

Businesses Ignore Disabled People at your Peril

Disabled People are under-represented in employment; I doubt there is a research project that has ever been produced which does not demonstrate this. Here we have put together some economic advantages an employer might want to consider when they are thinking about employing a disabled person or retaining them in their current position. Please feel free to read each section or just the ones which you feel may be of interest since they are independent sections.

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Advertising the Position

Many disabled people are over-looked when the skills required for the position are advertised. For example some neurodiverse people excel in jobs which require a very high level of accuracy and/or require a lot of tenacity. Repetitive jobs tend to have very high turnover of employees because they often require skills that few people have and involve tasks that many people dislike doing for too long. A job advertised which emphasises good communication skills or/and an outgoing personality that are not essential for the post could result in the most ideal candidate being excluded at the earliest point.

You must also ensure that your application materials can be made available in a range of different formats, are advertised widely so that disabled people can find and access them easily. Ask for our free factsheet on advertising job vacancies to disabled people for more information.

Work Trials

Work trials allow the employer and employee to see if they are mutually suited and that the employee can do the job to the desired standard. The employer can then afford to take more chances rather than go for the applicant who ticks all the boxes at the various stages of the application and interview. Unnecessary reliance on written, formal applications may, for instance, deter people with visual impairments and people who have not completed formal education. A failure to adapt interview procedures or locations might also inhibit the ability of disabled applicants to perform at their best.

Surely one of the most important ways to assess anyone is see how they do the job for a few weeks? This could open doors for a more inclusive society as well as bringing greater economic prosperity. The better the candidates that are found and employed, the higher level of work can be produced and reproduced on a consistent level.

Website Accessibility

A website that can be used by as many people as possible, is easy to navigate and doesn't keep crashing has numerous economic advantages.

When jobs are advertised the ideal is to target the greatest number of ideal candidates for the position.

To get an idea of how many people may face barriers accessing the content and information on websites; take a look at these statistics on disabled users:

- Making a business's goods and services accessible to disabled people increases income and encourages repeat business – a US survey found that for every \$1 spent there was an overall return of \$30
- One fifth of the Working Age population are disabled people (source: Labour Force Survey)
- 2 million people have a visual impairment - 4% of the population (source: RNIB)
- 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women experience some form of colour blindness - 9% of the population (source: Institute of Electrical Engineers)

- 12 million people are aged 60 or over - 21% of the population (source: UK Government)
- 9 million people have impaired hearing - 15% of the population (source: RNID)

I guess you can appreciate why making your website accessible to everyone is so important. Failure to make it accessible is not good business practice. In competitive industries everyone is looking for that edge. By making your website accessible to disabled and older people, you will more than likely benefit through increased business.

Recommendations to help website accessibility also mean that websites are compatible with the latest technology and allow for greater usage. Also the code tends to be quicker and therefore less crashes or slowing down of websites. And of course less bandwidth is required to keep the website in operation.

Not forgetting that more accessible websites will allow the organisation to move up the search engine listings and become even more popular when consumers are looking to use your product. And positive PR will be generated from people who can use your website rather than possibly your competitors.

Finally these websites tend to be easier to update and therefore allow less work from employees which could mean greater productivity. The Equality Act states a website must be accessible to disabled people. If your site is not accessible you could be sued. Please see our factsheet on website accessibility for more information.

Diverse Workforce

A diverse workforce offers numerous possible advantages. A representative workforce can help an organisation understand its consumers better. New attitudes and ideas are brought to the table so out dated ideas and opinions can be reassessed. Also the workforce can see the organisation is making efforts thinking about its work force. This can only be a positive in employer and employee relationships.

Furthermore, a disabled employee may use his or her challenges in completing a work task to think of a better way for all employees to construct the merchandise. Similarly, having a different set of experiences may allow a disabled person to identify better ways to meet the needs and desires of customers, regardless of whether or not the customers are disabled people. The employment of a disabled

person, compared to a non-disabled person could lead to increased innovation and financial gain for employers.

People with similar life experiences, who share similar backgrounds and think in a similar fashion cannot be good business practice, it is restricting and stifling. Business ideas and concepts need to be challenged and innovative to be continually successful.

Marketing Your Organisation to the Wider Community

Making your organisation more attractive to customers and clients can only enhance reputation within your local community. Being recognised both as a good employer and as a good business can only be a positive. People will see your positive attitude towards disabled people and this, in turn, can help them feel more positive towards the organisation. You should also consider how your reputation will grow through large numbers of friends and family of disabled people who hear positive feedback. This will help you to gain credibility within the wider community.

These factors can also help in attracting the best staff, and help attract potential investors and other scarce resources in a competitive environment.

Retention

Most disabled people become so during their working lives. By retaining someone who becomes disabled rather than letting them go, you will keep their skills and experience and so avoid the cost and inconvenience of replacing them.

Disabled people have as wide a range of talents as the rest of society. Some develop new skills in response to life as a disabled person and dealing with barriers. These can include organisational and management skills from, for example, juggling support requirements.

- Retaining an employee who becomes disabled commonly costs less than recruiting and training a replacement – the Post Office estimated that medically retiring a worker costs around £80,000.

Benefits that affect the workplace environment and co-workers may take place if a disabled person becomes employed or if a disabled worker is retained in a job. For example, staff morale may improve. By observing that currently disabled workers are retained, co-workers may be more confident that they could retain their job if they develop health conditions. Subsequently the ties to that company may be strengthened and loyalty rewarded.

A survey of employers contacting the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) in the United States found that 87 per cent of employers who had made an adjustment said that it had enabled them to retain a valued employee, and 55 per cent said it had saved them the cost of training a new employee (JAN, 2005).

Legal Requirements

Organisations must ensure that selection decisions and policies are based on objective criteria, and not on unlawful discrimination, prejudice or unfair assumptions.

As well as all the other reasons for good practice there is now legislation which outlaws discrimination. The actual expense of being taken to an employment tribunal is not the only cost consideration. You also need to consider the cost to your organisation of adverse publicity and low staff morale.

- A positive and proactive approach helps develop a good image and reduces the risk of potentially costly litigation and adverse publicity – in 2008 the average payment for a claim under the former Disability Discrimination Act at an Employment Tribunal was £13,000.

Myths

Many employers believe that disabled people will take more time off work than their non disabled work colleagues. Research in Dupont compared disabled employees' performance with their colleagues against the criteria of attendance, performance and safety and they found it was typically more effective – 79 per cent, 91 per cent and 96 per cent respectively.

The Last Word

It is believed there are about 8.5 million disabled people in Britain (source: ONS). With £40-50 billion being the combined estimated spending power of disabled people (source: Employers Forum on Disability).

Contrary to the myths and the negative stereotypical attitudes many employers hold about disabled people, disabled people's integration into mainstream employment is feasible, in all kinds of jobs and at all levels. In a fully accessible workplace disabled employees will be able to offer the same range of skills, abilities and personal qualities as their non-disabled peers.

The number and size of adjustments that are required is often very limited. For example, a survey by the former Department for Education and Employment found

that only one in ten disabled people needed any adaptations to get into a building or to use facilities at work. Those who did generally required only minor modifications to equipment or premises.

Links For Further Information

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/detail?type=RESOURCES&itemId=1074428156>

<http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2002/03/26/11844/employing-the-disabled-the-business-case-a-10-minute.html>

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browsable/DH_4904778

http://www.eukn.org/binaries/greatbritain/bulk/research/2007/6/economic_social_costs_employing_disabled.pdf

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/letters/article3161604.ece>

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/

<http://www.design-ecommerce.com/Web-Accessibility-Benefits.html>

<http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-accessibility/benefits-of-accessible-websites-2.shtml>

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