How dtSearch Enhanced Software Quality Through an Iterative VPAT® Process

SUMMARY:

- A leading provider of text retrieval and document filters, dtSearch needed an up-to-date Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT®) report to secure government contracts. However, they required specialized expertise to produce thorough and accurate documentation.

- Level Access's iterative approach to VPAT completion—encompassing multiple rounds of testing, remediation, and validation—aligned with dtSearch's goal to not only document its product's current state of accessibility, but ultimately build a more usable product.

- Through collaboration with Level Access, dtSearch expanded its focus from micro-level accessibility issues to broader systemic challenges, deepening developers' understanding of digital accessibility best practices and significantly enhancing usability.

- Conformance with accessibility standards not only helps dtSearch meet government procurement requirements, but also serves as an indicator of overall software quality to all potential buyers.

> "Level Access not only provided us with a completed VPAT, but also a process that helped us build a better product."
>
> **David Thede**,
> President,
> dtSearch

OBJECTIVE:

Produce an up-to-date, accurate VPAT report to land new business

For dtSearch, a leading provider of text retrieval and document filters, product accessibility has long been a priority. "Software that's usable for people with disabilities is more usable for everyone," said David Thede, dtSearch's president. "We want to provide the best possible user experience to every one of our customers."

Additionally, the company does business with government agencies who are legally obligated to purchase accessible technology. These agencies typically require documented proof of product accessibility in the form of a completed Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT), also known as an accessibility conformance report (ACR).

Early on, dtSearch produced VPAT reports in-house. However, as new editions of VPAT were released,

encompassing new and updated accessibility standards, dtSearch realized that refreshing this documentation would require specialized expertise. "The VPAT today is complex, and it's challenging for someone who's not a specialist to produce a thorough and accurate conformance report," said Thede.

Additionally, while dtSearch's developers swiftly addressed any accessibility issues that users brought to their attention, the team was mindful that their software likely contained barriers they weren't aware of. As they sought a third-party expert who could complete a reliable VPAT, they prioritized vendors who would also help them achieve a level of accessibility they would be proud of. "We needed a vendor who could help us build high-quality software, not just document compliance," explained Thede.

"As a software company, when you identify issues, the first thing you do is fix them. So, when updating our VPAT report, we didn't simply want to document our existing product's shortcomings—we wanted to deliver a better, more accessible product."

David Thede,
President,
dtSearch

SOLUTION:

Adopt an iterative approach to conformance reporting that aligns with the software development life cycle

Eager to both document and improve the accessibility of its software, dtSearch engaged Level Access. The dtSearch team was particularly drawn to Level Access's iterative process for completing a VPAT, which aligned with dtSearch's aim to enhance the usability of its product. Rather than simply delivering a one-off report, Level Access partnered with dtSearch on multiple rounds of testing, issue remediation, and validation. This collaborative process ensured that dtSearch not only obtained a completed VPAT that met buyers' standards, but ultimately built software that met users' needs.

By taking an
ITERATIVE
and
COLLABORATIVE
approach to VPAT process, dtSearch

ENHANCED PRODUCT USABILITY

"Level Access's iterative VPAT process was compatible with our focus on software quality. By supporting us through multiple rounds of assessment and remediation, Level Access provided feedback that helped us to meaningfully improve the usability of our product."

David Thede,
President,
dtSearch

As dtSearch's developers worked with Level Access to address issues that surfaced in testing, their awareness of digital accessibility best practices expanded. "Previously, we'd been focused on micro-level accessibility bugs, like missing hot keys," explained Thede. "Level Access brought our attention to broader, systemic challenges with our software's accessibility."

For example, Level Access's testing found an issue with a Windows 11 font size setting, as well as identified certain types of notifications that weren't accessible to screen readers. Level Access supported developers in resolving these issues and equipped them with the knowledge necessary to avoid creating similar barriers in the future. "The entire process was incredibly informative," reflected Thede.

Conforming with

ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

enables dtSearch to deliver a

HIGH-QUALITY user experience

RESULTS:

High-quality software that provides an exceptional user experience for all

Equipped with a completed VPAT, dtSearch can confidently sell its software to buyers who request proof of accessibility, such as government agencies. However, the benefits of having an accessible product extend beyond landing public-sector clients. "As an important part of compliance, accessibility isn't just a requirement for doing business with some types of organizations—it's an indicator to all buyers that your software is high-quality," said Thede.

"Accessibility compliance is becoming a proxy for software quality. Buyers today want to know that the software they purchase is developed by professionals that take their obligation seriously—and conforming with accessibility standards is a powerful way to demonstrate that."

David Thede,
President,
dtSearch

By meeting accessibility standards, dtSearch is also delivering on its goal of providing easy-to-use experiences for all customers. "Usability is one of the most important considerations when building a competitive software product," explains Thede, "and that means accounting for the broad range of needs and preferences that users have. By working with Level Access to make our product more usable, for more people, we've simply made it better."