



Overview of Section 508 Regulations and FileMaker Pro

This document provides an overview of Section 508 regulations and how they impact the users of FileMaker Pro. FileMaker, Inc. has also provided the following resources:

- **Section 508 Guidelines for Developing FileMaker Pro Databases** provides database design tips for compatibility with screen reader applications
- **Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) for FileMaker Pro** illustrates conformance with Section 508 guidelines

FileMaker, Inc. recognizes the importance of complying with Section 508 regulations and has enhanced the accessibility features in FileMaker Pro 8 and FileMaker Pro 8 Advanced, and later versions. It is important to note that developers have a great deal of flexibility in how they design databases, and care should be taken to consider accessibility issues during the design process.

As an application program, FileMaker Pro is covered by the Guide for Software Applications and Operating Systems (1194.21) regulations. While FileMaker is distributed as a database development program, customers can make use of included database templates or develop their own databases for use within agencies covered by Section 508. Third-party or in-house developers should take care to keep Section 508 guidelines in mind as they create or modify databases.

To make FileMaker databases accessible, they must be published as Web Applications using the Instant Web Publishing ("IWP") feature. Visually-impaired users can access the FileMaker data using Microsoft Internet Explorer (Windows) or Safari (Mac OS). These documents primarily address accessibility issues for visually impaired customers in the Windows operating system, using Microsoft Internet Explorer, and the Instant Web Publishing feature in FileMaker Pro. Instant Web Publishing is also accessible with the Apple OS X screen reader application, VoiceOver and the Safari web browser. Other disabilities are impacted much less by the Section 508 guidelines for software.

IMPORTANT: To build Section 508-compliant databases, it is best to use the most recent version of FileMaker. Versions of FileMaker Pro before 8.0 do not produce IWP pages that are very accessible. It is also important that end users use the most recent versions of the web browser and screen reader software.

What is Section 508?

In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. These agencies must comply with accessibility requirements when procuring, developing, using or maintaining electronic and information technology, unless doing so causes an undue burden (i.e. significant difficulty or expense).

Inaccessible technology interferes with an individual's ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

Why is Section 508 Important?

Through the Section 508 amendment, the federal government has been given the responsibility to set an example for the rest of the country by being a model employer and providing exemplary service to its customers and employees with disabilities. Whenever possible, they must use accessible technology so information can be available to all employees, customers, and partners.

Section 508 is proactive: It does not require users to disclose their disabilities. It reduces barriers to Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT) up-front, in much the same way that the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) removed many architectural barriers.

Section 508 helps drive accessible design: Companies compete to develop software products that conform to the Section 508 standard. Currently, many products conform to some, but not all, applicable provisions.

Section 508 provides specific guidelines for developing software applications, operating systems, web-based applications, telecommunications products, video and multimedia products, self-contained products and desktop and portable computers. These technical standards provide guidelines for developing accessible products for a wide variety of disabilities. Most of the software guidelines primarily address visual impairments, since this is the most difficult area of access for software. Some guidelines also address hearing loss in areas where sound is an important part of the application and physical access for users with motor-skill disabilities.

Section 508 technology permeates society: Product features developed for the purpose of meeting federal procurement regulations will be retained and incorporated in products sold outside the federal government.

Section 508 serves as a model for accessibility: Universities, and governmental agencies have chosen to incorporate parts of the standards in their policies or procedures.

Section 508 is enforceable and accountable: In the United States, Section 508 is enforceable by law for federal governmental agencies. Each federal United States agency has appointed a Section 508 coordinator. All federal departments evaluate their agencies for Section 508 compliance and submit information to the United States attorney general. The attorney general, in turn, submits a report to the President with information and recommendations regarding the extent to which the E&IT of the federal government is accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. Over time, Section 508 principles will be required by more governments and corporations.

Section 508 increases employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the federal government. It also supports full participation by the public who use federal government E&IT products.

Why is Section 508 important to FileMaker developers?

The primary customer segments that require Section 508 compliance are currently government and education, but all developers who deploy FileMaker-based solutions to a large number of users, a transient user base, or an unknown user base should ensure the accessibility of their solution.

For example, you might develop a database that is used by a small non-profit that only has 3-5 employees or volunteers working in a database. If the data entry staff changes frequently, it's best to design a database that can be used by a wide number of people, including those with disabilities.

Which FileMaker customers are impacted by this regulation?

Many FileMaker customers are federal agencies and are required by Section 508 to procure and provide accessible products. Other FileMaker customers may develop custom databases for use by federal agencies. These custom-built databases must also meet Section 508 standards.

Additional Resources

Guidelines for FileMaker developers for incorporating Section 508 Accessibility Standards.

FileMaker VPAT

Resources for understanding and implementing the requirements of Section 508:
www.section508.gov

Federal agency committed to design that is accessible to persons with disabilities :
www.access-board.gov

Guide for Software Applications and Operating Systems (1194.21):
www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.21.htm

Guide for Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22):
www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm

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