

Web-video as content: a layered, accessible and webstandards approach

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Introduction

In The Netherlands the government ministries and other governments use video more and more as content on their web sites. The 'Digital Media department' of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport [1] developed a piece of code to deliver video in an accessible and web standards compliant way. We worked in cooperation with the 'Style guide Working Group' and the 'Pilot Government-video'. Within the 'Pilot government-video' the Dutch ministries work together to produce short web-video for Dutch government use. This includes producing captions for every video on the web. The pilot uses the web-video code of the ministry of Health as the only means to display the video's on the web.

All corporate ministerial government websites in The Netherlands have to comply with the 'Styleguide for corporate websites [2]'. Part of this Styleguide is the obligation to comply with the 'Web Guidelines [3]', The Web Guidelines build on existing web standards and accessibility guidelines of the W3C-WCAG. The web-video code is built with these requirements in mind.

What is it?

The code uses a completely layered approach to deliver video on the web. As much users as possible can use the information of the video. A genuinely accessible video on a website does not exclude visitors:

- Blind and visually disabled
- Colour blind
- Visitors who do not have 'proprietary' or 'closed' technologies (for example, a lot of plug-ins)
- Visitors who do not have client-side script-support or have disabled this
- Visitors who use text browsers or other alternative browsers.

The functionality of this 'government video' is based on the 'JW FLV Player' of Jeroen Wijering [4]. We chose FLV as our main format, because of the wide availability on client-software (eg browsers). The code is still in beta, although we do use it on our live websites. At version 1.0 we will reach the set goals.

Position

Our approach shows an accessible way to deliver video to the web. We focus on accessibility for all, because the government has to reach all citizens.

- All users in any scenario can use the text-transcript. This contains the spoken text and written explanations about sounds, actions and gestures in the video. Reading this transcript a user can fully understand the video.
- Users with Flash plug-in version 8 or higher will see an embedded JW FLV Player, with closed captions
- Users without a Flash plug-in, or with a Flash plug-in lower than version 8, will see an embedded QuickTime Player, with closed captions
- Users without Flash or QT-plug-in will see an embedded Windows Media Player
- All users in any scenario can download the video in several formats, so they can play the video on their own media-player of choice
 - Video for Apple QuickTime Player (.mov/.mp4 format)
 - [IF user has IE] Video for Windows Media Player with captions (.asx format)
 - [IF user has no IE] Video for Windows Media Player (.wmv format)
- Users without Flash or QT plug-in can either use a downloadable format or the text-transcription
- Users without JavaScript can also either use a downloadable format or the text-transcription
- All video's have captions. These captions contain the dialogues and explain relevant actions and sounds in the movie. The captions display as 'closed captions'.

Working examples are available on our website [5]. The code can be downloaded and re-used as well [6].

Conclusion

We are not there yet. The 'video on the web' landscape keeps changing and we have to be flexible. Our approach has room for that, we can alter the code when necessary. Topics as search, captions, audio-descriptions, video-encoding and mobile use need constant attention.

Reference:

[1]: <http://www.minvws.nl/> or <http://www.minvws.nl/en/>

[2]: <http://stijlgids.overheid.nl/>
and http://stijlgids.overheid.nl/downloads/Style_Guide_1.1_UK.pdf

[3]: <http://webrichtlijnen.overheid.nl/english>

[4]: http://www.jeroenwijering.com/?item=JW_FLV_Player

[5]: <http://www.minvws.nl/organisatie/staatssecretaris-bussemaker/weblog/>
or an english example on
<http://www.minvws.nl/en/themes/health-insurance-system/the-new-health-care-system-in-the-Netherlands-video/>

[6] <http://www.minvws.nl/en/video>