

**USE OF TECHNOLOGY
AND RELATED TOOLS TO IMPROVE
ACCESS TO JUSTICE**



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This outline focuses on the use of websites as a tool to enhance the public's understanding of a tribunal's justice system and to make that system more accessible to a self-represented litigant. A user-friendly tribunal justice system website must address many of the same issues confronted by those who establish a user-friendly tribunal justice system. For example, whether in person or on the web, the tribunal should provide plain language in documents, multiple language choices, accessibility for the disabled, and an environment that is suited to the community it serves. Any resources that are available at the tribunal, such as self-help videos, forms, publications and access to tribunal decisions, should also be available on-line. Ideally, a website should allow the user to perform tribunal business without having to take a day off from work to make a personal appearance at the tribunal. Greater dissemination of information leads to greater access to justice.

Site Geared to the Public

- The website should be primarily geared to the public, as opposed to attorneys or other court users.
- Ideally every page should go to a readability specialist. A 7th grade reading level is preferable.
- The website should contain easy to use instructions that assist users as to procedures and forms. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/servicenoticeofpetition.shtml#> how as opposed to just posting: <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/rpapl735.shtml>)
- It is helpful to non-English speaking users if content is provided in multiple languages. Customize content on the website to meet area-specific language needs.

Easy Navigation

- Users should be able to easily navigate the site. Specifically, website content should be easily accessible, without the need for extraneous mouse clicks, and navigation buttons should be intuitive and conveniently placed.
- For example, definition links placed in legal and procedural text are helpful to the user. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/vacatingjudg.shtml>)
- Content offered in other languages should not be buried in English text so it cannot be easily accessed. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/index.shtml>)
- Quick Finds and FAQs are helpful to direct users to most accessed pages.

Forms

- Forms should be available on-line.
- Forms should be searchable.
- Ideal to make forms easily accessible from multiple locations, both on a forms page and as links from explanatory text. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/namechanges.shtml> and <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/forms.shtml>.)
- Forms should be fillable on-line.
- E-filing is ideal.
- Payment on-line on secure site is excellent. (e.g. <http://nycserv.nyc.gov/NYCServInquiry/NYCSERVMain>)
- Forms should use plain language (readability).
- Provide forms in bilingual format (e.g. English/Spanish) so that even if the user is required to submit the form in English, he or she can still understand what the form says. (e.g. http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/civil_spanish/forms.shtml)
- Provide instructions on procedures and forms. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/smallclaims/forms/InstructionsforFiling.pdf>, <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/smallclaims/startingcase.shtml#starting>)
- Or, consider formats other than text, such as video instructions on filling out forms using screen capture software. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/smallclaims/videos.shtml#videos>)

Self-Help

- Provide a virtual self-help center on the website. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/resourcecenter.shtml>)
- Provide tribunal publications on-line.
- The user should have access to a searchable database of tribunal decisions.
- Develop explanatory “how-to” videos. Simultaneous sub-titles are best (closed captioning), otherwise a written transcript should be available to comply with ADA requirements. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/videos.shtml#seminars>)
- Links to outside resources and legal assistance are helpful. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/vlpselfrep.shtml#meet>)
- Providing information in multiple formats, text, video, or publication, can reach more litigants because some people understand better by watching

and listening, while others absorb information better by reading. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/repairsvideo.shtml>, <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/startinghp.shtml> and <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/pdfs/tenantsguide.pdf>)

On-line Chat

- Providing live help on a website is wonderful for users who are having trouble navigating on their own. An instant messaging feature allows the user to ask a live person for information which can be instantly provided. (e.g. <http://www.montanalawhelp.org/MT/index.cfm>)

A2J interactive forms

- A2J created interviews are Internet based user friendly programs that ask the user questions about their legal situation, then generate a completed court form and/or information sheets based upon the responses given in the program. (e.g. <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/interactive.shtml>)