CASE STUDY FROM HAVEN SMITH & COMPANY

459 public PDFs from 10 agencies. 79% had at least one barrier.

To see where California agencies really stand before the ADA Title II deadlines, we checked the public PDFs of 10 cities, counties, and school districts.

CLIENT	TYPE	SCOPE	RESULT
Ten California agencies	Research	459 public PDFs	79% had a barrier

Context and goals

Agencies are working toward the Department of Justice deadlines now. We wanted a fair picture of how far along they are, using only what any resident can download.

What success looks like

- Every file is tagged, has real text, and names its language.
- Every file gives screen readers headings and image descriptions.

What we measured

We checked 459 public PDFs from 4 cities and counties and 6 school districts, most of them in the Bay Area. Each file was checked for tags, real text, language, title, headings, and image descriptions.

What we found across all 459 files

Check	Result
Had real text	91%
Had at least one barrier	79%
Never named a language	57%
Had no tags at all	39%
Were scanned pictures	39 files

Most files can be fixed without retyping a word, because the text is already there.

Every agency we checked

Agency	Files	No tags	No language	Scans	Had a barrier
School district A	60	37	37	0	97%
School district B	59	48	53	11	97%
School district C	60	15	40	4	77%
School district D	43	14	24	0	74%
School district E	55	9	26	0	65%
School district F	13	4	5	3	62%
City A	52	14	29	6	83%
City B	59	21	19	8	69%
County A	57	14	29	6	68%
County B	1	1	1	1	100%
All ten	459	177	263	39	79%

What we found

- The good news: more than 90% of the files already had real text, so most can be fixed without retyping a word.
- 79% of all files had at least one barrier for screen reader users.
- 57% never told a screen reader which language to read in.
- 39% had no accessibility tags at all.
- 39 files were scanned pictures of paper, with no readable text.

The four most common problems

What one typical public PDF looked like.

1. No tags, so a screen reader can’t find headings, lists, or tables.
2. Images with no description, so a screen reader skips them or reads a file name.
3. Scanned pages with no real text at all.
4. No language named, so a screen reader guesses how to pronounce every word.

After: the tags we add

- `<Document lang="en-US">`
- `<H1> Document title`
- `<Figure alt="Map of the new bike lanes downtown">`
- `<P> Real text from the scanned page`
- `<Table> Headers announced`

The path to good

- Fix the most-used files first with a deadline sprint, then keep new files clean with a monthly retainer.
- Check vendor work by hand, because tagged files still failed when nobody reviewed the tags.

Follow-up

This was a review of public files, not paid work. Agency names are kept private, and each agency can ask for its own numbers.

Want to see it on your files?

We test and fix documents, websites, and software, led by a DHS Certified Trusted Tester. Start with a free accessibility check: we check your homepage, review 10 public documents, and fix one for free.

Get your free check at havensmith.company.

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