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Disability Online for CSR Practitioners: Keeping Global Business in Touch

Employer's Forum On Disability

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Disability Online for CSR Practitioners: Keeping Global Business in Touch

Abstract
[Excerpt] Corporations are under increasing pressure to become more transparent and to be seen to treat people fairly – be they employees, customers or other stakeholders. However, too often disabled people are forgotten as organisations shape their thinking on corporate social responsibility.

Keywords
GLADNET, disability, ILR, Cornell, corporations, business, organization, employee, customer, stakeholder

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Disability Online for CSR Practitioners

Keeping global business in touch

employers' forum on disability

There are 610 million disabled people worldwide.

Do you know what your stakeholders expect?

employers' forum on disability

AccountAbility
institute of social and ethical accountability

CABLE & WIRELESS

"The Employers' Forum on Disability is the authoritative employers' voice on disability as it affects business. We enable business to promote economic and social inclusion by making it easier for companies to work with disabled people as employees, customers, shareholders and stakeholders. 'Disability Online' reflects the increasing importance of CSR to our membership, which includes over 380 UK and global organisations, which together employ over 20% of the UK workforce."

Susan Scott-Parker,
Employers' Forum on Disability

"AccountAbility's mission is to promote accountability for sustainable development. As a leading professional institute, AccountAbility provides assurance and accountability management tools through its AA1000 Series, offers professional development and certification, and undertakes leading-edge research. 'Disability Online' will help companies who may have adopted a 'Corporate Responsibility' agenda, but may not have fully integrated their approach to disabled customers, suppliers and employees."

Simon Zadek,
AccountAbility

CABLE & WIRELESS

"Cable & Wireless is keen to ensure that disability is closely aligned to the corporate social responsibility agenda – and is delighted to support 'Disability Online' as part of its Gold Card membership commitment. The Internet is a primary point of reference on CSR issues; we are delighted that many of the world's leading CSR portals are making the Disability Briefing Papers available online to members and business partners."

Joe Franses,
Cable & Wireless

CSR Partners:
Engaging on Disability

- Ashridge Centre for Business and Society (ACBAS)
- Business in the Community
- Business for Social Responsibility
- Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College
- Centre for Social Markets (India)
- CSR Europe
- Instituto Ethos (Brazil)
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development

Disability – the missing dimension to Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporations are under increasing pressure to become more transparent and to be seen to treat people fairly – be they employees, customers or other stakeholders. However, too often disabled people are forgotten as organisations shape their thinking on corporate social responsibility.

The Global Inclusion Benchmark, launched by the Forum in 2002, reveals the extent to which leading companies address disability in their social reporting. In 2002 only 20% of a selection of the world's leading corporations publicly demonstrated their commitment to disabled people. The 2003 Benchmark results, announced in October, revealed an increase to 32%.

Concerned by these findings the Forum, supported by Cable & Wireless, joined with AccountAbility to research and produce the factual briefings which would, for the first time, provide straightforward and business-focused guidance for companies and their advisers, on why and where to position disability as a business priority.

We began by asking AccountAbility which organisations the UK and global business community turn to for guidance regarding the emerging priorities for business. Organisations were selected whose websites are internationally recognised as key information resources for business. The Forum then produced a set of targeted briefings for CSR practitioners, which our partners have now made available online.

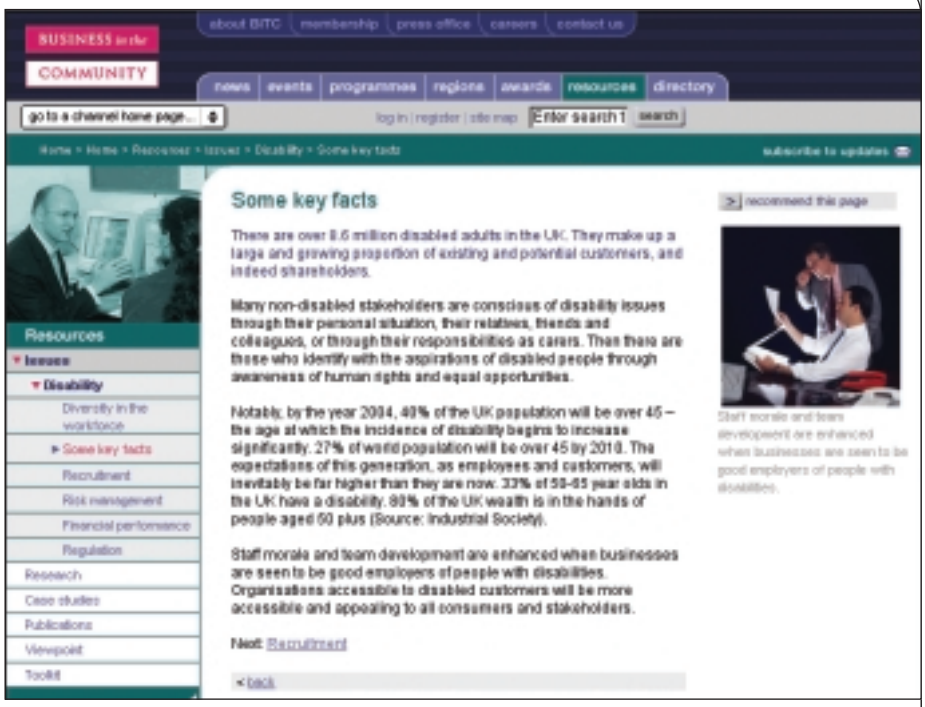
The Online Briefings
Business briefings are available on:

- **CSR & Disability: The Strategic Business Case**
- **Disability: Some Facts**
- **Companies in Action**
- **Disability & Employment: Investing in Human Potential**
- **Valuing Disabled Customers**
- **Human Rights & Disability**
- **Labour Standards & Disability**
- **The Digital Divide & Disabled People**

Making websites accessible to people with disabilities

Inaccessible IT and systems create unnecessary, usually quite unintentional barriers – barriers for talented disabled people trying to apply for jobs online, as well as for millions of disabled customers wanting to shop on e-commerce sites. As governments worldwide begin to regulate on this issue, companies face increasing risk of litigation as well as risk to reputation.

This project has enabled the Forum to work with our partners to assess their website's accessibility using "Bobby" (see below), plus various manual tests. Some of the solutions adopted included: labelling images with alternative tags; ensuring correct colour contrast between text and background, using frames and ensuring sites were easy to navigate. Access is achievable – even small organisations can improve access to their sites.



"Business in the Community is absolutely clear that, as an organisation that helps business to become truly inclusive, our own website and processes must be barrier-free. We cannot tell others that practice must follow principle unless we demonstrate this in our own work."

Mallen Baker, Head of Business Impact, Business in the Community

"The Employers' Forum tech report was really good – easy to understand but still detailed. I have discussed it with Ethical Media and they will be implementing the changes necessary to bring us up to level 1 standard.

Fortunately we are in a position to be able to make some changes to our site and have a web consultancy which is committed to accessibility anyway, which makes it easier for us. I can imagine however that it could be a little more difficult to convince some colleagues that accessible doesn't mean boring – were we to have to design a new website. People like to see fancy flash things! Perhaps it would be good to have a list of good-looking corporate websites that are also good at accessibility?"

Sarah Burton, CSR Europe

Sites can be tested for basic accessibility by using the online tool **"Bobby"**, provided by the website management company, **Watchfire – bobby.watchfire.com**

For further information on auditing websites and improving accessibility see the Forum's publication **"Accessible Website Design: A Practical and Strategic Guide"**.

For more information on website accessibility go to **www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/accessibility.htm**

The Strategic Business Case

Disabled people have a proven track record of bringing valuable skills and commitment to the companies for which they work.

They also have significant spending power – at least £50 billion in the UK alone – and an increasingly powerful voice in the wider debate regarding corporate ethics and responsibilities.

Disability is a complex issue which impacts across a business – from the adjustments which a disabled colleague needs to their workstation, to welcoming disabled customers, to the approach a business takes to corporate philanthropy.

The emerging trend worldwide, is to position disability as a civil rights issue and to implement discrimination legislation which protects disabled people in employment and as customers.

Tomorrow's successful companies will seek to engage with disabled stakeholders so as to ensure ethical and legal obligations are translated to the mutual benefit of business and disabled people.

The full briefings are available from **www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/csr/disabilityonline.htm**

Disability: Some Facts

This project required us to bring together, for the first time, the latest, most comprehensive, most relevant data relating to the impact of disability on business. Our task was difficult because there is no single accepted definition of disability worldwide and the majority of data is gathered for use by the public sector. Most of the information in these briefings, therefore, comes from the UK, where business has some fifteen years experience in gathering the evidence needed to engage and equip employers on this issue. We believe the UK statistics, however, to be a useful indicator of the experience of disabled people more generally, although obviously the degree of exclusion and the loss to business and the economy will differ from culture to culture.

The Forum will continue to update these briefings. If you can help please contact rhiannon.suter@employers-forum.co.uk.

- **The ILO estimates that there are at least 610 million disabled people worldwide**
- **400 million disabled people live in the world's developing countries**
- **There are 39 million disabled people in Europe and 49 million people with a disability or long-lasting condition in the USA**
- **8.6 million people (aged 16 and over) self-declare as disabled in the UK (15% of the UK population)**
- **Disability is estimated to affect 10% to 20% of every country's population, a percentage that is expected to grow because of poor health care and nutrition early in life, growing elderly populations and violent civil conflicts**
- **33% of people aged 50 – 65 in the UK have a disability**
- **41% of disabled people of working age in the UK have no educational qualifications in comparison to 18% of non-disabled people**

Work and Disability

Only 17% of disabled people in the UK are born with a disability. Most people become disabled during their working lives – many of them in the workplace. Companies need to do more to help prevent disability occurring at work, as well as to ensure they retain employees who do become disabled.

- **6.9 million people of working age (or nearly 20% of the UK working age population) have a disability**
- **Of the 6.9 million disabled people of work age, approximately 3 million are in work**
- **12% of the UK workforce are disabled**
- **There is a significant talent pool of students known to have disabilities to be drawn upon. In 2000/2001 there were 30,970 students with disabilities in higher education**

Stakeholder Engagement

Most companies enter into dialogue with their employees – be it through meetings, staff representatives, intranet and email based engagement or perhaps questionnaires on morale. It is vital that these processes are accessible to and inclusive of disabled people. Some companies also find it valuable to set up support networks of disabled employees who advise management on how to improve its disability performance.

Lloyds TSB has a network of disabled employees with substantial resources. This network assists the bank in delivering its commitment to becoming disability confident and to promoting career development opportunities for all disabled staff.

Co-operative Financial Services has found that by publicising the definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act and encouraging employees to 'declare' themselves, significantly more employees came forward, enabling them to ensure people receive the necessary support. The Co-op also has a disability steering group chaired by the executive director of resources which brings together people at every level of the business, disabled and non-disabled.

For more information on e-recruitment go to
www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/e-recruitment.htm

"The information was very interesting and I was pleased to be able to add it to our site – the information was popular. As a result of having a special page on disability we put up a report on disability by one of our member companies – Manpower."

Sarah Burton,
CSR Europe

"The information is absolutely brilliant"

Vandita Chism, Ashridge

Barrier-free E-recruitment

McKinsey &Company have found that at least 1.3 million disabled people of working age in the UK face ongoing exclusion because companies maintain inaccessible e-recruitment websites

Yet building an e-recruitment site which is barrier-free is no more expensive than building an inaccessible site

Making an existing website accessible costs on average under five per cent of total development expenditure. This investment can significantly increase your talent pool by improving the access and usability of a site for everyone. It also lowers maintenance costs, enhances reputation and reduces legal liability.

Disability and the Workplace

There are a number of physical and mental impairments which are specifically linked to modern work-practices and the workplace. 6% of all adults who have worked in the UK (about 2.2 million people) report a health condition that they believe was caused by or aggravated by work. The most commonly reported are musculo-skeletal disorders, followed by mental health difficulties such as depression.

Similar research in Australia found that of people of working age with a disability, nearly a quarter of their main impairments were caused through accident or injury (23 per cent), or were due to working conditions or overwork (15 per cent). Of those due to accidents, more than a third (36 per cent) of the accidents occurred at work.

This trend is likely to be reflected worldwide. In countries where workplace standards are lower, the incidence of disability caused by workplace accidents and other work-related factors is likely to be higher.

Human Rights and Labour Standards

Disabled people want to work; they want the same choice of goods and services as other consumers, and they want to be treated with respect and consideration in every walk of life. Too often disabled citizens are excluded from mainstream society and denied equality because of deep rooted attitudinal, as well as physical, barriers.

Business can play an important role in protecting the human rights of their disabled employees, as well as by promoting human rights across their supply chains, for their customers and in the community.

The International Labour Organisation provides guidance on disability and labour standards.

C159 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983. Ratified by 73 countries. This, the key convention on disability produced by the ILO, reads:

"International standards to ensure the 'equality of opportunity and treatment to all categories of disabled persons, in both rural and urban areas, for employment and integration into the community'

Each member shall, in accordance with national conditions, practices and possibilities:

- **Consider the purpose of vocational rehabilitation as being to enable a disabled person to secure, retain and advance in suitable employment**
- **Formulate, implement and periodically review a national policy on vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled people**
- **Promote employment opportunities for disabled people in the open labour market**
- **Promote co-operation and co-ordination between the public and private bodies engaged in vocational rehabilitation**
- **Evaluate vocational guidance, training, placement, employment and other related services to enable disabled persons to secure, retain and advance in employment."**

The ILO has produced a code of practice, **'Managing Disability in the Workplace'**, in line with this convention.

For further information go to **www.ilo.org**

The Disability Market and Customers

- **Disabled people, their friends and family form a significant and growing market: In the UK 1 in 4 people are disabled or close to someone who is**
- **The total spending power of disabled people in the UK alone is estimated at circa £50 billion**
- **1 in 5 disabled customers experience difficulties accessing services because of their disability**
- **Fewer than 10% of UK service providers believe that the costs of introducing changes to benefit disabled customers outweigh the benefits**

The Internet: Opportunities for Inclusion

Millions of disabled people can and do use the internet. In a recent poll disabled adults rated the value of the internet much more highly than non-disabled people. Disabled people report that the internet:

- **significantly improved the quality of their lives (48% vs. 27% non-disabled)**
- **made them better informed about the world (52% vs. 39% non-disabled)**
- **helped them feel more connected to the world (44% vs. 38% non-disabled)**
- **helped them reach out to people with similar interests and experiences (44% vs 38% non-disabled)**

However too many disabled people find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide. As well as being more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty or with lower educational levels, all factors in the digital divide – disabled people also confront unique and unnecessary technological barriers.

- **Two thirds of leading websites in the US are inaccessible to disabled people. Other studies estimate that as much as 78% – 99% of online content is inaccessible to people whose impairments affect internet use**
- **The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) estimates that 2 million disabled people in the UK are unable to use the internet because of accessibility issues**
- **A recent report by the RNIB found that of a sample of leading UK High Street retailers, not one had an accessible e-commerce site**
- **Of 50 – 100 most visited sites in the US across six categories, including: overall most visited, clothing, international, jobs, college – only 33% passed even basic accessibility tests**

Promoting Inclusion

Barclays recently launched "It's Your Money" – a guide to using financial services for people with learning difficulties. The Forum has helped Barclays develop a membership initiative which signals a positive response to the UK Government's social inclusion/financial literacy agenda. Some 200,000 copies are being distributed across agencies for people with learning difficulties, Citizen's Advice Bureaus and prison literacy programmes.
A similar guide "Paying Your Bills" has been produced with the support of Centrica.

Tackling the Digital Divide

U Can Do IT, a London (UK) based charity, provides in-home training to enable deaf, blind and physically disabled people to take advantage of the Internet in their homes and to carry out day-to-day tasks, such as shopping and banking, to keep in touch with family and friends and to access opportunities for learning and personal development.

With support from Cable & Wireless, U Can Do IT is piloting a project training tutors to use two new complex software packages, JAWS & JAWBONE. Both are specialist pieces of software, which allow visually impaired and hearing impaired students to use the Internet.

Global Inclusion Benchmark

The Employers' Forum on Disability Global Inclusion Benchmark is a unique guide to where companies should address disability within their social reports. Piloted in 2002, and released again in 2003, the Benchmark reveals the extent to which some of the world's leading companies in the area of CSR, report on the interests of their disabled stakeholders.

The Global Inclusion Benchmark is produced in association with AccountAbility and with the support of UnumProvident.

For further information go to **www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/csr/gib.htm**

Global Inclusion Benchmark

Truly inclusive organisations will publicly demonstrate that they address disability as a business and societal priority.
Their reports will include:

1. **An Equal Opportunities or diversity statement or general statement of corporate values that explicitly includes disability**
2. **A CSR strategy which explicitly commits to addressing disability**
3. **A commitment to engage with disabled stakeholders**
4. **A named board director responsible for corporate governance in relation to disability (either alone or as a specific component of Equal Opportunities/ diversity)**
5. **Indicators and targets to measure performance in relation to the disability dimension of CSR and in relation to disabled stakeholders – employees, customers, partners, shareholders, suppliers and community members**
6. **Company performance on recruitment, retention and career development for disabled employees and employees who become disabled**
7. **The impact on disabled people of employment practices which affect every employee, e.g. work-life balance, health and safety etc.**
8. **Work undertaken to make company products, services and the built environment more accessible to disabled consumers**
9. **Involvement in partnerships with Government or Non-Governmental Organisations – particularly organisations run by disabled people – to build the capacity of the company to become disability confident**
10. **Details of the disability dimension of any corporate investment which encourages social inclusion and community economic development**

Accessibility: The Global Inclusion Benchmark also looks for evidence that social reports, annual reports and accounts are written in straightforward language and are available in accessible formats, e.g. Braille, large print, electronic format on an accessible website

The Employers' Forum on Disability and Corporate Social Responsibility

"Definitions and measures of Corporate Responsibility have developed quickly, and sometimes unevenly, in relation to issues deemed important to, and by, companies. Labour standards for instance are high on the agenda, but disability rights are often conspicuously absent. The Global Inclusion Benchmark is becoming a valuable health check on how well companies are handling these issues and critically, how well civil society in turn encourages the private sector to prioritise disability rights. This initiative tackles head on, an issue that is not always addressed well by companies, who may have adopted a 'Corporate Responsibility' agenda, but have not yet fully integrated their approach to disabled customers, suppliers and employees."

Simon Zadek, AccountAbility

"**Disability Online for CSR Practitioners** is important as it makes it easier for Corporate Social Responsibility opinion leaders and practitioners to keep up to date with leading corporate practice on disability and to ensure they have the facts and the bigger picture to make available to their members and stakeholders.

These briefings reinforce the work that leading global companies are doing in communicating their commitment to getting it right on disability.

The Royal Mail is also supporting the Forum as it works to help our members address disability as a natural part of CSR by encouraging CSR standards, guidelines and indices such as FTSE4Good, SA8000 and the BiTC Corporate Responsibility Index to include disability.

I am particularly pleased at our partner organisations' efforts to "walk the talk" by these organisations, as they take steps to ensure that disabled employees and stakeholders are able to access their websites."

Susan Scott-Parker, CEO,
Employers' Forum on Disability

The Employers' Forum is grateful to Cable & Wireless, the Royal Mail and UnumProvident for supporting our Corporate Social Responsibility and disability programme.

Disability Online was managed by **Rhiannon Suter, CSR Research and Projects Manager**

For more information on this project or the Forum's CSR programme please contact Rhiannon on 020 7403 3020, rhiannon.suter @employers-forum.co.uk.

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The full briefings, including sources for the statistics included in this guide, can be found on the Forum website: **www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/csr/disablityonline.htm**

AccountAbility:
Tel: 020 7549 0400
www.accountability.org.uk

The Disability Online Partnership

Advocates of Corporate Responsibility continue to develop how 'material' business issues are understood. Disability issues are by no means a new discovery, but incorporating them more clearly into the field of Corporate Responsibility adds influence and leverage to disability rights advocates. This partnership is extremely valuable since it brings together a significant number of leading international Corporate Responsibility organisations who between them have a massive collective corporate network.

The Ashridge Centre for Business and Society (ACBAS), www.ashridge.org.uk, based in the UK, is a leading authority on relations between the corporate sector, government and civil society, with an emphasis on the changing role of business.

Business in the Community, www.bitc.org.uk, based in the UK, is a unique movement of 700 member companies committed to continually improving their positive impact on society.

Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), www.bsr.org, A non-profit organization, based in the USA, is a global organization that helps member companies achieve success in ways that respect ethical values, people, communities and the environment.

The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, www.bc.edu/centers/ccc/index, in the USA, is a leading resource on corporate citizenship, providing research, executive education, consultation and convenings on citizenship topics. The Center's mission is to establish corporate citizenship as a business essential

The Centre for Social Markets (CSM), www.csmworld.org, in India, is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to making markets work for the triple bottom line – people, planet and profit. CSM has offices in India and the United Kingdom.

CSR Europe, www.csreurope.org, is a business-driven membership network. Our mission is to help companies achieve profitability sustainable growth and human progress by placing corporate social responsibility in the mainstream of business practice.

Instituto Ethos, www.ethos.org.br, based in Brazil, is an association of companies of any size and/or sector that are interested in developing their activities in a socially responsible manner, in a permanent process of evaluation and improvement.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) http://www.wbcsd.ch/, is a coalition of 170 international companies united by a shared commitment to sustainable development, growth, ecological balance and social progress.

Disability Online for CSR Practitioners

- The Business Case
- Employment
- Labour Standards
- Human Rights
- Customers
- The Digital Divide

Business for Social Responsibility

THE CENTER FOR CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP AT BOSTON COLLEGE

World Business Council for Sustainable Development

An Employers' Forum on Disability initiative,
in partnership with Accountability, with the support of Cable & Wireless