Embrace the 'inclusion revolution'

By Nicky Brand   14 Jan 2021

There are an estimated 1 billion people, or 15 % of the world's population, living with disabilities. Given that 70% of consumers prefer to buy from brands that are inclusive, marketers are embracing the "inclusion revolution" by means of ad campaigns, social content and CSI initiatives. While this helps normalise disability, very few organisations are engaged in evolving their products or business strategy with inclusivity in mind.

To give you an idea of what this means, here are some examples of brands that can be seen to be successfully designing for inclusivity:

- The Eone Bradley timepiece; tell time by touch or sight.
- The Under Armour MagZip designed for foolproof zipping, even with one hand.
- Tommy Hilfiger's adaptive clothing ranges includes clothes with one-handed zips, extended openings, adjustable waists and magnetic closures – all of which maintain the style of the brand.

In a world that is becoming more digitised by the day, organisations should have more data and more insights into their customer needs than ever. This should suggest that those with impairments should be more enabled than before, particularly when it comes to communication.

Yet the majority of websites are not currently designed for those with impairments and only 4% of organisations in the US are thinking about inclusive design in any regard. This valuable market segment has been left behind despite many of today's technologies been born out of innovations developed to support those with disabilities.

Examples of innovations that informed today's technology include:

- Touchscreens, sold to Apple, were originally designed for people with mobility issues and are now used on mobile devices everywhere.
- The electric toothbrush was designed to help those with limited motor skills to maintain dental health and are now used by millions for better cleaning.
- Closed captions were originally used for people with a hearing impairment and are now used for myriad of activities, from learning a new language to watching content with the sound off.

Evidence that designing for the few, will not only ensure accessibility to those living with impairments, but also enhance the experience for the remaining population – delivering a truly inclusive experience.

As more products and organisations move online, full access to the internet should be seen as a right and not a privilege. Embracing the opportunity to serve those with impairments better should not be seen as just the right thing to do, but also fundamental to driving business growth. Smart organisations that leverage modern data and technology to deliver against this will surely see even greater returns on their investments.

> *Imagine the captive opportunity represented by a community of people who have spent their lives without companies or brands acknowledging their existence, much less creating products or advertising designed by or for them. Imagine that community's potential for passionate loyalty to brands that get this right.~ Joe Crump, president, Wunderman Thompson New York*

Before we delve into how inclusive design can benefit a brand, let's consider what it means in practice. It is not simply about 'accessibility', which often means trying to customise a product or experience designed for the able-bodied for the disabled community. Instead, it is about building things from the ground up to be truly usable by the largest number of people.

Inclusive design benefits all

Inclusive designs may lend concrete benefits to anyone who uses them. For example, a voice-powered assistant on a smart device can help someone with limited mobility or poor eyesight to get the latest news headlines from the web or switch their home lighting on and off. This functionality is also useful to someone without a disability.

Embracing inclusive design means that organisations need to look beyond the usual biases of their marketing, product and engineering teams. They should ideally tap into diverse perspectives - people from different demographic groups, income levels, differently-abled people - to understand how a wide range of consumers will use the product or service.

This will help the organisation to build solutions that focus on what's universally important to most humans. A solution for someone who can't hear or see might improve the lives of those who can. Self-driving cars, for instance, could enhance the mobility of blind people in the not-too-distant future and make travel safer for everyone else, too.

> *Exclusion and inclusion are a series of choices designers make every day. Period. ~ Kat Holmes, author,*

Embracing inclusive design might be challenging for organisations with legacy products and services. A good place to start is by understanding the target audience and their needs, followed by an accessibility audit to see whether existing products and touchpoints are easy for all customers to use. An analysis of the consumer journey will reveal areas to be optimised that improve the experience for all customers.

Getting the right perspectives

The next step might be the development of an inclusive experience framework. This will help anyone in the business designing products or experiences to create optimised journeys for everyone who interacts with your brand.

It is important to include the perspectives of disabled people when building your teams or conducting user research. You should include your target audience within the design process via methods like design thinking. A powerful technique is to host inclusive design workshops, where people living with disabilities explain how everyone can help execute on the strategy.

> " *The key to inclusive design is working closely with excluded communities to create better solutions. Recognise who's most excluded from using a solution and then bring them into the heart of the design process. People who navigate mismatched interactions every day of their lives will bring ingenuity and deep expertise in how to solve those design challenges. ~ Kat Holmes, author, Mismatched* "

It's personal

A deeper understanding of customer needs and a better customer experience for all will make for a more satisfied customer base. Also consider how sophisticated data and marketing technology can be used not only to improve the customer experience, but also tailor it to the specific needs of an individual customer.

Inclusivity is not just ethical and moral; it also drives business success. Not only are there opportunities to tap into underserved markets, but also to build better relationships with other customers. Friends and families of disabled people will think more of brands that show that they care, too.

Brands that make the right moves in terms of inclusivity will drive customer trust, engagement and loyalty. Many customers are looking to businesses to show leadership when it comes to social justice and inclusivity today and will richly reward those that do.

ABOUT NICKY BRAND

Nicky Brand is a senior business consultant at Acceleration.
▪ Embrace the 'inclusion revolution' - 14 Jan 2021
▪ Preparing your brand for the female consumer of 2030 - 4 Sep 2020

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com