

Like eating soup with a fork?

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Inclusive design is a logical evolution to the design process: not 'one product fits all', or the removal of specialist products, rather that products

and services should be available to as many people as possible, without the need for specialist adaptation. The cordless kettle is a classic example. In addressing the needs of those with limited manual dexterity, the cordless kettle was developed and turned out to be easier for the majority and thereby became the standard, not the exception.

Worryingly, many consumer products show a continuing lack of real user awareness. Technology products, in particular, increasingly limit usability by offering features which are rarely understood or needed. These products are typically created by young, healthy, technically-literate designers, often to meet



the commercial challenge of another brand. As a result, technology spirals out of control, and users are left behind. The Philips Index Study of 2004 revealed that only 13% of the public believed that general technology products were 'easy to use'. And when Microsoft asked Word users to list 10 'most wanted' new features, results revealed that nine of them were already there – users had simply not found them. Even technically simple products now seem out of control.

To update an old joke, how many trips to the shop does it take to change a light bulb – given the variety of styles, fittings, sizes and so on that are now available?

There is now a commercial opportunity to get products right for the majority – and the majority has some degree of impaired ability, increasing as the years go by. The ageing population is another important factor in this debate. Impairment can also be transient – we all operate less effectively when we're tired, in a noisy place, or have left our reading glasses at home. The best-designed products are easy to use whatever the state of the user or the environment

Sagentia is a lead member of the Centre for Inclusive Technology and Design (CITD), a body comprising organisations with

world-leading expertise in inclusive design and disability. CITD is currently developing a best practice 'toolkit' to help businesses really identify, quantify and understand target markets.

As part of this, Sagentia is working with clients using tools such as the exclusion audit, developed by Professor John Clarkson of the University of Cambridge. This maps products or technologies against data on the population's capability to reveal who is excluded and why.

Design teams can bring elements of the inclusive design approach into their current processes quite quickly. For example, a priority is to get a more diverse user group involved at an earlier stage. A spread of capabilities – lifestyle, gender, age and experience – is important,

as are older users. They offer a wealth of experience, knowledge and brand awareness that is rarely appreciated.

A usability breakdown is another useful exercise and one which Sagentia has used with clients on products ranging from digital cameras to juice cartons. Breaking down a product by different user viewpoints is a simple approach which never fails to deliver valuable insights.

Inclusive design can deliver a real competitive advantage. Consumers, tired of products they don't like, want brands which have taken the time to really understand their needs. Companies must now change their established mindset and adopt an inclusive approach, before their competitors do so first.

Ian Hosking is a Managing Consultant and has over 15 years' experience of human factors work. He is currently specialising in inclusive design which looks at the impact of the variation in human capability on human performance (cognitive, physical, and sensory) in order to make products usable by a wider range of the population.

He is a lead player in the formation of the Centre for Inclusive Technology and Design which is looking to promote inclusive design within the UK.

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