



Accessibility Helps Everyone

Features of accessible design encountered in everyday life benefit everyone, not just those with disabilities.

Audible and Visual Announcements

Isn't it helpful to hear and see announcements for stops when riding a bus or subway line? Those audible and visual announcements are required so that people who are blind or have low vision or are d/Deaf* or hard of hearing can know when their stops are approaching.

* Many people in the Deaf community prefer use of a lowercase "d" to refer to audiological status and the use of a capital "D" when referring to the culture and community of Deaf people. We use d/Deaf here to be inclusive of all d/Deaf people.

Audiobooks

In 1932, the American Federation for the Blind created audiobooks on vinyl for the blind. (This would not have been possible if American Inventor Thomas Edison, who had a disability, hadn't developed the phonograph in 1877.) The records came in sets containing complete texts of popular works such as Shakespeare's plays or the U.S. Constitution. In 1932, Congress passed legislation that allowed the Library of Congress to produce audiobooks, thereby increasing the number of available titles.

Now, audiobooks are popular among all people — not just those with disabilities — as a way to enjoy their favorite authors. The Audio Publishers Association estimates that half of Americans have listened to at least one audiobook.

Clear Walkways

No one likes to hit their head on wall sconces or walk into handrails, signs on posts, or wall-mounted drinking fountains. That's why the ADA requires minimum headroom clearance and minimum horizontal protrusions.

Closed Captioning

Many technological developments have served to bring speaking and signing d/Deaf and hard of hearing people together in common cause. For example, an array of professional, social, and political action organizations of d/Deaf people worked together



to ensure passage of the Television Decoder Circuitry Act in 1993, which required all new television sets made in the U.S.A with a screen of 13 inches or larger to incorporate.

An image of a New York Times headline: Captions for Deaf to be shown on TV.
February 28th, 1974.

Cooking

The global kitchen brand OXO was inspired by the experience of founder Sam Farber when he watched his wife Betsey, who has arthritis, try to peel vegetables. He decided to make easier-to-use kitchen tools for all people, but especially for chronic pain sufferers like Betsey.

Two decades later, OXO's Good Grips line is used around the world by people with and without physical disabilities. "It's hard to think of a vegetable peeler as radical," Farber said in 2000. "But I guess it was."

Detectable Warning Surfaces

Have you ever wondered what those surface patterns of small domes that cross curb ramps are for? They are detectable warning surfaces, designed to alert pedestrians who are blind or have low vision to the presence of a hazard, such as a road. They are also required on open boarding platforms in rail stations to discourage people from standing too close to the edge of the platform.

Electric Toothbrushes

In 1954, the first powered toothbrush, the Broxodent®, was made in Switzerland by Dr. Philippe-Guy Woog. His toothbrushes were designed to aid dental patients with limited motor skills.

Elevators

Moving between floors can be challenging when carrying luggage at the airport. Thanks to accessible design, we all have access to elevators! And while elevators are more convenient than escalators for moving your luggage, they're required to provide vertical access for people with disabilities.



Ramps and Curb Ramps

Ramps and curb ramps help everyone using wheeled devices— not just wheelchairs but strollers and wheeled briefcases. They are required in the ADA Accessibility Standards for wheelchair access.

Texting

James Marsters, an orthodontist who lost his hearing during infancy, invented a device that relayed typewritten conversations through a telephone. Marsters' TTY (teletypewriter) system enabled tens of thousands of d/Deaf people to regularly communicate with hearing people by phone. In the 1990s, that technology was overtaken by text messaging (Short Message Service, or SMS), invented to help people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing and used by mobile phone users everywhere.

In 2001, a three-year project began among several European research teams, organizations that support d/Deaf people, and Vodafone UK to ensure 3G texting would not only be inclusive for d/ Deaf and hard of hearing people but also easy to use and beneficial to their daily lives. The resulting technology is used in today's 5G iterations by billions of people around the world — whether d/Deaf, hard of hearing or hearing.

A New York Times image from 1961 of a woman seated beside a TTY/teletypewriter machine

Photo credit:

1. New York Times By, L. B. (1974, Feb 28). Captions for DEAF to be shown on TV: 12 P.B.S. outlets, including WNYC, will test system to run through June stations listed. New York Times (1923-)
2. Display Ad 55 -- No Title New York Times (1923-); New York, N.Y. 30 July 1961: 55.

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