

Case study

**Airline
accessibility:
Amadeus are
in it for the
long haul**

amadeus



Accessibility and usability go hand-in-hand for airline industry websites

Amadeus is the leading IT solution supplier to the global airline industry, providing e-commerce products that connect airlines with travel agents and customers.

The company's e-Retail product is the world's most widely used airline Internet booking engine. It is a fully customisable white label solution, which powers more than 260 websites for over 100 of the world's airlines.

“Our software is going to be much more accessible than it was ... and better accessibility makes for better usability – it benefits everyone.”

Roxane Lesbros, Manager, User Experience Definition, Interfaces for e-Retail and ARD Web, Amadeus



Challenge

When the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued new digital accessibility rules based on compliance to level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG v2.0), it focused airline industry minds.

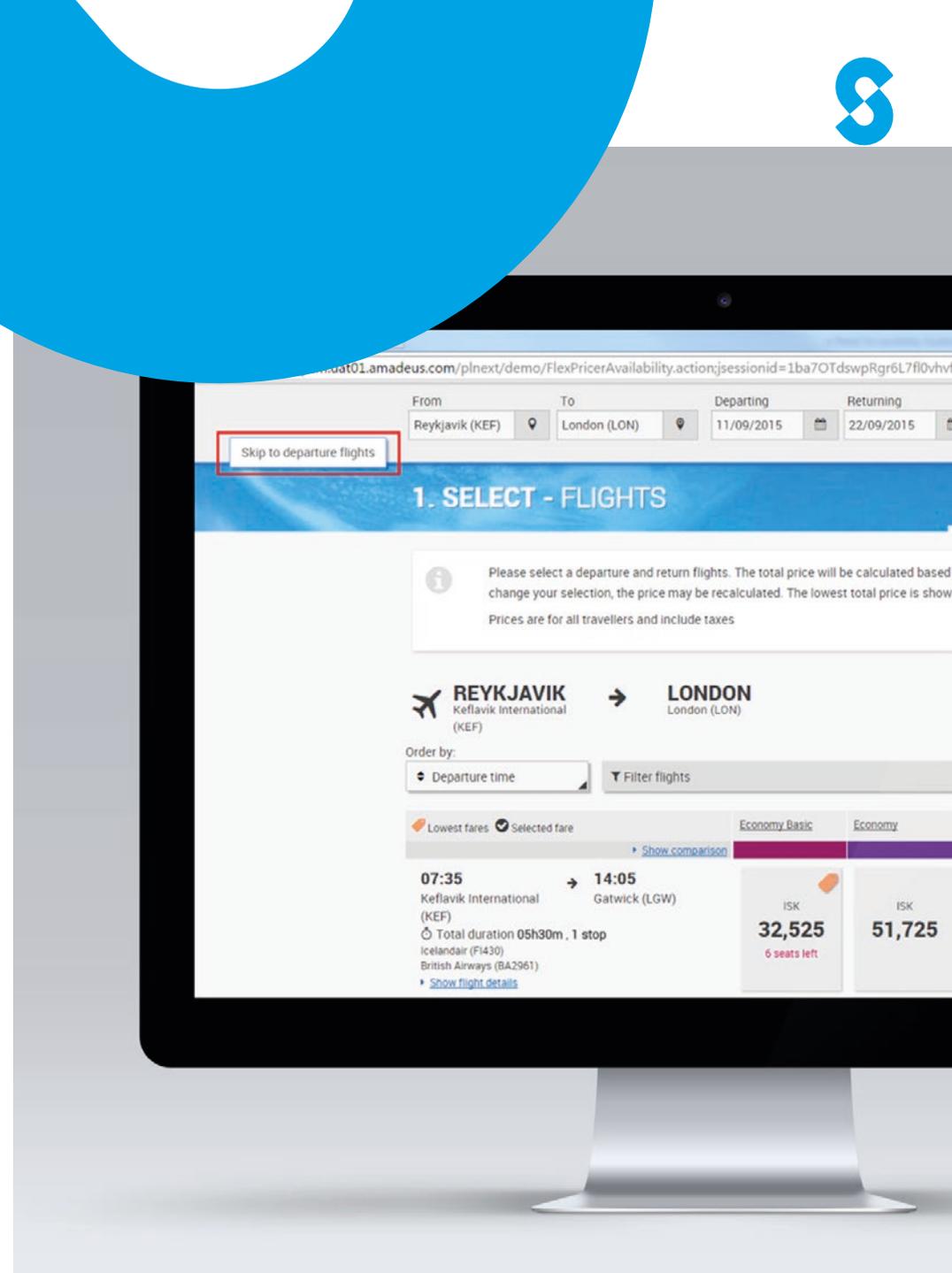
Amadeus had to address the accessibility of its e-Retail product in time for the introduction of the new DOT rules in December 2015. Roxane Lesbros of Amadeus says, “The first thing we had to do was to fully investigate and understand the product’s existing level of accessibility.”

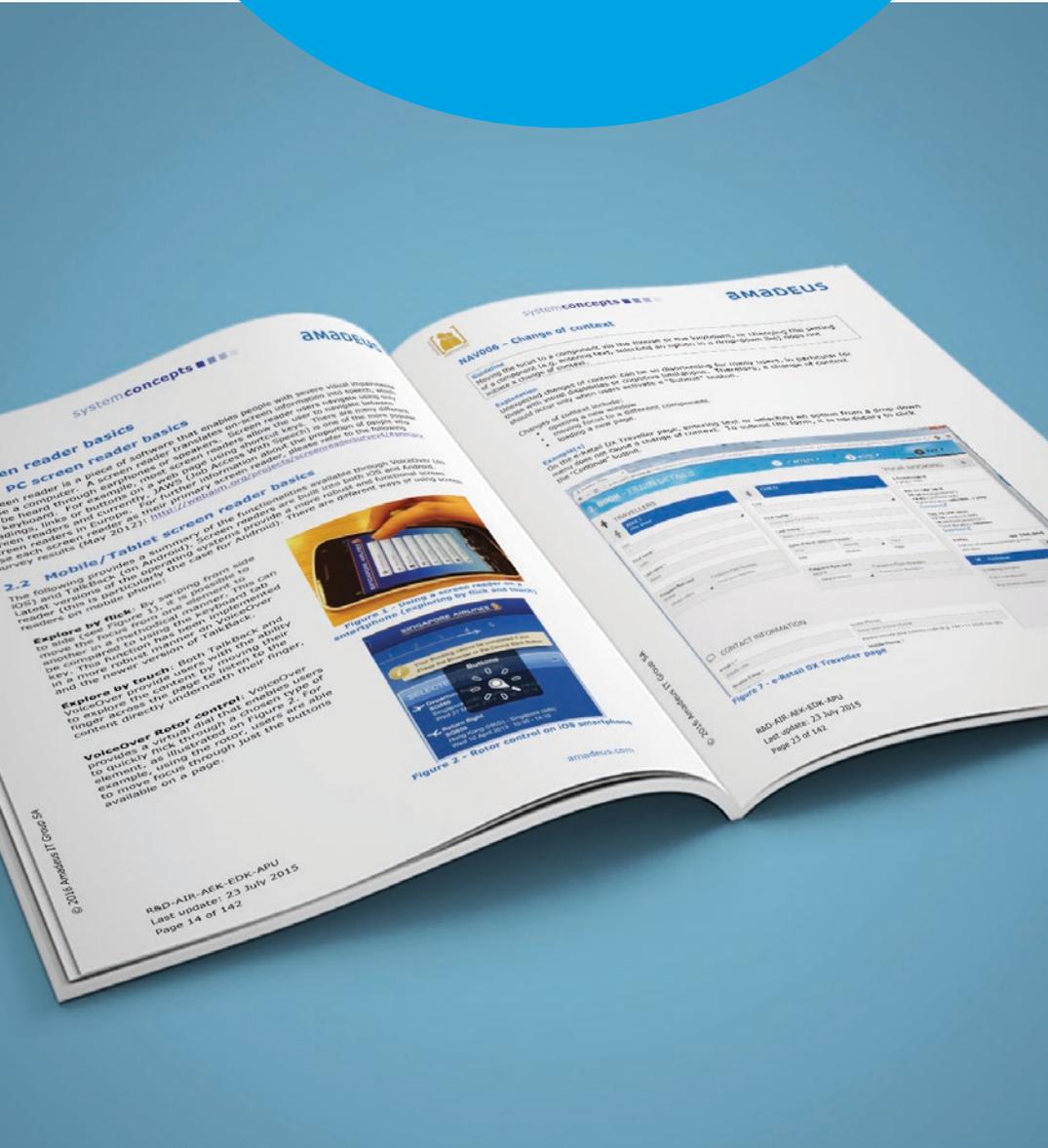
What we did

We were able to bring together a unique blend of skills and capabilities to help Amadeus. Our consultants combined their usability and UX expertise with knowledge of WCAG v2.0 – and also a degree of technical and coding capability. Our first recommendation was for us to conduct an expert accessibility audit and user testing programme, to understand the state of play of e-Retail as it stood.

The user testing with disabled participants was extensive, covering multiple devices to deliver a full picture of product accessibility. The results of this initial work were unequivocal: Amadeus would be better off developing a new e-Retail product from scratch, rather than trying to fix the accessibility shortcomings of the existing one.

A key finding was that product accessibility needed to extend beyond the technical WCAG v2.0 requirements, providing additional functionality to enable users with disabilities to request special services online.





Industry-specific accessibility guidelines and training

To be able to deliver a new product that met these requirements, the team of developers at Amadeus needed clearer guidance. WCAG v2.0 is written as a generic standard, making it complex to read and interpret. We created more user-friendly e-Retail accessibility guidelines based on our findings from the testing with users and our interpretation of WCAG v2.0, specifically relevant to the airline industry.

To support the effectiveness of these guidelines, we also delivered accessibility training for the Amadeus development teams based in Nice, France and Bangalore, India. Our open approach facilitated a knowledge and skills transfer process to the internal team of accessibility experts at Amadeus, enabling it to extend delivery of the training programme to its development, quality assurance (QA) and implementation specialists. In all, nearly 100 people underwent accessibility training in India, the UK, France and Germany.

“Training has been an important aspect, getting our developers, QA and implementation specialists up to speed on new coding and testing techniques,” says Roxane.

Accessibility is a journey, not an end

Compliance with the US DOT requirements is not a straightforward ‘tick the box’ process. Our work with Amadeus on e-Retail continues, with expert accessibility audits and user testing. We’ve also supported the company by speaking at a prestigious airline industry conference it hosted in Bangkok.

At the conference we outlined our accessibility work on e-Retail, and shared a few of the key considerations in the accessibility journey. “It was really positive and opened things up, by highlighting the business opportunity of better serving people with disabilities,” says Roxane.



Benefits

Understanding users

Through its partnership with System Concepts, the e-Retail team at Amadeus has learnt a great deal about its users. There are countless combinations of assistive technologies, operating systems and browser versions to consider, not to mention a huge spectrum of digital maturity across the user community. Seen in this context, accessibility compliance is a complex issue.

Better accessibility means better usability

Roxane stresses the value of working with us to gather feedback from users, explaining, “A site can be theoretically compliant with a guideline, yet can still be difficult or confusing to use. You learn a lot through user testing. The bottom line is to determine whether users are able to complete a booking on our website. User testing answers this question.”

Roxane says that one challenge of the imminent introduction of the DOT rule was that people tend to focus on the punitive costs of potential non-compliance, rather than the benefits of improved accessibility. And on a personal level she has found the process rewarding, saying,

“System Concepts make complicated things simple. They’re able to take a complex problem and break it down into smaller, easier pieces, and their communications and written materials are very clear and high quality.”

“Internally we’re proud to be pioneers in improving accessibility.”

A positive client-consultant partnership

Roxane describes the working relationship with System Concepts as, “Excellent. System Concepts make complicated things simple. They’re able to take a complex problem and break it down into smaller, easier pieces, and their communications and written materials are very clear and high quality.”

The benefits of working with an independent specialist

She also recognises the benefits of partnering with an independent third party specialist. We’ve

shared learning gained through our accessibility work in different industry sectors, and Amadeus customers like knowing that independent experts are involved in improving the accessibility of e-Retail.

Words of wisdom

Improving the accessibility of e-Retail has been a steep but positive learning curve for Amadeus. “We’ve learnt that accessibility needs to be built-in to the product development process. You don’t want to have to discover and address issues at some future point,” says Roxane. Her final piece of advice on accessibility is refreshingly simple, “Take it more seriously, and start early,” she says.

Could your business benefit from expert UX insights?

For friendly advice on how we can help
your business, just get in touch.

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