

Technology and entertainment media

**What disabled consumers choose
to buy and why**



June 2022

Acknowledgements

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Introduction



Most of us use some form of technology every day and many of us could not now work or stay connected with our family and friends without technology.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we relied on technology for news, information and entertainment, to shop and maintain social connections with family and friends, and of course, to work.

We asked disabled consumers about technology they had bought in the last two years. This included hardware such as TVs, phones, consoles and software such as games or streaming services such as Netflix, Spotify, Disney+ and Amazon Prime. We wanted to know what they bought and why and to what extent their disability or health condition influenced their choice.

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.

The wider context: disabled consumers in Britain today

There are 14.1 million people in the UK with a disability or condition. This represents 22% of the total population and 19% of working age adults. **Disabled people have spending power, known as the “purple pound” worth around £274bn¹** but research commissioned by Business Disability Forum reveals that, even in 2021, many report that their choice is limited and feelings of consumer empowerment are relatively low:

- **90% were** affected at the decision-making stage of purchases by either; limitations of design (products, services or venues not being inclusive or accessible), limitations in available information, and/or how information was presented (31% were impacted by all three aspects).
- **65% agreed that** “I feel like my choices of what to buy are limited on a daily basis due to barriers (a lack of accessibility or inclusion)”
- **26% did not feel able** to request adjustments or identify their preferences or needs when they tried to buy a products or services
- **27% agreed** that the businesses they buy from ‘have a long way to go to ensure products and services and accessible for all’.

There are signs of change however; almost two thirds (**65%**) agreed that businesses they used are starting to recognise the importance of accessible and inclusive products and services. Just over half (**54%**) agreed to have noticed a positive change in how they were treated as a disabled or older customer.

Be part of the change.

¹ Recent research (2020) has found the annual spending power of disabled people and thier families to be £274 billion. It is important to remember that disabled people often have to spend more than non-disabled people on everyday living costs associated with having a disability.

Methodology

Business Disability Forum (supported by Microsoft) commissioned Open Inclusion to gather business and consumer insights in the period from September 2021 to January 2022.

These insights were drawn from:

- **Ten depth interviews with businesses** undertaken by Business Disability Forum amongst their Members and Partners.
- **A quantitative survey of 1,001 people.** A quantitative survey carried out by Ipsos on behalf of the Business Disability Forum, interviewing 1,001 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain between 26 November and 5 December 2021. The survey was carried out to explore the differences in attitudes to decision making between disabled and non-disabled consumers. Disabled respondents self-selected their disability and included people with sensory, physical, neurodiverse, mental health, cognitive and long-term conditions and access needs related to aging. In total 457 respondents opted in to one or more of these. The data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age within gender, government office region, working status, social grade (and ethnicity in the UK).
- **A qualitative and detailed online survey** (241 respondents all with disabilities answered a 25-minute questionnaire) among Open Inclusion's Panel.
- **Focus groups** of four separate 90-minute sessions facilitated by Open Inclusion.

▶ **View full research methodology.**

Our findings and recommendations are presented as a **report** and seven consumer sector reports.

Read other consumer sector reports in this series:

- ▶ **Banking and insurance**
- ▶ **Days out and leisure**
- ▶ **Holiday accommodation**
- ▶ **Hospitality**
- ▶ **Retail**
- ▶ **Utilities.**

Key findings



Disabled consumers told us that they looked first and foremost for specific features and specifications when buying new IT technology or entertainment media.

Other factors influencing decisions were cost and ease of setting up the equipment or software.

- **Almost two thirds of respondents (62 per cent) said** that disability or access needs influenced their choices
- **Just under two fifths (36 per cent)** observed that their choice of technology or entertainment media was limited to some extent because of their disability or access needs.

A common theme was that information that they needed is difficult to find and access.

- **Just over half (55 per cent)** felt that finding the information they needed was either a lot or a little more challenging
- **Just under half (46 per cent)** felt confident that they were making the right choice relating to new technology or entertainment media.

Key highlighted stat:



62% of respondents said

that disability or access needs influenced their choices when buying technology.

Getting it right

There are clear benefits to getting it right. Disabled consumers are as likely as anyone to be tempted by the latest gadget or new entertainment service. **Only just over a third (34 per cent) said** their first instinct was to use a product or service they had bought before. They did, however, want the process of buying to be as straightforward as possible.

“I called Vodafone to order an Apple watch, they ran me through the features, and I bought it. It was very simple and quick.”

Disabled consumer

Patience and good customer service was noted and enhanced the experience of making a new purchase:

“Apple Store [were] so helpful in helping me to decide on a purchase. [They] provided all necessary info and outlined purchase set up and post purchase support. Very patient about how I was slower due to vision. Didn't rush me. Explained all the free accessibility training they would provide. All done in a friendly way that made me feel good about myself and excited to be getting the new equipment. And they delivered on all their promises.”

Consumer with sight loss

Technology and entertainment purchases are often expensive and required careful consideration.

- **77 per cent of respondents said** that they considered all features very carefully before they made a choice
- **37 per cent said that** 'I read general reviews in the media, websites or comparison websites, such as Which? or Money Supermarket'.

Not just any recommendation, however, was sought.

- **23 per cent agreed that** 'When possible, I will filter or look for reviews and recommendations from people like me'
- **Just over two fifths (42 per cent)** stated that they liked to discuss this type of decision with partners, friends, or family.

“Buying a new laptop and, after consulting family and comparison websites, I was very competently guided by customer services through the choices available without any pressure to buy. [I was] treated throughout politely, with understanding and compassion. A very positive experience.”

Disabled consumer



Key recommendations

Four key themes emerged from the research that help disabled consumers be more confident about their technology and entertainment purchases.

These are:

1. Better training for customer services and sales staff on the accessibility features or products, or at the very least signposting to internal experts who could answer questions about accessibility.
2. Clearer and more extensive information about the products and services. Disabled consumers wanted to know, for example, the weight of the product and the size of buttons. Where specific and technical information is given, it needs to be clear, easy to understand and free of jargon.
3. Manuals and specifications in accessible and inclusive formats. This includes information in larger print, provided electronically and accessible to people using screen readers.
4. Better support on how to set up new equipment and troubleshooting.

“The models did not show which had built in accessibility and it would have taken an age to trail through them. Even the customer service people didn’t seem to be bothered to do it, so I didn’t purchase.”

Disabled consumer

“How big are the remote-control buttons for the new TV? Is there large and clear print on the remote control and TV?”

Disabled consumer

Detailed findings



All respondents were asked what was most important to them when choosing to buy new technology, IT or entertainment.

The most influential factors were:

- General features and specification of the product – or content for streaming services (**74 per cent**)
- Cost (**70 per cent**)
- Ease of setting up the equipment or software (**59 per cent**)
- Positive recommendations and reviews (**45 per cent**)
- Specific accessibility features (**43 per cent**).

See Chart 1 for the full breakdown.

Chart 1: Most important factors influencing decisions for IT/technology or entertainments purchases



Disabled consumers wanted more information than they could usually find easily about the products. Questions they wanted answered included:

- “How would it respond to my jumpy fingers?”
- “Are the touchscreens, buttons and displays usable for people like me?”
- “Layout of buttons on equipment and how tactile they are?”

Information that disabled consumers sought but didn’t often find included the weight of a product and the type of screen display.

“Weight is always a factor but not often included on technical specs.”

Disabled consumer

“Due to epilepsy, I needed technology that is not too advanced as HD display and really bright images that come at you can cause problems.”

Consumer with epilepsy

Setting up new technology

With technology purchases, the point of sale is often not the last contact that the consumer has with the seller or manufacturer. Technology might need to be set up by the consumer to work properly.

Disabled consumers reported being frustrated by inaccessible instructions and sales or customer service staff who did not know how to activate – often, built-in – accessibility features.

“It’s often difficult to get accessible instructions for a tech product in Braille or audio, and not all sales staff in a high street [shop] know how to use or turn on accessibility features.”

Consumer with sight loss

Some consumers reported having to ask for help from family members and noted that technology is often frustratingly difficult to set up even for non-disabled people.

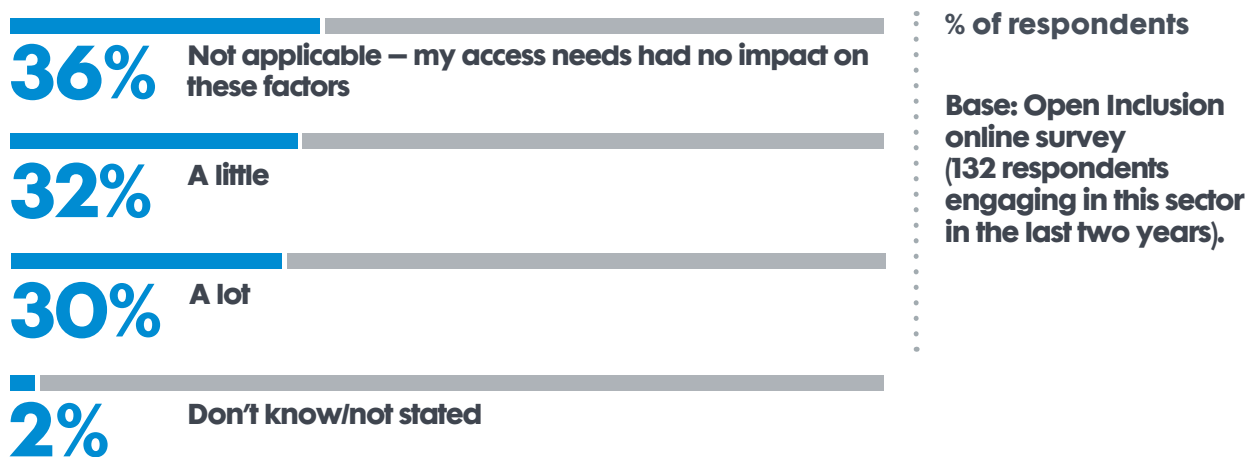
“I have difficulty in setting these things up myself. I need the help of a younger member of the family.”

Disabled consumer

Accessibility

Three in ten (30 per cent) respondents who had bought or considered buying a new technology product or service in the last two years said that their disability and access needs influenced their decision a lot. **A further 32 per cent said it influenced factors a little. Only just over a third (36 per cent) said that access needs had no impact at all on their decisions.**

Chart 2: To what extent, if at all, do you feel that your disability or access needs impacted the factors influencing choice, or played a role when deciding?



Limited choice and increased costs

Some consumers knew that certain brands offered accessibility features in some of their products but a lack of information about those features limited choice in many instances.

“I can’t really use my hands very well, so voice input is really important to me, there’s not a lot of information, even for brands that have that as an option.”

Consumer with dexterity disability

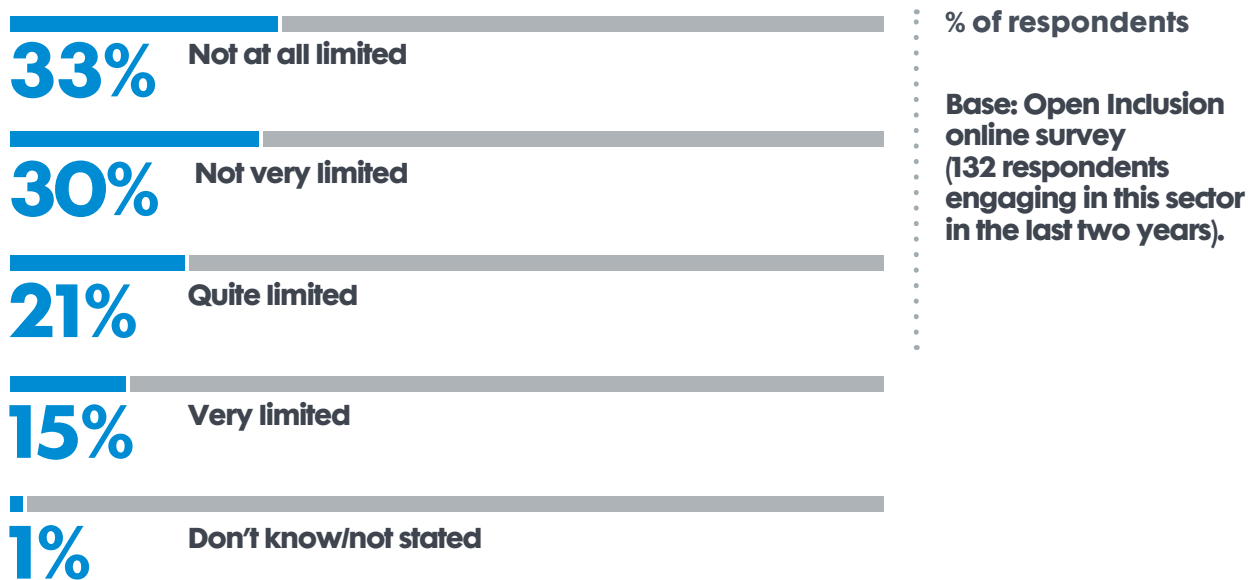
Others commented that not only was choice more limited but that products that had the features they needed were more expensive.

“I had to make sure that the TV had audio description on it but there was very little choice and prices are always more due to being disabled.”

Disabled consumer

Just under two fifths (36 per cent) of respondents said that choice of technology or entertainment purchases had been limited to some extent specifically due to their disability or access needs (15 per cent said that choice had been very limited).

Chart 3: To what extent, if at all, do you feel that your choice of IT/ technology or entertainment media was limited given your disability or access needs?



Challenges in finding the right information

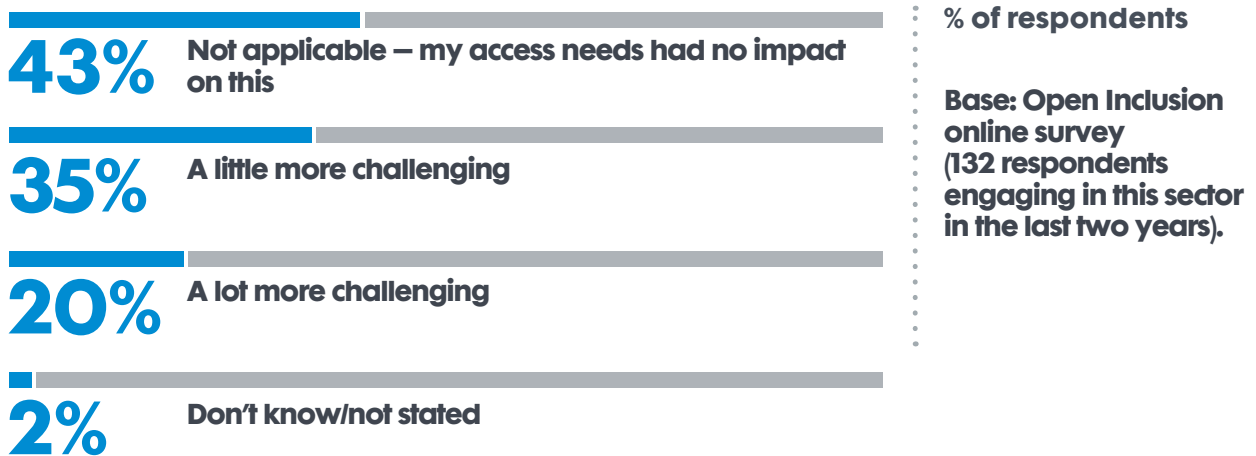
Disabled consumers were often looking for very specific information about a product or service to ensure that they would be able to use it easily, but this information was hard to find.

“The item was not clearly described. There were just picture images rather than a full detailed breakdown of how the item operates and a description of its design.”

Disabled consumer

Over half of respondents (55 per cent) observed that finding specific information about these types of services was more challenging to some extent given their disability or access needs. A fifth (20 per cent) said it was a lot more challenging.

Chart 4: 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?



Almost half of respondents (61 in total) noted that information was difficult to find. The main challenges were in relation to:

- The accessibility of products and what services themselves
- Specific product information (technical specifications, size, and weight of a product)
- Lack of alternative formats such as large print or braille
- Inaccessible or difficult to read instructions and manuals
- Information that was hard to understand or process
- Staff not being knowledgeable about accessibility, disability, or access needs.

Disabled consumers often wanted basic information rather than or in addition to new and eye-catching features or gimmicks.

“Handheld tech – I need to be able to hold it when my hands aren’t working, so the cover or case feel has to be right, it has to have a secure grip, and not too bulky to hold.”

Disabled consumer

“There’s an abundance of catchy gimmicks and services constantly advertised, and the simple facts overshadowed by jargon and marketing creativity which is confusing when needing basic information.”

Disabled consumer

The format of information and communication

“Due to cognitive problems, it is hard for me to process basic info on things I know nothing about , for example technology, so [I] just want to know how things work and what is the best option... what it can be used for can be hard to work out.”

Consumer with cognitive disability

A fifth of respondents noted difficulties in the format of information and communication, across the feedback the following themes were most prominent:

- Customer service staff were not available to answer questions or did not have the knowledge needed about accessibility
- Difficulties communicating with customer service or sales staff because of a lack of choice of communication channels – for example, telephone, email, webchat and face to face
- Information provided was too wordy, hard to process or the language was too difficult to understand
- The information that was needed about accessibility and specifications – for example weight – was not available or easy to find.

“I need a lot more add-ons than other people and I find it takes a long time to digest the information.”

Disabled consumer

“The questions are difficult to obtain an answer for as most sale staff do not have personal experience of disability.”

Disabled consumer

“I have a few different access needs and they are often not understood by customer service staff when I specifically asked about assistive technology.”

Disabled consumer

Making the right choice

Less than half the disabled people asked (46 per cent) agreed that they felt confident making the right choice of technology for them.

Decisions were not made lightly:

- **77 per cent people said** that they considered all features very carefully before they made a choice
- **37 per cent agreeing that** ‘I read general reviews in the media, websites, or comparison websites, such as Which? or Money Supermarket’.

It wasn't reviews by just anyone that mattered:

- **23 per cent said that** ‘When possible, I will filter or look for reviews and recommendations from people like me’
- **Just over two fifths (42 per cent)** stated that they liked to discuss this type of decision with partners, friends or family.

However, there was an appetite for new technology. **Only just over a third (33 per cent) said** that their first instinct in this type of decision is to use a provider or business I have used before’.

Getting it right

Some businesses are getting it right and disabled consumers were quick to praise.

“PC World customer service online were helpful for me obtaining IT equipment that was suitable for me.”

Disabled consumer

“Buying a new laptop and, after consulting family and comparison websites, I was very competently guided by customer services through the choices available without any pressure to buy. [I was] treated throughout politely, with understanding and compassion. A very positive experience.”

Disabled consumer

Conclusion



Disabled people are big consumers of technology. Some want the latest gadgets and games as much as non-disabled people, but others need technology to live independent lives and access the world beyond their homes.

Disabled people use phones and laptops to shop, bank and communicate with family and friends and health professionals and of course to work. Technology is also access to recreation from online entertainment streaming services to games.

Customer service staff who know the products they are selling – including the accessibility features – make the experience enjoyable and the prospect of new technology exciting. Conversely, poor-quality service and inadequate or inaccessible information about the specifications, set up and accessibility features of technology makes for a frustrating experience and fears of making an expensive mistake.

Some businesses are clearly getting it right – but there is more that could be done to entice disabled consumers.

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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