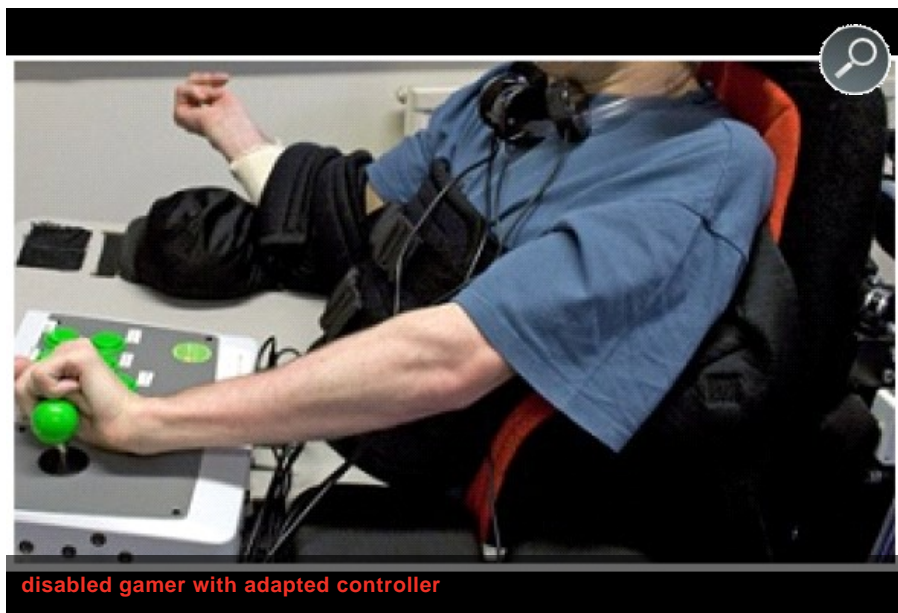


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disabled gamer with adapted controller

## Game on: new guidelines for accessibility

By **Annie Makoff** - 4 months 2 days ago

Computer gaming is a booming industry. And as it gears up to further exploit people's games hunger by launching new products from games to consoles, Annie Makoff reports on an initiative to make more games more accessible to more people

### Video: ZX Spectrum advert on YouTube

[ZX Spectrum advert on YouTube](#)

The games industry in the UK is worth more than £4 billion. According to research by the Internet Advertising Bureau, approximately 33 million Brits are active computer game players.

Of course, gaming may not be everyone's cup of tea. But for many, it has several benefits: it can encourage learning, improve hand-eye coordination and be a welcome distraction from the everyday stresses of normal life.

We've come a long way since the 1980s when the blocky graphics and basic music of the ZX Spectrum revolutionised home computing and we now have games with surround sound and 3D vision technology. But improvements in accessible gaming for disabled people have not kept pace with those technological strides and while for the non-disabled player the world of gaming is their oyster, it's not so easy for a non-disabled gamer to experience virtual reality.

According to computer game accessibility specialist Ian Hamilton, more than 20 per cent of gamers say they have a disability; 10 per cent of male gamers have red-green colour blindness and 15 per cent of adults have a reading age of 11 years old or less.

"These are significant figures considering that 15 per cent of the UK population has a disability. But it makes sense when you consider that people with disabilities have just the same reasons as anyone else to want to play games, plus sometimes additional ones such as therapy, pain relief, or a reduced number of recreation options."

Ian has worked extensively with disabled gamers and has produced several games and platforms for people with profound disabilities. He decided to act following repeated requests

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from game developers asking for accessibility advice.

The result is the Game Accessibility Guidelines, which were published in September and which provide guidance on creating games more accessible to people with mobility, sensory, speech and cognitive impairments.

"Developers are often aware that there's a problem with game accessibility and want to do something about it, but just don't know where to start. The one thing it isn't intended to be is something that can fix everything by itself. If you want to do the best possible job then as with any other industry, you need to combine accessibility guidelines with testing with disabled players and get expert advice."

Adrian Lawrence has been a gamer for more than 25 years. Initially discovering language games as a child on his school's BBC Micro computer, Adrian started playing against his friends on their own systems before eventually saving up to buy his own console.

For him, action and adventure games are fun and "help pass the time". They also help keep his mind sharp. His competitive and sometimes obsessive-compulsive streak means he enjoys completing every level and every single challenge a game has to offer, even if it means splashing out on downloadable extras.

In fact, he's been known to spend up to 80 hours a week gaming.

But despite the benefits Adrian gains from gaming, such as socialising online with other gamers - which is something he struggles with in a real life situation because of his autism, the inaccessibility of games can be frustrating.

"I have dyspraxia as well as Autism so I can be a bit clumsy and now a lot of games have moved to motion controls, I'm unable to play them easily as you have to really coordinate your body and certain movements for your character to move in the right way on the screen. These kinds of games which use motion controls leave people like me behind."

Fellow disabled gamer Stacey Riley, whose impairment makes it difficult for her to move her legs and right arm easily, says that gaming can be intensely frustrating because of her slow reaction times.

One particular game series, Broken Sword, used point-and-click control up until recently when it changed to direct control - a slightly more complex movement which made it impossible for Stacey to play.

"Broken Sword was my favourite game but one of the updated sequences required quick movements and a lot of running. I just couldn't do it so I had to ask a friend to complete it for me, save the level and send me the file back just so I could reach the next stage. Where's the fun in playing a game if you have to hand over control to someone else?"

Stacey sees the issue of accessible gaming as a 'huge bone of contention'.

"The majority of games assume you have full function in both your arms and legs. But when I find a game that I can play and enjoy, I can really immerse myself in it – I feel part of the story. I feel more involved when I play a game than when I watch a film."

The solution to making gaming more accessible while preserving the element of challenge lies in removing the unnecessary barriers from the game rather than removing all barriers. Enabling subtitles, slow-moving text and easy-reach controls are just some of Ian's recommendations.

"That's what accessibility is about. Simple things which are beneficial for all players, but which make a monumental difference to certain groups."

Adrian and Stacey welcome the guidelines, as do developers whose response has been overwhelmingly positive. Many studios, from the smallest independent gaming studios to the biggest, are already using them.

As Ian says: "Hopefully these guidelines will mean that game developers have a solid base to move forward from - creating some real change in best practice across the industry and so a real difference to people's lives,"

Tags: [video games](#), [gaming](#)

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