

# What disabled consumers choose to buy and why – Disabled consumers' confidence in business



## 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.

## How confident are consumers that businesses will respond to their access needs?

**"Being empowered to have a conversation with the business. If a product does not meet my needs – work with me to make me confident about the purchase."**

Respondents in the online survey were given some statements about the business response to consumer engagement pre-purchase and their perceptions of accessibility and direction of change.

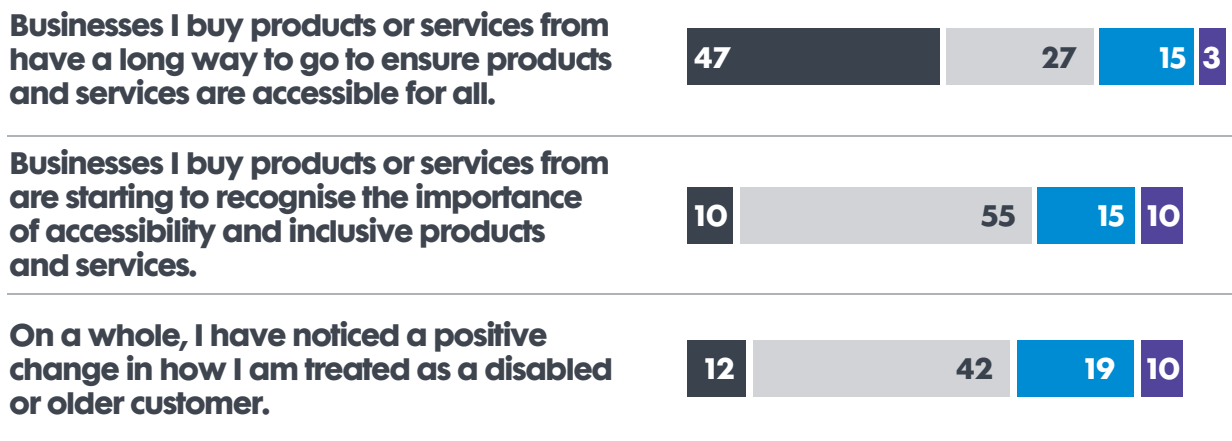
Responses highlighted a need for more progress in this area.

- **74 per cent of respondents said** that the businesses they buy from 'have a long way to go to ensure products and services and accessible for all'.
- **47 per cent agreed** strongly and another 27 per cent agreed slightly. 18 per cent disagreed.

There was however some recognition of change over time:

- **Almost two thirds (65 per cent) agreed** to some extent that 'Businesses I buy products or services from are starting to recognise the importance of accessibility and inclusive products and services.' One in ten (10 per cent) agreed strongly.
- **Just over half (54 per cent) agreed** to some extent that 'on the whole, I have noticed a positive change in how I am treated as a disabled or older customer.' Just over one in ten (12 per cent) agreed strongly.

### Chart 6: Business response to accessibility of products and service



#### Key



% of respondents

Base: Open Inclusion panel survey (All respondents 241) don't know and not applicable not included in the chart.

The focus groups discussed individual experiences of whether businesses are evolving. Like the survey findings, it was felt that there are some signs of a more disability-inclusive culture. However, it was noted that the baseline was low, and inconsistency makes the experience frustrating.

**“[In retail there are] improvements that staff are more aware that they might have to gesture and lip read. I don’t expect someone to sign but perhaps to say thank you – some basics. I noticed that recently, perhaps as a result of the pandemic.”**

**“Businesses are aware that there are disabled people who might be their customers. Why would you wilfully exclude a sixth of the world’s population?”**

**“[Commitment has] got to be all year round. [It] feels like we always have to make that case. It’s been that way for a very long time.”**

Participants felt that progress needs to happen in the following ways:

### **Businesses demonstrating that they are consumer-led**

Disabled consumers will quickly notice if a product or service design is user-led and tested. The consumer experience is frustrating where accessible features are in place but are not ‘fit for purpose’.

Examples given were accessible toilets or lifts that you cannot turn around in, or accessible bedrooms in hotels that are still only meeting basic requirements. There were many other instances where accessibility was not considered at all, such as inaccessible websites, experiences at checkouts in shops and a lack of accessibility into venues and premises.

### **Businesses gaining knowledge about disability inclusion**

There was a feeling among some participants that while we are seeing the start of a shift, businesses are still relatively poorly informed, and work needs to be done to fill the gaps in insights. Without this, the reality of talking about disability inclusion can feel tokenistic.

## **Businesses recognising how accessible products apply to disabled consumers**

It was noted that sometimes businesses do offer accessible and inclusive products and services, but a lack of recognition of how they apply to disabled consumers means that there is no information or signposting for disabled consumers.

The lack of information about services available for disabled consumers and people with access needs was frustrating, particularly when opportunities are found by 'accident' rather than design. Examples included in-person consultations in a shop which disabled consumers did not know was an option, and a bank which had a dedicated helpline for disabled customers that consumers with disabilities did not know was for them.

"In some sense a lot of organisations are able to provide what you need tailored to your needs – really it's a matter of signposting."

## **The business response**

### **How can businesses gather insight into consumer experiences?**

The importance of insight gathering at all stages of the consumer journey was raised in a number of depth interviews.

Insight gathering can be achieved through customer research, but it can also be through internal structures put in place for feedback capture. These exercises should be systematic and regularly fed to senior executives or steering groups. Participants mentioned the need to become aware of frustrations before they could escalate to complaints, and this can happen in pre-purchase stages as well as after engagement with consumer-facing staff.

Ideas and systems used were:

- Feedback via customer sales or service staff who regularly interact with consumers and can readily identify barriers and challenges. One supermarket told us that feedback from sales staff is regularly collated and used to review priorities
- Listening groups
- Listening in to customer and sales service calls
- A review of complaints data

- Customer satisfaction or engagement surveys including questions about the pre-purchase experience and all data analysed by disability demographics
- Participants stressed that it was important to ensure that a specific steering group was set up with responsibility to review feedback in a strategic way, plan actions based on evidence, and roll out learnings to relevant parts of the business.

## Internal structures and prioritisation

Businesses recognised that disabled consumers need to interact with products and services as independently as possible and that built-in accessibility allowed this to happen.

Indeed, for one organisation it was important that accessibility becomes 'congruent' with the product or service they were delivering. When discussing how to embed disability inclusion in customer strategy, it was felt that effective engagement depended on several elements:

- **Senior level 'buy in'** – The importance of having a senior leader or stakeholder role specifically linked to accessibility or disability inclusion. This can be done via internal communications, where leaders' voices about their own experiences bring empathy and a change in culture about inclusion. This has a positive impact internally which will ripple out to customers.

**"Leading from the top makes a difference."**

- **Targeted insights and action planning based on the customer journey** – To link comprehensively customer touchpoints with accessibility-specific steering groups that represent individual stages of the customer journey and can develop and take ownership of targeted actions. Efforts should be made to review data and feedback systematically, and this should be filtered out within the organisation to all steering groups concerned. Research should be commissioned to understand the levers and barriers pre-engagement – ask the consumer what matters.

**"If we fail to support their needs, we fail."**

- **The power of measurement and metrics** – Some organisations talked about the use of metrics on dashboards related to disabled consumers: 'what gets measured gets done'. Measuring aspects related to disability inclusion – whether it be the number of consumers, levels of consumer satisfaction or net promoter scores – gives consumer strategies for disability inclusion a foundation for prioritisation and development.

## 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](https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/membership).

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