be learnt for web accessibility by looking at LOHAS products are the importance of design in conjunction with another, seemingly more profound property.

Further, with Bionade and other LOHAS brands it is not merely the design of the product but also clever branding and marketing that helped their popularity and perceived sexiness.

It is not manageable within this dissertation to highlight the numerous other successful LOHAS brands, ranging from clothing to cars, in more detail but e.g. the popular smoothie brand Innocent, similar to Bionade, has never been shy to tell the story of its humble beginnings. The book series “Great Brand stories” has dedicated a whole book to the story of Innocent and author John Simmons describes in great detail how 3 Cambridge graduates with a limited budget managed to turn the idea of a healthy drink containing “nothing but fruit” into the “the UK's fastest growing food and drink business.”²⁴

Like Bionade, this seems to portray Innocent as the opposite of big corporate manufacturers like Pepsi or Coca Cola, which I suggest is appealing to LOHAS consumers as they are often critical and want to know more about the origin of a product.

The stories told add to the brands' credibility for this consumer group, almost appearing like a David versus Goliath scenario. If a similar approach is useful for web accessibility may not be provable, but it does show that storytelling, striking chords with the consumer or client outside the mere product seems immensely useful.

Against this backdrop there has been notable criticism of both Bionade and Innocent for having “sold out” by being available at Mc Donald's outlets (incidentally another well known brand that embodied “evil” to anti corporate and ecological consumers in the past and who is now trying to offer healthier foods and appear in a different light) although I suggest such discussions would not be a hindrance for web accessibility. If, for instance, the Mc Donald's website would be made more accessible and this fact would be openly communicated ,it can be only beneficial for the wider cause of accessibility as the business sense of such measures would become more apparent to other companies.

In any case what transcends is the importance of having marketing expertise on your side when promoting a product that should appeal to LOHASian instincts.

Bionade's success only began with a new marketing manager on board and two of the founding members of Innocent have a background in marketing and advertising²⁵ which does imply there has been a lot of thought put into the way the brands should be perceived.

As emanating from a recent survey web developers and designers often work as freelancers, in small teams or little start up agencies ²⁶which suggests direct access to a branding or marketing expert within their own ranks may be very limited and it is often the web developer or designer himself who is selling the product i.e. the website to the customer.

Christian Heilmann, an experienced web developer, book author and contributor to many discussions on accessibility, points out in an article for Digital Web Magazine:

“A lot of tutorials and introductory accessibility articles are written by Web developers for Web developers. [...]”

Accessibility is perceived and sold as a technical issue...” ²⁷

This also suggests that implementing marketing and branding strategies seldom take place when arguing the case for web accessibility. If, however accessibility is to learn from LOHAS, taking these aspects into consideration seems pivotal.

To conclude that the marketing and design measures taken to boost sales for a.m. LOHAS brands can be applied to web accessibility without meaningful adjustments is, however, too simplistic.

A key difference already lies in the market for the products in question; while the a.m. LOHAS examples are aimed at end consumers by and large websites of substantial scope are commissioned by commercial enterprises or public organisations. It is common marketing practice to tailor activities depending on whether a Business to Consumer (hereafter referred to by its widely used abbreviation B2C) or Business to Business (B2B) relationship exists; many agencies even specialise in catering for one of the two thus implying a profoundly different approach is necessary.

The finer points of B2B versus B2C marketing are subject to constant professional debate and not within the scope of this paper, nevertheless a widely accepted differentiation seems to be that B2C focuses on individual customers or a small group (e.g. a family shopping together) whereas B2B focuses on other businesses as the consumer.²⁸ The latter usually implies a more complicated decision process as more money, areas of expertise and decision makers are involved not to mention the business risk of spending a lot of money on a dysfunctional product. A B2B product like a softdrink would typically be bought more spontaneously at the point-of-sale.

While it has been shown that looking at some LOHAS products may be helpful in influencing the future fate of web accessibility another significant question arises.

The LOHAS examples mentioned above are tangible products whereas accessibility is more of an underlying concept.

How do you therefore promote a laudable concept as opposed to a narrowly defined product?

2.2 Learning from successful LOHAS principles

Sustainability is a concept ,that by definition, lies at the very heart of LOHAS.

Similar to accessibility there can a very broad approach as to what being sustainable may mean, but for this dissertation I will concentrate on the environmental aspect of sustainability.

It seems that accessibility, by some is still widely regarded as an altruistic measure and therefore something that might be interesting for “do-gooders” but not per se an exciting proposition. As this paper has hopefully highlighted in preceding chapters this is not the case but the situation does bear resemblance to the acceptance and perceptions of sustainability before LOHASian ideas gained widespread popularity.

Just like accessibility could be seen as a domain for “do-gooders” , sustainability could be and has been thought of as being connected to unworldly “tree-huggers”.

Indeed, going back briefly to the Bionade example , Blum (the Marketing Manager) has been quoted in a recent newspaper article that one of the biggest problems in the beginning was people associating the word Bio with hippies.²⁹

In an article entitled “Making Sustainability Sexy”³⁰, Marc Stoiber (a creative director at Grey Advertising) touches on some points that can also be applied to the area of accessibility. Stoiber argues that *“most sustainable products have somehow been positioned as things we must buy, not that we want to buy, or are enticed to buy.”*

I feel this is also exactly the case when laws and court cases are over emphasised in order to sell accessibility ³¹ or high moral values, obliging to cater for disabled users are brought into the equation as the single most important factor in favour of accessible websites.

As this paper has pointed out when defining LOHAS, if accessibility is to be taken on board by these consumers or be seen as a part of their mindset, it has to strike more than one chord, neither a purely hedonistic nor a solely guilt-laden one.

“It's a bit like your Mom saying you must wear your toque when it's cold. Even if you do what she says, you don't want to” Stoiber continues, which in the case of accessibility could well describe the thoughts of a client who is made to think about accessibility on his website exclusively for rational reasons e.g. fear of a law suit.

This would seem like the exact opposite of wanting to commission an accessible website for its “sexiness” - in the case of sustainability a report in the Financial Times on LOHAS was aptly entitled

“Encouraging green consumerism: Guilt is no solution” ³²

A conclusion I would wholeheartedly deem valid for web accessibility.

The importance of making sustainability a more attractive proposition seems to have also been the driving force behind recent papers commissioned by the World Wildlife Found (hereafter referred to by its common abbreviation WWF)³³ and the United Nations Environment Programme (hereafter referred to by its common abbreviation UNEP).

In the foreword to UNEP's publication, a guideline entitled "Communicating Sustainability: How to produce effective public campaigns", the organisation's chairman recognises

*"[...]that traditional messages from governments and green groups urging the public to adopt the environment into their day-to-day decisions need to be overhauled. Many of these messages are simply too patronising, guilt-laden or disapproving. Instead of turning people on to the environment, they risk switching them off."*³⁴

He further states the aim of the publication to "make sustainable lifestyles fashionable and 'cool' "³⁵, thereby coming very close to the approach of my study in looking at ways of making accessibility sexy.

The guideline contains 16 examples of successful sustainability campaigns from across the globe and draws many conclusions that I deem transferable to the cause of accessibility. The scope of this dissertation does not allow for an exact analysis of all recommendations but valuable conclusions for promoting accessibility are that successful communication may include linking the subject to other issues beyond the obvious realm³⁶ and that industry jargon is seen as real barrier to successful communication of a concept.³⁷

Taking on board the former advice is very much the approach this paper has been trying to take throughout by linking web accessibility to areas outside of the obvious realm of web design.

The latter consideration is also particularly relevant to web accessibility as currently the only way an accessible website can be instantly claimed to users are badges hinting that the site has passed some automated accessibility tests and that its underlying code (XHTML for the content, Cascading Style Sheets or CSS for visual

appearance) passes the W3Cs validation engine.

The relevance of automated tests without an auditing authority checking the claims is being just as much debated as whether a valid code alone constitutes true accessibility of a website. I cannot delve deeper into such debates as the scope of the dissertation does not allow for this but whatever the case it seems clear that to an non technical user badges showing acronyms followed by a tick are not likely to enlighten, excite or emotionally engage him with the product i.e. the website.

In contrast, fair trading is another example for a LOHASian principle with a recognisable umbrella label incorporating a number of national organisations worldwide ³⁸

When a consumer sees the Fair Trade logo on a packet of coffee he will probably not know or care which technique is used to pick the beans for his coffee but he can instantly assume the product being sold will help people lead a better life which is ultimately also a pivotal aim of making a website accessible.

If the consumer is LOHAS oriented he will almost certainly choose the product with this label, but only given the taste of the coffee compares to a usual brand.

This suggests the emotional value and implications of fairness might be something web developers and designers could include much more openly when communicating about web accessibility, perhaps even a label along the lines of “Fair Design” stands a better chance of getting noticed and desired by an ethically aware client than the somewhat cryptical “W3C XHTML 1.0” et al.

Overall sustainability and accessibility share a lot of common ground, both principles take on board a stance which shows a wider awareness of ethical issues. Admittedly the impact of ignoring sustainability may be larger for mankind (see e.g. current climate change debates) than ignoring accessibility of websites but nevertheless I believe it is more likely for a person concerned with the well being of the planet to also consider the well being of fellow human beings and their participation in every day life.

It is this rationale that allows for products with a “fair trade” label to become increasingly branded together with the “organic” label as both are seen as part of a bigger picture (of personal and universal well being) even though at a first glance the rights of workers may seem unrelated to the healthiness and naturalness of produce. As recognised by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, organic and fair trade are “*two concepts based on the same holistic principal*” .³⁹ I see no reason why this essence of LOHAS, linking two issues together that go beyond good looks and price, could not be beneficial for web accessibility if marketed cleverly on the grounds of a LOHAS belief system.

It is evident that approaches to market a concept like sustainability always included the involvement of marketing professionals. UNEP e.g. has worked together with futerra, an agency specialised in “Creative and Strategic Communications for Sustainable Development”⁴⁰ for its guidelines, as has the WWF by co-operating with Clownfish a renown brand and communications agency⁴¹ to come up with very inspiring and insightful results and recommendations.

So far I have not come across a similar approach and co-operation involving governing bodies concerned with web accessibility, be it the W3C, European Union or local governments. What has been issued are often guidelines concerned with technical or legislative questions ⁴² rather than a communication encompassing a fresh look at accessibility by e.g. applying LOHAS principles. As I hope to have shown in this dissertation, this however might be a promising course of action.

To conclude however that the models of communicating sustainability as discussed above could just be applied to the wide area of web accessibility would be (as in the case of trying to compare Bionade to a website) too simplistic. Within the scope of this dissertation I can regrettably not explore further the issues of self-esteem, dignity, empowerment or the historical development of the disability rights movement but suggest they would all need to be a part of a campaign that has the potential and integrity to make “web accessibility sexy.”

Chapter 3

Conclusion

This dissertation could only merely touch the surface of an approach to web accessibility that goes beyond current arguments in its favour. Throughout the research for my topic it soon became evident that there a huge number of subjects both LOHAS and web accessibility touch - spanning technology, design, human behaviour, marketing and legislation to name just a few.

The approach of comparing these two fields added to the complexity even more and I found the number of times I had to refer to this paper's insufficient scope seems further testament to this intricacy. Nevertheless, the current Zeitgeist of ethical consumerism, as expressed within the LOHAS market with its holistic outlook, could allow for the notion of accessibility to be perceived as a sexy property for a website and therefore help accessibility break into the mainstream.

For this to happen though, there need to be more combined efforts taken by all stakeholders and key players involved in web accessibility. First and foremost a more collaborative approach between developers, designers and governing bodies is required to communicate an image of accessibility which is immediately associated with technical sophistication, business acumen and visual design quality. At the same time it is vital to stress web accessibility as being a fair practice with a huge group of users as beneficiaries.

The successful culmination of these ideas under the umbrella of web accessibility would make it probable to reside within a LOHAS framework, benefiting from all the attributes this category implies, including sexiness.

As it currently stands the industry is not able to market web accessibility in such a way to a broader audience.

A funding body or bodies is/are therefore required to invest in a coherent campaign involving marketing experts, key figures mentioned above and a proportion of users with disabilities. The campaign may look at some lessons learnt from LOHAS, as outlined in my study, but also needs to address unique issues of accessibility in a tactful and nevertheless enticing way.

If there is to result a recognisable label or other form of certification for an accessible website this needs to strike the same chords as the popular LOHAS labels “fair trade” or “organic” and further needs a transparent audition process to be meaningful.

While all this may sound like an utopian vision I believe there has never been a better time to consider “making web accessibility sexy”. Given the current legislative focus on wider issues of accessibility and inclusion and the growing interest in LOHAS it would seem like a wasted opportunity not to look at these topics intertwined.

Word count: 6016

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