

7 WAYS BRANDS CAN BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TODAY

An Ipsos Point of View

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GAME CHANGERS



KEY FINDINGS:

- With at least one in four adults directly affected, consumers with disabilities are the largest, most diverse, and most forgotten “minority” group in the U.S.
- Consumers with disabilities are a part of every community regardless of race, gender, region, class, or age. They’re interacting with brands whether their disabilities are visible or not, which directly impacts the way they experience products and services.
- Opening the door to consumers with a range of disabilities can be a fertile source of brand innovation that benefits everyone.



How can brands develop more accessible products, experiences, and services for the one in four U.S. adults with some form of disability? We identified the top tips in a recent Ipsos executive roundtable.

1. Challenge your brand to see the world through a different lens by asking, “Who am I not engaging with today?”

Lee Stuckey, Founder and President of AHERO, tells a story about a mentor who was listening to managers at his non-profit review the populations they had reached that year. He congratulated them, but then asked, “Where are we not helping?... Where are we not covering? That’s where I want to be now.” Similar to the non-profit leader, brand leaders can ask who their brand is not serving today, and reward teams for learning how to meet their needs.

2. Innovate from the margins to design for the masses.

Invite people with disabilities to the table. Too often, those with disabilities are treated as an afterthought or not at all. Host collaborative conversations with those with disabilities by ensuring they receive an invitation to your research, and by centering on their voices and experiences. Accessibility researcher Wendy Grauer explains how co-creating with consumers with disabilities benefits the entire marketplace: “When we invite consumers with disabilities to the table, we’re not only breaking down barriers and interrupting bias... We’re ideating and we’re innovating for populations who are creating their own workarounds to maneuver the marketplace... We can learn so much from them, that can increase the effectiveness and efficiency for the masses as well... I have a passion for including plus-sized and people with disabilities in my research, because there is so much you can glean from the workarounds they must perform with products and services.” The ingenuity and resourcefulness of those on the margin can spark creativity and innovation.

3. Approach new consumer groups with a mindset of cultural understanding.

Sign language interpreter Todd Tourville asserts, “Deafness is a culture... Don’t bring to the table your expectations of what that culture is going to bring to you, because that culture is going to bring to you something incredibly fascinating, wonderful, diverse, illuminating... I think I got invited in so deeply into their culture because I just kept saying, OK, I trust you. What’s next? Teach me. Help me.” In qualitative research, we say you need to unlearn in order to learn, to leave your preconceived notions at the door, to be open to being wrong and learning something new. In many cases, when brand leaders and researchers work in accessibility, they are exploring cultures that are not their own—so this mindset is particularly important.

4. Consider the impact of nonvisible disabilities.

As humans, we may find it easier to understand and empathize with physical disabilities we can see. People with nonvisible disabilities like epilepsy, arthritis, ADHD or autism look no different on the outside than their peers. Yet, on the inside, many have encountered a lifetime of struggle attempting to hide their disability and escape stigma and judgment. Researcher Noah Rosenblatt-Farrell considers this as he plans his approach: “Whether there are visible disabilities that I’m aware of, there could always be invisible disabilities that I’m not aware of, and that I won’t find out until we get into the conversation, into research. So, I kind of assume that everybody has something and that it’s good to kind of listen for what they’re revealing to me and so that I can understand what it is exactly, and then learn from them.”

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5. Illuminate intersectional experiences.

Healthcare researcher DBora Schrett tells us, “When it’s a person of color, or a person of the LGBTQ community, where they already have a sense of isolation and [are] not being seen or not being heard, and then it’s added on and compounded by a disability that is not visible.” Schrett also calls out age as a particularly important factor: “We have also the technologies and innovations that are allowing people to live longer with a disability or an illness.” Brand leaders should be intentional about understanding how intersections with disability impact consumer experience with their brand or service.

6. Listen with an open mind and heart.

Create a safe space for people with disabilities to be vulnerable and authentic, building trust by carefully designing a group or one-on-one conversation to ensure respondent comfort. The researchers in our discussion emphasized humility, listening deeply and without preconceived notions, and checking for understanding. Don’t assume you know how someone’s disability manifests in their life and affects them.

7. Act! Video calling, adaptive clothing, kitchen gadgets—these are just a few examples of products designed with disabilities in mind, massively embraced by the general population. Whether you’re designing experiences for a target audience or for the masses, the lives and workarounds of consumers with disabilities can be a source of inspiration and innovation.

Consumers with disabilities are a diverse group growing in size and significance. Recognizing that anyone may have a disability, whether or not it’s visible, is a great way to change one’s mindset. Brands can start by asking who they’re not serving today, then listen, learn, and act to create a better world for everyone.



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