

What disabled consumers choose to buy and why – Inclusive communication



Who is this for?

'What disabled consumers choose to buy and why' is for everyone involved in improving the experience of disabled consumers whether online, by phone or in-person. The findings will be useful for customer experience managers, customer service personnel, facilities and property managers and also for D&I and HR professionals responsible for attracting and hiring customer-service staff.

Why does inclusive communication matter?

Our research showed that being able to find the right information – in a format that is accessible – is critically important to disabled consumers.

"A lot of companies use PDFs, it is not accessible with screen readers... Allow [me to receive] that information in a Word format so I can read it. Avoid columns, rows and text boxes... You would have thought that by now a lot of these companies might have grasped this."

"I can't underline how important it is to put a description on, just having a picture does not help."

"I ended up staying with my current bank because I could not get information in easy read format from any other bank."

“For me because I use BSL it is hard to communicate with staff in fact sometimes it’s impossible [they] sometimes ask me to write on paper or gesture, a lot of it is just pointing everyday throughout my life...but some shops like Apple will bring an interpreter in but we have to know when they are available it becomes limited for me to access when I want to.”

“Bank accounts are complicated and can seem very technical. Providing easy to read explanations of features and benefits is the most effective way of me feeling confident in the service and the provider.”

Finding and accessing the right information

“[It] doesn’t matter how much information is out there, there is always at least one question that needs to be answered. You need to get in touch with a business immediately. That can be the difference between a hit or a miss.”

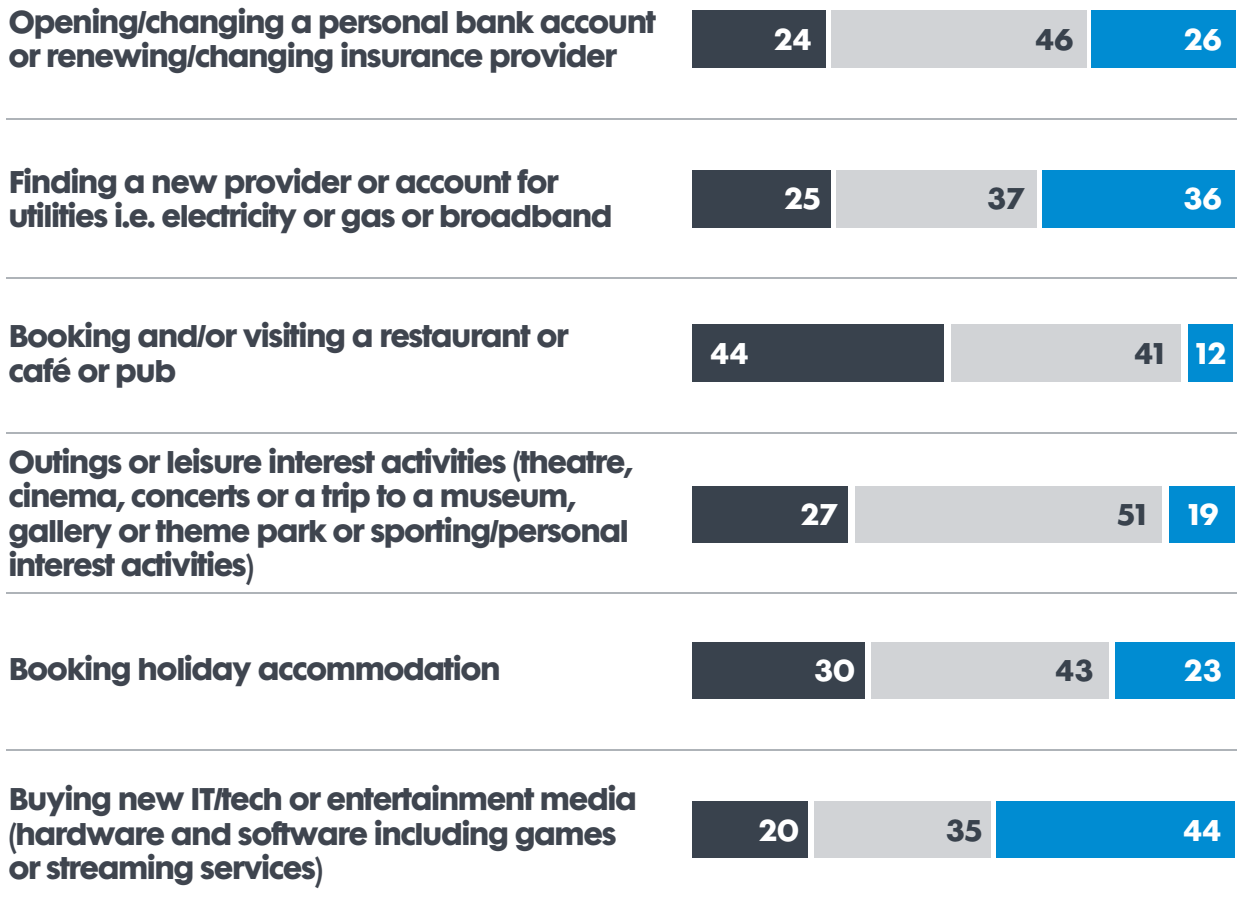
Finding information relevant to individual needs about a product or service is essential if browsing is to turn into a sale. This is particularly true for higher value items or those which can only be used if they are or can be made accessible – for example, a building or venue, or a product or service that is used with assistive technology. Getting this vital information is difficult for many.

In the online survey, at least seven in ten respondents stated that their access needs had made finding the information they needed more challenging because of their disability or access needs in the following sectors:

- New places to eat out (**75 per cent**)
- Days out for leisure (**78 per cent**)
- Holiday accommodation (**73 per cent**)
- Banking and insurance services (**70 per cent**).

Over half of the respondents said the same for the remaining sectors (retail, utilities, and technology).

Chart 7: To what extent, if at all, do you feel that finding specific information about these types of services was more challenging for you given your disability or access needs?



Key



% of respondents

Base: Open Inclusion Panel Survey (All respondents 241, base sizes for each sector vary)

Focus group discussions confirmed that the challenge relates to finding information and getting the detail needed, in the format that is inclusive for all customers.

Where do disabled consumers look for information?

Websites

Findings from our online survey highlight that websites are by far the first port of call for information across all business sectors.

When asked where they found the information needed to help make decisions about a purchase or engagement in the last two years, websites were most mentioned. This highlights the high level of dependence on public consumer websites to manage detailed queries and the importance of them being accessible, well-structured, with clear content that is easy to navigate and filter through.

This was further corroborated in a separate question about how businesses can best engage with potential customers. Ensuring the website was accessible, contained detailed information and easy navigation was one of the top mentions. Some respondents thought that outwardly communicating a commitment to accessibility and inclusive design on websites would also encourage engagement. There are many outward signs of a commitment to inclusion that a business can make. These can have an impact on the level of interest, attraction and engagement from the outset.

“An authentic welcome statement using inclusive language.”

Other sources of information

Aside from websites, the main sources of information that disabled consumers relied on were reviews from comparison sites and reviews and recommendations from customers and informal contacts such as advice from friends and family.

Key findings

We asked disabled consumers where they look for information. The most common answers (mentioned by 20 per cent or more of respondents) are below, arranged by sector:

Banking and finance

- Provider's own website (**60 per cent**)
- Friends and family or colleagues (**31 per cent**)
- Looked up information on comparison websites such as Which (**31 per cent**)
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers generally (**28 per cent**)

Utilities

- Provider's own website (**62 per cent**)
- Looked up information on comparison websites (**39 per cent**)
- Friends and family or colleagues (**26 per cent**)
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers generally (**21 per cent**)

Hospitality

- Provider's own website (**72 per cent**)
- Friends and family or colleagues (**45 per cent**)
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers generally (**33 per cent**)
- Looked up information on comparison websites such as TripAdvisor (**21 per cent**)

Days out and leisure

- Provider's own website (**81 per cent**)
- Friends and family or colleagues (**38 per cent**)
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers or visitors generally (**27 per cent**)

- Recommendations and reviews from disabled customers or visitors specifically **(26 per cent)**
- Other marketing from the venue or attraction such as social media **(25 per cent)**

Holiday accommodation

- Provider's own website **(84 per cent)**
- Information on comparison websites such as TripAdvisor **(31 per cent)**
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers generally **(27 per cent)**
- Friends and family or colleagues **(23 per cent)**
- Recommendations and reviews from disabled customers specifically **(23 per cent)**

Technology

- Provider's own website **(74 per cent)**
- Friends and family or colleagues **(39 per cent)**
- Recommendations and reviews from other customers generally **(39 per cent)**
- Recommendations and reviews from disabled customers specifically **(22 per cent)**

Detailed and relevant information

Information needs to be detailed enough to be useful. Disabled customers often need more specific and detailed information to be confident that the product, service or engagement works for their access needs.



“It was more difficult to get specific information – for example, is the card reader available in an accessible version? Is the mobile app accessible? Some of this information could only be tested after the account is opened, hence why I needed to know this in advance.”

Disabled finance consumer

Respondents felt that relevant and detailed accessibility information should be a default in all information, specifications and FAQs and this would encourage them to open communication with new businesses.

“FAQ which is in-depth. I read one the other day which told me the path was slightly raised into a hill – it made me comfortable I could get round and knew exactly what to expect.”

“Be able to demonstrate commitment to inclusive design by promoting accessible features in product marketing information – it should not be necessary to have to search product manuals for references to accessibility features.”

Over and above the specification of products and details of services relating to accessibility, issues were raised by participants in relation to the quality and fullness of information. Some noted that information was inconsistent across different areas of the website. Transparency was another important feature both in relation to the specification of products and how accessible they are, and about the costs.

“They are not open and transparent. This results in difficulty obtaining the information I need.”

“Basically, you just want to know how much I am going to spend in total.”

Communication of the purchasing process

The focus groups also raised frustrations about the processes for setting up a new account or purchasing items and managing collection or delivery of purchases. In terms of understanding their needs, the option to test and trial was seen as a benefit when offered.

Disabled consumers commented on the need to make the registration process as easy as possible. Form filling should be minimal and if possible, once set up, not repeated often. In the online survey, 50 per cent of respondents who had opened a new personal bank account or insurance policy in the last two years stated that the process of setting up the account was an important factor in their choice. 49 per cent said the same relating to a new utilities account.

“Setting up a new provider can cause me a lot of anxiety. It can be confusing and time consuming. I feel a lot of people with anxiety issues or lack of technology experience will choose to renew insurance even if it’s more expensive rather than look for a better deal.”

Some participants noted the ease of process, and that the process of shopping online had been made easier by some stores. Amazon was quoted as working very efficiently on a number of levels:

- Contact points for queries before and after sales (in the customers preferred format)
- Being able to find detailed product information needed
- Setting up the process for delivery
- Quick purchase mechanisms that avoid repeat form filling: “Just tap it and you are done.”

Finally, in terms of understanding needs, it was noted that on occasion going in to test and trial products, particularly those that to work alongside assistive technology was a great benefit. Business should consider offering consultations where relevant and appropriate.

“It was important to know if, when removing from the case, AirPods let out a noise to indicate if battery was low”. After calling customer services this respondent was booked an appointment to try them the store which was a real benefit. “When it is online, I can never truly understand what a product will feel like in person.”

Communication in the format of the customer's preference

The final aspect related to inclusive communication is the need for customers with disabilities and conditions to communicate with business in their preferred format.

Respondents felt that having various contact options and clear information about how to get in touch would encourage them to engage with businesses.

“I like the opportunity to be able to phone or email a business about a product or service so that I can ask the questions that I need to, in order to help me decide whether to buy a product or service. Sometimes, when I’m looking for certain products on apps, the descriptions can be lacking and I have to ask for sighted assistance to get the information that I need. This is because the descriptions don’t always tell you about how accessible something is.”

The online survey highlighted that there was no clear single preference for communication at the decision-making stage. Two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) stated a preference for email, but just over half selected telephone or face-to-face communication (52 per cent in each case):

- Email (66 per cent)
- Telephone (52 per cent)
- Face-to-face (52 per cent)
- Webchat (32 per cent)
- Text (17 per cent).

“By email or text. The spoken word is hard for me to understand on telephone, especially when calling from a call centre. I often ask for alternative methods like email, but they seldom happen.”

“For me as a totally blind person, email, phone or face-to-face are my preferred methods of communication. Particularly if face-to-face, I want staff to come and ask if I want help, not be left wandering around. I need to be given time to explore physical products. If online, I need pages uncluttered with adverts, products clearly separated, buttons or checkboxes alt-texted and graphics clearly labelled.”

“Various means of communication... you need all of it. Live chat, phone, email. It’s got to be accessible in as many ways as possible and quick to reply otherwise you think ‘I won’t wait for that product’ and they have lost your custom.”

Further information

For advice about how to communicate in an accessible and inclusive way, see our **Inclusive Communication Toolkit**.

About Business Disability Forum

Business Disability Forum is the leading business membership organisation in disability inclusion. We are trusted partners, working with business, Government and disabled people to improve the life experiences of disabled employees and consumers, by removing barriers to inclusion.

Find out more about the benefits of joining us at **businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/membership**.

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