

# What to Do If You Get an Accessibility Demand Letter

A demand letter alleging your website isn't accessible is alarming, but it's not a judgment. Here's what the letter actually means, the steps worth taking in the first week, and the ones to skip.

The letter usually arrives by email or certified mail, from a law firm you've never heard of, on behalf of a plaintiff you've never met. It states that your website violates the Americans with Disabilities Act, cites specific barriers a screen reader user allegedly encountered, and requests remediation, sometimes alongside a settlement figure.

It's designed to be alarming. Some of that alarm is warranted. Some of it isn't. Knowing the difference determines whether you handle the next few weeks well or badly.

## What the Letter Actually Is

Most of these letters aren't the opening move of a company-ending lawsuit. They're the opening move of a settlement negotiation, often from firms that send hundreds of similar letters to businesses in a sector or region. That doesn't make the underlying claim baseless, ADA Title III does apply to business websites in most circumstances, but it does mean the letter is a starting point, not a verdict.

The letter typically wants one of two outcomes: a negotiated payment to make the claim go away, or a commitment to remediate specific issues, sometimes both.

Very few of these situations proceed to a courtroom. Most resolve through negotiation, remediation, or a combination of the two, well before trial.

Understanding this doesn't mean the letter is nothing. It means the reaction it's built to provoke, panic and an immediate check to make the problem disappear, usually isn't the reaction that serves you best.

## The First Week

Don't ignore it. Silence doesn't cause the claim to expire. It typically leads to litigation, which is more expensive and slower than almost any other path available to you.

Don't respond to the sender directly before you've talked to a lawyer, either. Anything you say, including an apology or an informal promise to fix things, can affect your negotiating position. Route communication through counsel once you have one.

Get an attorney with ADA Title III experience specifically, ideally one who has handled website accessibility claims and not just general business litigation. This is a narrow enough area of law that experience matters more than firm size, and a generalist attorney unfamiliar with the pattern of these claims can cost you time and leverage in the negotiation.

And resist the urge to buy a quick technical fix before you understand what's actually wrong. This is where accessibility overlay vendors show up fastest, often within days of a demand letter becoming known in a local business network. An overlay is not a compliance solution, and installing one after a demand letter doesn't resolve the underlying claim; it sometimes weakens your position, since it can look like an attempt to paper over the problem rather than fix it.

## Recognizing the Pattern

A meaningful share of these letters come from a small number of law firms and plaintiffs who send large volumes of similar claims, sometimes to dozens of businesses in the same city within a short window. This isn't a secret, and it isn't, by itself, a reason to dismiss the letter. But recognizing the pattern helps calibrate the response.

A letter that names specific, plausible barriers, missing form labels, no keyboard access to a booking widget, images with no alternative text, reads differently than one with vague, generic language that could apply to almost any website. The specific one deserves a specific, evidence-based response. The generic one may still need to be taken seriously, but it's worth having your attorney ask early whether the plaintiff can substantiate the claim with any detail beyond the template language.

Either way, the response process is the same: get counsel, get a real audit, and let the evidence drive the negotiation rather than reacting to the letter's tone.

## What a Real Response Requires

Once you have counsel, the practical next step is usually an accessibility audit that documents your site's actual state against WCAG success criteria, not a scanner report, a combination of automated scanning and manual testing by someone who understands both the technical standard and how the barriers alleged in the letter map to it.

This serves two purposes. It tells your attorney what's actually true, which shapes the negotiation. And it gives you a remediation roadmap you'd eventually need regardless of how the specific claim resolves, since the underlying obligation to have an accessible website doesn't go away once this particular letter is answered.

The audit findings usually fall into a spread: some claims in the letter are accurate, some are exaggerated, and occasionally a claim doesn't match the site as it currently exists (the plaintiff's testing may be months old, or based on a browser and assistive technology combination that behaves unusually). Your attorney needs this picture to negotiate from an informed position instead of an anxious one.

## What Doesn't Help

Skip the general "make it go away" response: installing a widget, adding a generic accessibility statement with no remediation behind it, or paying the requested amount immediately without verifying what's actually being alleged. Each of these treats the letter as the problem, when the letter is a symptom of an actual accessibility gap that existed before the letter arrived and will keep existing until it's fixed.

It's also worth resisting the opposite instinct: assuming the letter is meritless and can be ignored because it "feels like" a shakedown. Some demand letters are opportunistic. The website accessibility gap they're pointing at is frequently real regardless of the sender's motive.

## After This One Resolves

Whatever the negotiated outcome, the underlying gap needs a real fix, not a settlement-driven patch. [The small business owner's guide to website accessibility](#) covers what actual compliance work looks like, separate from any specific legal situation.

The [COREaccess™ Accessibility Leadership System](#) covers the full audit, remediate, train, and monitor framework this kind of situation calls for.

COREaccess™ audits are built to hold up under exactly this kind of scrutiny: WCAG criteria mapped to specific findings, severity ranked, documented in a form that works whether you're using it to negotiate a claim or just to close a real gap before the next letter arrives. If you're dealing with one of these right now, a 15-minute conversation is a reasonable next step once you've retained counsel.

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