Digital Citizen

Being an effective, professional and responsible user of technology for your personal brand.

“This Is For Everyone.”
Sir Tim Berners-Lee

This was the fundamental principle set out by the inventor of the World Wide Web. In creating the internet, Sir Tim Berners-Lee provided a platform that allowed us to create and share content across the planet. We are all creators and consumers, with the potential to contribute to, and benefit from, the sum of human knowledge.

So what are your personal responsibilities as a digital citizen? Well, there are certain laws, authorities, societal rules and cultural expectations that apply in the digital world, just as they do in the real one.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

W3C is an international consortium working together to develop web standards and guidelines to ensure that all web users, regardless of ability, age or location, have the opportunity to share knowledge, expand commerce and innovate.

“The Web is fundamentally designed to work for all people, whatever their hardware, software, language, culture, location, or physical or mental ability. When the Web meets this goal, it is accessible to people with a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive ability.

Thus the impact of disability is radically changed on the Web because the Web removes barriers to communication and interaction that many people face in the physical world. However, when websites, web technologies, or web tools are badly designed, they can create barriers that exclude people from using the Web.”

Recent UK Government guidelines state, “if you exclude anyone from using your service based on disability, you may be in breach of the Equality Act 2010.” So, it has never been more important to ensure any service, platform, digital media, written text element or document is fully accessible to all users.

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Our in-house expert, Senior Web Developer Allan Beattie, says:

“From a developer's point of view, it might seem that "making our website accessible" is yet another task to add to an already complex stack of priorities. But in actual fact, given that the W3C has put so much work into the universal access of the Web, it’s really more a case of keeping our website accessible. In other words, starting simply, and being mindful of the choices we make in progressively enhancing our website - without breaking anything along the way!

From a content provider’s point of view, it’s a similar story: keep it simple. Text is already universally accessible, to machines as well as humans. If an image is important to the context of your content, give it a textual description; but if the image is just for decoration, it doesn’t need to be announced to screen readers or search engines. It’s all about conveying meaningful content.”

There are a few simple things we can all do to ensure that what we publish online benefits everyone.

- Add captions or transcriptions for video or audio resources; this will allow users with visual or hearing impairments to engage fully with your content.
- Ensure links to other websites are meaningful and indicate where the link takes you; this helps screen-reader users and search engines to utilise your content.
- Include descriptions, or “alt text”, for your images. This allows blind users using screen reading technology to hear a description of your image.

Accessibility features

For a full list of the accessibility features you will need to build into any content, platform or information you publish online, see our Accessibility on the Web guide in the Learners Toolkit Accessibility resource. This resource also looks at the guiding principles and different tools you can use to assess your own work. Many of these are free to use, and will help identify areas where accessibility can be improved. If you are interested in web accessibility and want to know more, we suggest getting started with An Introduction to Web Accessibility from WebAIM.

Further training

If you are interested in becoming a digital creator, coder or entrepreneur, the W3C offer free online MOOC courses in a variety of subjects:

- HTML5 Introduction
- HTML5 Part 1: Coding Essentials and Best Practices
- HTML5 Part 2: Advanced Techniques for Designing HTML5 Apps
- CSS Introduction
Copyright

Copyright is a statutory right of ownership of an intellectual property (written, printed, graphic, electronic or performance). Copyright law, as laid down in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988 (c.48) (CDPA), protects the rights of creators by stipulating the extent to which copying can be undertaken so that their right to benefit financially from their works is not endangered through excessive copying or re-use. Copyright law also outlines the scope and extent to which works can be copied or re-used.

At first glance, Copyright law appears to be a dry subject and not necessarily something you would have much interest in. However, consider a situation where you have worked hard over many months or years to produce an essay, a thesis, a piece of research, a book, a musical composition, a painting, etc. Then think about how it would feel to see your work being credited to someone else, or being torn apart and repurposed to meet someone else’s agenda – you would feel a sense of injustice, a betrayal and anger.

That is really all we mean by Copyright law; attribute the work to, and credit, the creator. As simple as that.

We are lucky to have a dedicated expert at the University, Copyright Officer Mary Mowat, who says:

“Having to think about copyright implications of quoting someone else’s words in your essay or using an image from the internet in a PowerPoint presentation may seem like a chore but in fact, a working knowledge of copyright law is one of the most useful and relevant skills you can acquire. A respect for others’ copyright is not simply a matter of complying with the law, but is also a demonstration of good academic practice.”

The Library provides a wealth of advice about Copyright law and legislation on their webpages. They have also created a handy quick guide to Copyright, which provides general advice to staff and students.

If you would like to continue learning about Copyright to inform your own work, or other people’s, after you leave University, we advise you refer to the UK Government’s Copyright guidance.

Privacy

We all know not to post pictures of ourselves in compromising situations that may be used against you by potential employers or other individuals. However, according to Microsoft’s Annual Survey of Internet Users most “still don’t feel they are completely aware of the information that’s being collected about them.”

The Internet Society³ has published some basic facts and advice about where and how data about you is collected, what data is collected, how it is being used today, and what you can do to protect yourself. As a starting point:

- Think before you hand over personal details – does your social media profile really need to include your phone number, employment status and list of interests?
- Check your privacy settings on devices, internet browsers and apps.
- Be aware of the permissions and terms and conditions you agree to when you register for a new service. Is your content protected?

So we all have a responsibility to use technology in a way that doesn’t harm others, and to be aware of the impact that technology has on our health, environment and society.