

# 2022 Website Experience Benchmark Report

An industry report looking at the content quality, performance, accessibility, and more of New Zealand council websites.



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# Foreword by

# ALGIM

ALGIM has for many years undertaken an audit of all local authorities websites in New Zealand. Our goal has been to lift the game of Local Councils and provide a higher standard of web interface for their communities. Are we achieving this?

The trend has been for Councils to improve performance each year and so a large number are moving into the upper quartile. But what will 2022 results bring?

Today we live in a world of change and ALGIM is no exception. We have decided to partner with industry experts, Monsido - powered by CivicPlus, to assist us with our web audit. The emphasis here is around whether the Council or CCO website meets current accessibility standards and conforms to internationally recognised guidelines.

Thank you to Monsido - powered by CivicPlus for their generous support and the findings will be combined with our other checks to rank and calculate who is at the top of their game.

**Mike Manson**

Chief Executive, ALGIM



# Introduction

For the second year in a row, Monsido is happy to provide insights into the state of New Zealand councils websites. This year's report aims to provide an industry benchmark for local councils to understand how their website is performing against modern website metrics.

Council websites are invaluable information hubs for local communities. And while other communication platforms, including social media, are filling an ever-growing part of day-to-day information flow, local government websites continue to play an important role as an authoritative and official information source.

The website experience is therefore more vital than ever. It needs to quickly provide citizens and residents with the information they need. It needs to do it on varying internet connection speeds, as well as on different types of devices. Beyond that, today's expectation is that local government websites are not only informational but also transactional to some degree and allow users to take action rather than visit a council service centre. And if your website experience does not live up to the expectations of the user, your local community may seek other unofficial information sources.

So how are council websites in New Zealand performing? Have they improved since last year? And if not, where are they failing? From website accessibility to content quality, this report looks at the majority of New Zealand's council websites, as well as Auckland Transport and Welling Water\*.

*\*Two council websites were unable to be scanned, and they are therefore not included in the report*

# Methodology

The methodology of the report is based on website scans run on Monsido's proprietary Web Governance platform. The platform scans for potential errors and issues across different Web Governance categories, including Web Accessibility, Content Quality Assurance, Performance, SEO, Response Time, and Uptime.

In addition to the scans, Monsido provides several other features including PageAssist™ Personalisation Tool Bar, Consent Manager, Statistics, PageCorrect™, and more.

For the purpose of this benchmark report, Monsido scanned a sample of 500 pages from the main publicly facing websites during a two-week period in July/August 2022. The websites were scanned based on the following aspects:



## Web Accessibility

Is your website accessible to all users? Can it be accessed by people using assistive technology, such as a screen reader?



## Content Quality Assurance

Can users navigate your website without running into broken links, broken image links, or misspellings?



## Performance

Is your website performance optimised? Does it perform according to Google Lighthouse standards?



## SEO

Is your website easily found? Can search engines easily crawl and locate relevant information on your website?



## Response Time

How fast does your website load? Can it be accessed via slower or mobile Internet connections?



## Uptime

Is your website available 24/7? Can users access it all hours?

Monsido also conducted a benchmark report for council websites in 2021, and the average benchmark results from that report will be used for comparison purposes.

# The Councils

We tested the majority websites of all of New Zealand's council websites\*, including Auckland Transport and Welling Water.

Curious to see your detailed results? Reach out to Monsido or ALGIM, and we'd be happy to share the results of scanning your website.

[Request a free scan from us](#)

Ashburton District Council	Kaikoura District Council
Auckland Council	Kaipara District Council
Auckland Transport	Kapiti Coast District Council
Bay of Plenty Regional Council	Kawerau District Council
Carterton District Council	Mackenzie District Council
Central Hawke's Bay District Council	Manawatu District Council
Central Otago District Council	Marlborough District Council
Chatham Islands Council	Masterton District Council
Christchurch City Council	Matamata-Piako District Council
Clutha District Council	Napier City Council
Dunedin City Council	Nelson City Council
Environment Canterbury Regional Council	New Plymouth District Council
Far North District Council	Northland Regional Council
Gisborne District Council	Opotiki District Council
Gore District Council	Otago Regional Council
Greater Wellington Regional Council	Otorohanga District Council
Grey District Council	Palmerston North City Council
Hamilton City Council	Porirua City Council
Hastings District Council	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Hauraki District Council	Rangitikei District Council
Hawke's Bay Regional Council	Rotorua District Council
Horizons Regional Council	Ruapehu District Council
Horowhenua District Council	Selwyn District Council
Hurunui District Council	South Taranaki District Council
Hutt City Council	South Waikato District Council
Invercargill City Council	South Wairarapa District Council

Southland District Council	Waimate District Council
Southland Regional Council	Waipa District Council
Stratford District Council	Wairoa District Council
Taranaki Regional Council	Waitaki District Council
Tararua District Council	Waitomo District Council
Tasman District Council	Wellington City Council
Taupo District Council	Wellington Water
Tauranga City Council	West Coast Regional Council
Thames-Coromandel District Council	Western Bay of Plenty District Council
Timaru District Council	Westland District Council
Upper Hutt City Council	Whakatane District Council
Waikato District Council	Whanganui District Council
Waikato Regional Council	Whangarei District Council

\*For this round of scans, there were two council websites that we were unable to scan and they are therefore not included in the report. The two councils are Buller District Council and Waimakariri District Council.

**Not a local council?** We work with 1000s of organisations across many different sectors. We'd love the opportunity to scan your website and see how Monsido could help your organisation. Request a free scan from us.



# Results

The results of the scans include the leading 10 performers overall, as well as top performers in each category individually. In addition, the average results for each category will be presented. To shed light on the progression of council websites, we'll also cross-compare the 2022 average results of each category with the 2021 results.



## Overall

The Overall category highlights the best performing council websites for Web Accessibility, Content Quality Assurance, Response Time, Performance, and SEO. Congratulations to the following councils for their high rankings overall.

### 2022 Overall Ranking

### Council Name

1st	Waikato Regional Council
2nd	Tasman District Council
3rd	Hutt City Council
4th	Manawatu District Council
5th	Waitomo District Council
6th	Waipa District Council
7th	Invercargill City Council
8th	Otago Regional Council
9th	West Coast Regional Council
10th	Ashburton District Council

\*Overall ranking is based on the average (weighted) ranking





## Web Accessibility

An accessible website ensures all visitors are able to use your website and consume its content regardless of age, digital skills, or disabilities. Monsido scans your site to find any possible issues that may hinder web accessibility, giving you an overview of how your website is doing, as well as recommendations on how to address these issues. With the Monsido platform, we recommend organisations get an accessibility compliance score over 70% to prove a path to compliance. These top 5 councils are well on their way.

Ranking	Council Name	Accessibility Compliance*
1st	Southland District Council	74.10%
2nd	Kawerau District Council	72.77%
3rd	Northland Regional Council	72.52%
4th	Thames-Coromandel District Council	72.17%
5th	Wellington City Council	72.01%

\*Based on the number of WCAG 2.1 AA checks passed on the Monsido platform in a 500-page scan.

### Web Accessibility scoring:

The industry average in the Web Accessibility category for School Districts in 2022 was: **68.56%**

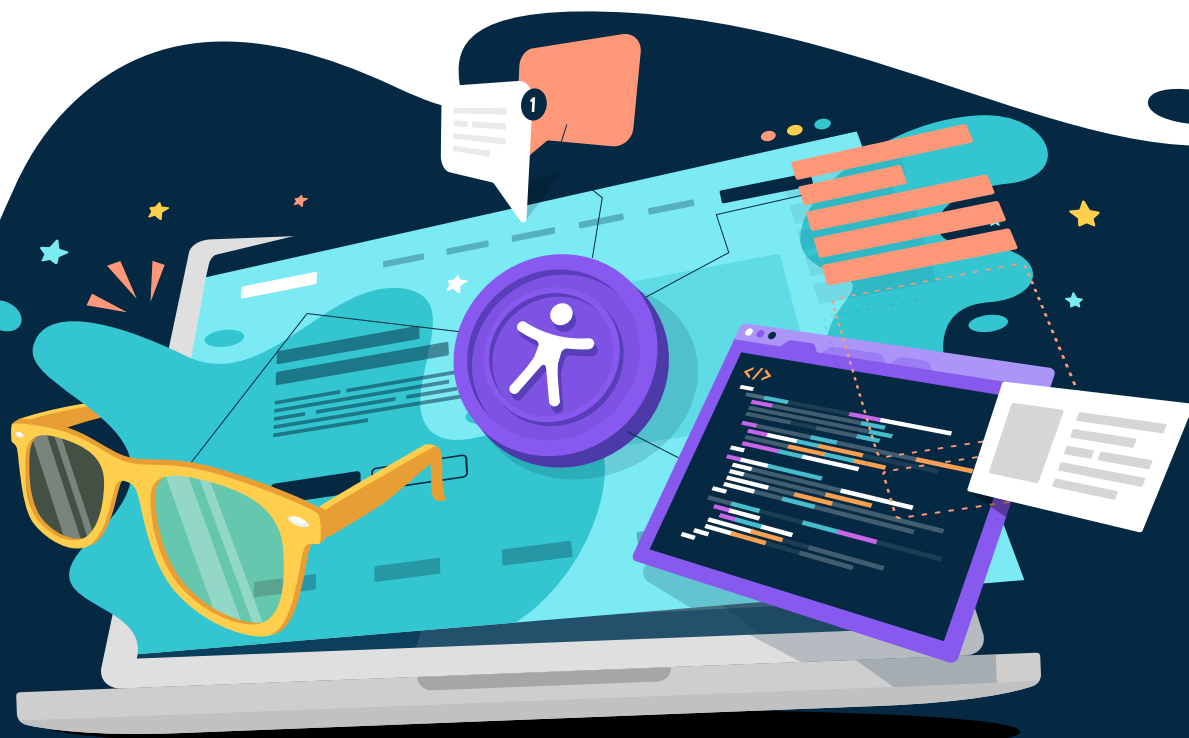
**Excellent** - scores between 80-100

**Good** - scores between 70-79

**Poor** - scores between 50-69

**Fail** - scores between 0-49

In addition, we found that on average the websites had **393 pages with failing accessibility checks**, as well as **218 pages had images that were missing alternative text**.





# Content Quality Assurance

Content Quality Assurance looks at misspellings, broken links, broken images, and readability issues. By taking on Quality Assurance, you can decrease bounce rates, increase conversions, and improve your SEO, helping you to better reach your business goals. We congratulate the following councils for leading the way in the Content Quality Assurance category.

Ranking	Council Name	Quality Assurance Compliance*
1st	Whangarei District Council	99.40%
2nd	Palmerston North City Council	99.20%
3rd	Northland Regional Council	99.00%
4th	Dunedin City Council	98.80%
5th	Upper Hutt City Council	98.40%

\*Based on the number of pages without broken links, broken images, and misspellings, and overall weighted ranking

**Content Quality Assurance scoring:**  
The industry average in the Content Quality Assurance category for School Districts in 2022 was: **73.72%**

**Excellent** - scores between 80-100  
**Good** - scores between 70-79  
**Poor** - scores between 50-69  
**Fail** - scores between 0-49

In addition, we found that on average **92 unique broken links** and **4 broken image links** were found.



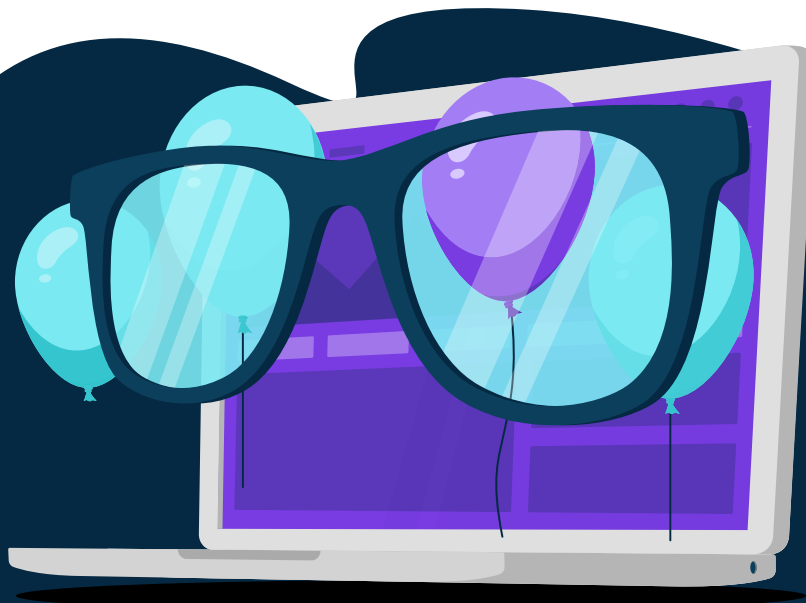
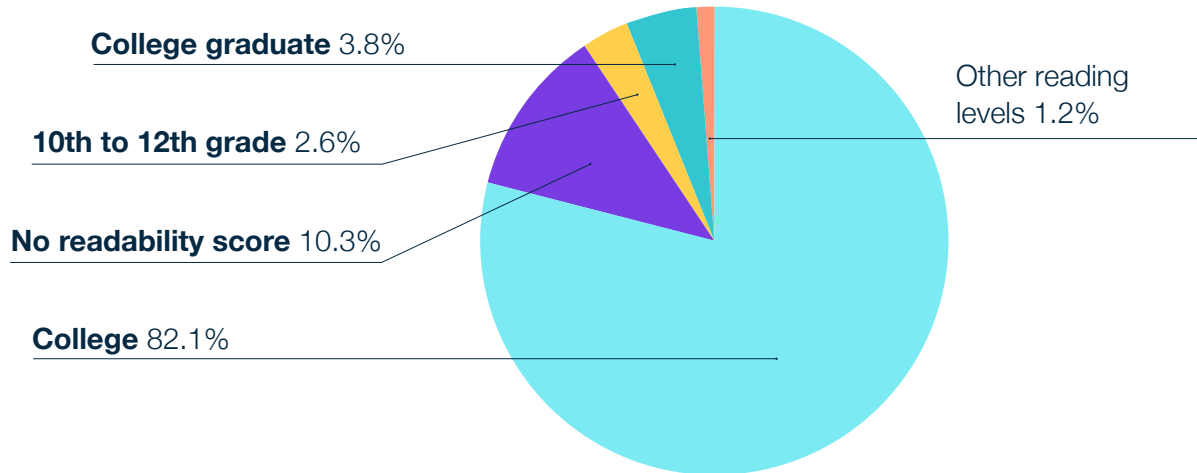


## Readability

As part of Content Quality, the report at the readability of the council websites. The majority had reading levels at a college level. In New Zealand, a 2020 report by UNICEF found that “64.4% of 15 year olds in the country have more than a basic proficiency in reading... meaning 35.4% - over a third - struggle to read and write.” In addition, it is also important to remember those website visitors that have English as a second language.

Local government websites are vital public information, and a lack of readability from the general public can be detrimental to the collaboration between councils and the local community. Ensuring simple and plain English at a lower reading level is therefore critical to truly ensure local council websites are a relevant information hub for residents.

### 2022 Readability Level of New Zealand Council Websites





## Performance

Powered by Google Lighthouse, the Performance metric looks at Google's Core Web Vital metrics, web page performance and quality, accessibility, progressive web apps, SEO, and more. Addressing performance issues can improve the response time, increase meaningful traffic, and improve the overall user experience. A big congratulations to the following New Zealand Councils for paving the way for ensuring excellence in the Performance category.

Ranking	Council Name	Performance scores*
1st	Kaipara District Council	97.00%
2nd	Waitomo District Council	94.00%
3rd	Kawerau District Council	93.00%
4th	Wellington City Council	90.00%
5th	Otorohanga District Council	90.00%

\*Based on Google Lighthouse Performance scores that test for Performance, Accessibility, Best Practices, SEO and Progressive Web Apps

### Performance scoring:

The industry average in the performance category for School Districts in 2022 was: **63.31%**

**Excellent** - scores between 80-100

**Good** - scores between 70-79

**Poor** - scores between 50-69

**Fail** - scores between 0-49

In addition, we found that council websites on average **only scored 28.96 on mobile performance from a 3G connection.**

We also found that on average it took **2.97ms for the new Core Web Vitals metric** - Largest Contentful Paint to load which represents how quickly the main content of a web page is loaded.





## Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

On-page SEO is still a major factor in search engine ranking. Having common errors like missing H1 tags, broken links, and too many internal links on a page can harm your rankings and visitor experience. We applaud the following councils for leading the pack in the SEO category.

Ranking	Council Name	SEO Compliance*
1st	Porirua City Council	92.83%
2nd	Far North District Council	91.70%
3rd	Wellington City Council	91.34%
4th	Upper Hutt City Council	91.23%
5th	Waikato District Council	91.15%

\*Based on the number of pages that are compliant with all Monsido SEO checks.

### SEO scoring:

The industry average in the SEO category for School Districts in 2022 was: **81.25%**

**Excellent** - scores between 80-100

**Good** - scores between 70-79

**Poor** - scores between 50-69

**Fail** - scores between 0-49

In addition, we found that on average **14.55 pages were missing H1 titles**, and **39.82 pages had duplicate titles** found on more than one page.





## Response Time

Good site performance is critical not only for user experience but also for SEO as it is a Google ranking metric. Monsido's Heartbeat module allows you to monitor your site's performance to ensure a smooth user experience for your visitors and avoid any potential loss in business. A big shout out to the Council for the fastest response time.

Overall Ranking	Council Name	Response Time*
1st	Waikato Regional Council	60ms

\* The average response time is based on the average response time (ms) over a one-week period in Monsido's Heartbeat module.

### Response Time scoring:

The industry average in the Response Time category for School Districts was: **1,925.04 ms**

**Excellent** - 0-200ms

**Good** - 199-350ms

**Needs Improvement** - 349-600ms

**Fail** - 600ms and above



## Uptime

As part of the scans, we also looked at the Uptime of the New Zealand Councils' websites.

The industry average uptime for New Zealand Councils is a near-perfect **99.95%**. So a big congratulations to all Councils for ensuring excellent uptime.

On average, the council websites had 2.31 incidents during the scanning period that affected uptime.

### Uptime scoring:

**Pass** - websites with 99 - 100% uptime

**Fail** - websites below 99% uptime



## 2021 vs. 2022 Results

For a year-on-year comparison, here are the average 2021 results of council websites in each category compared to the average 2022 results.

Category	2021 Results	2022 Results
Web accessibility	93.80%	68.56%
Content quality assurance	63.56%	73.72%
Performance	61.44%	63.31%
SEO	77.05%	81.25%
Response Time	2,110.68 ms	1,925.04 ms
Uptime	99.77%	99.95%



# Analysis of Council Websites

The 2022 results combined with the year-on-year comparison showcases a number of interesting changes in overall website health and quality for New Zealand councils.

## What's improved

New Zealand council websites improved on content quality assurance, SEO and response time. Improvements in content quality assurance and SEO often indicate a renewed effort into better website content practices that ensure more relevance, and an overall better website user experience.

For both content quality assurance and SEO, council websites ranked on average in the “Good” category. On a positive note, there were few broken image links. However on average, there were nearly 92 unique broken links found on a website — indicating a need for more clean up. Another area of improvement needed is within content readability to ensure ease-of-understanding amongst residents. With regards to SEO, there were less than 15 pages on average with missing H1 titles — a good sign that content contributors understand the value. However, duplicate titles are more challenging and most likely a result of multiple content contributors being unaware that others are using the same title.

In addition, improved response times also indicate investments into improving the user experience — however response times are still in the failing category. To reach the “Good” or “Excellent” category, council websites would still need to significantly improve. This could be of value to those website visitors accessing council websites on slower internet connections, for example from more rural areas.

## What's remained steady

Website performance and uptime remained relatively unchanged. The uptime of websites are normally steady, unless there is a drastic change in IT infrastructure. There was a miniscule decrease in the uptime, and few incidents. Whilst the average number of incidents was 2.31, the median was much lower at 0.5 for each website — indicating that it was few websites with more incidents that increased the overall average number of incidents impacting uptime.

More surprising is the continued and even slight increase in website performance metrics, as Google introduced the new Core Web Vitals metrics since the last report that looked at quantifying new elements of the website user experience. Websites scored in the “Average” category for desktop performance, but in the “Poor” category for the mobile experience. In addition, it took nearly 3 seconds for the main content to load — increasing the bounce rate risk.



## What needs attention

Web accessibility is the area that has taken a downward turn. Web accessibility is often overlooked as a “set it and forget it” type of initiative, but in reality needs ongoing work to ensure compliance and inclusivity as new content is added. We noted a particularly high correlation between the number of websites with a high number of WCAG 2.1 AA errors and the websites with missing Alt Text on images — so it is possible that simple changes on sitewide assets such as images can have a large impact on improving the accessibility score. With nearly 400 pages on average being affected by WCAG 2.1 AA issues and errors, this is an area that needs to be re-addressed by New Zealand council websites — especially as the new version of WCAG 2.2 is looming.



# Key Takeaways

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This year's benchmark report is a representation of the ever-changing nature of council websites, as a living-and-breathing document that represents the values and priorities of the society they represent. Key takeaways from New Zealand councils looking to improve their website going forward include:

**Re-prioritise website accessibility:** The web accessibility score of council websites fell drastically in 2022. It is vital that New Zealand councils re-prioritise this to ensure a more inclusive and accessible digital environment for all their residents. This is not only for persons with disabilities that use assistive technology, such as screen readers or electronic Braille displays, to access a website — but it is equally beneficial for other groups such as the elderly that rely on zoom functions and digital magnification tools, users with cognitive or neurodivergent individuals, and more.

**Focus on sitewide guidelines and improvements:** There were several indications that some issues stem from a lack of consistency across the websites. Implementing guidelines such as ensuring Alt Text on all images, maximum image file sizes, or style recommendations for a simplified English writing style could significantly improve the overall performance of websites. Implementing content policies on your website that automatically flag to administrators when content guidelines are violated can also help with more ongoing maintenance as new content is added.

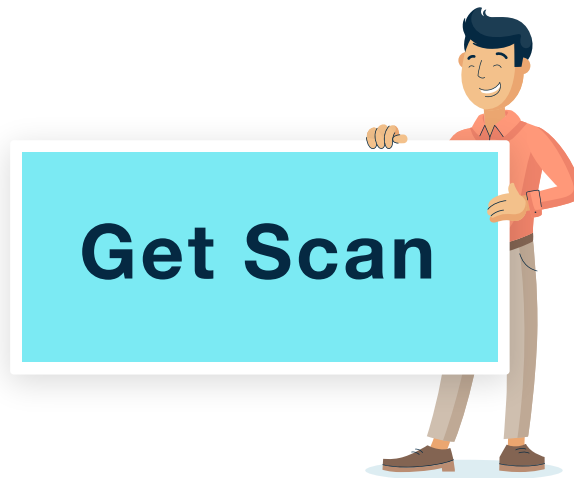
**Maintain good content hygiene:** Councils did an excellent job of maintaining high content quality that lived up to a good user experience, as well as SEO standards. We applaud and encourage continued efforts as the availability of quality content can ease the need for in-person communications during business hours, and thereby ensure convenience in engaging with your local council from the comfort of your own home 24/7.

Websites are the go-to source for official information, and with limited resources and time — councils are often forced to prioritise their website efforts. We hope this report provides some insight into some suggested efforts for New Zealand council websites in the upcoming year. Whether you are outperforming or trailing behind the industry averages, it's important to recognise that your website is an important asset to your community — and that it is never too late to begin working on new, long-term initiatives to ensure equal opportunity to access information on your website. Ultimately, it's about tackling those areas that will have maximum impact for your website users and ensuring they have a positive interaction with your council in serving their needs.

# How does your website compare?

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If your website was not featured in this report, please feel free to reach out to us and we'd be happy to facilitate a **complimentary scan of your website**.



## About ALGIM

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ALGIM (Association of Local Government Information Management) provides professional development and thought leadership across a range of local government professions. Our roots are in ICT, but over the years we've expanded to encompass the traditional IT roles, IT infrastructure, web and digital, information and records management, customer service, and GIS. Whether it's high-calibre conferences, training academies, scholarships, awards or networking, we provide dozens of options for further training, education and professional development. For more information visit [www.algim.org.nz](http://www.algim.org.nz)

## About Monsido - powered by CivicPlus

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Monsido is a leading web governance solution designed to enable organisations to deliver a superior and inclusive user experience across their digital presence and support their journey to ensure communications are open, optimised, and compliant. The Monsido Platform includes a cohesive suite of tools for web accessibility, website quality assurance, brand and content compliance, user consent management, social and web content archiving, and more. Monsido is powered by integrated technology leader CivicPlus®. For more information, visit [monsido.com](http://monsido.com)

