3 February 2014

Ms Maile Carnegie
Managing Director
Google Australia & New Zealand
5/48 Pirrama Rd, Pyrmont NSW 2009

Dear Ms Carnegie,

Last year the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), in partnership with a number of Australian disability organisations, initiated an online petition to eliminate inaccessible CAPTCHA, including Google's inaccessible reCAPTCHA, from the web.
(see: http://www.change.org/en-AU/petitions/it-s-time-to-finally-kill-captcha-2)

Telstra has already made a commitment in its latest Disability Action Plan to rid all their sites of CAPTCHA. We would like to ask Google in its capacity as industry leaders to also commit to making reCAPTCHA fully accessible to all web users as soon as possible.

Google's mission includes making the world's information 'universally accessible'. As a leading online innovator, Google is well positioned to set a benchmark for accessibility and lead the way in which accessible online platforms and content are developed. Eliminating inaccessible reCAPTCHA will progress Google's commitment to this mission significantly.

The reCAPTCHA website states that 'reCAPTCHA is accessible to blind users.' Our own experience and that of many other web users who are blind, vision impaired or Deafblind and rely on screen reading software to read online information would challenge that statement. ReCAPTCHA does provide audio alternatives to the standard visual challenge however, in general, these audio alternatives are so distorted that it is impossible to decipher the spoken numbers imbedded under the static.

As you are aware, access to the web is increasingly essential to fully participate in all aspects of economic, social and cultural life in the 21st Century. With over 200,000 websites using reCAPTCHA, millions of people across the world are excluded from full participation and productivity. Our change.org petition is a testament to the need to resolve this issue, with over 3500 signatures from around the globe including Australia, the US, the UK, Germany, Cambodia, Canada, South Africa, Ireland, and Slovakia, to name a few. While ACCAN acknowledges the benefits of reCAPTCHA in helping digitise books, the use of it as a security protocol defeats the primary purpose of online content – making that content available to wide audiences.

Please help bridge the digital divide and move toward achieving Google's mission of full accessibility with the elimination of inaccessible reCAPTCHA as soon as possible.

If you would like to discuss this further please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Teresa Corbin   Wayne Hawkins
ACCAN CEO   ACCAN Disability Policy Advisor