



New study finds major companies derive business value by removing IT barriers for people with disabilities and boomers

Businesses weigh in on accessibility benefits in study sponsored by The Customer Respect Group

IPSWICH, MA, February 1, 2008. A new study sponsored by The Customer Respect Group finds that companies strategically invested in removing barriers to customer interaction are deriving significant hard and soft benefits from accessibility initiatives.

The study, “**Accessibility and business value: Profiles in success,**” evaluated the Web-site accessibility of Fortune 100 companies based on a benchmark developed by The Customer Respect Group. The accessibility benchmark was designed to measure the effectiveness of features that help improve the online experience for people who are blind or have low vision, and for those with cognitive and mobility challenges. The benchmark served as the basis for accurately identifying leading companies in the area of online accessibility. Subsequent interviews were conducted with executives the top ten leading companies—including Verizon Wireless, Southwest Airlines, General Electric, Proctor & Gamble, TIAA-CREF, Washington Mutual and others—to further investigate the companies’ broader accessibility initiatives and determine the impetus for investment.

Executives interviewed by The Customer Respect Group cited increases in product sales, market opportunities, and customer loyalty as key benefits derived from accessibility and marketing efforts targeted toward people with disabilities and aging consumers. Study findings show that companies who approach accessibility as part of a larger corporate strategy realized the greatest return on investment. According to the study, “...for some of the best-performing companies...accessibility is part of a much bigger vision. The broad corporate strategy was not based upon a set of evolving technical standards but on a much more wide-ranging ambition to remove as many obstacles between the corporation and its existing or potential clients.”

The report is divided into six sections.

- Section one looks at the methodology, key findings and results of the benchmark evaluation. It includes an introduction to the topic of what makes a site accessible
- Section two describes why some of the leading companies were motivated to improve online accessibility
- Section three looks at case studies of successful accessibility redesigns
- Section four contains valuable lessons and tips from companies who have completed accessibility redesigns
- Section five examines the technical findings in detail, and discusses the adoption of some key accessibility features across the full range of sites in the evaluation
- Section six looks at detailed best practice recommendations for accessibility, with examples from some leading sites

Top- Accessibility Benchmark Companies

The intention was not to single out websites at the bottom of the benchmark; the study looked to understand the motivations of the companies with the most accessible websites. Top scorers listed in alphabetical order:

- 3M Company
- AARP
- Banana Republic
- Bank of America
- Cardinal Health
- CenturyTel
- ChevronTexaco
- GEICO
- General Electric
- General Motors
- Intel
- Medical Mutual of Ohio
- Microsoft
- Nationwide Life Insurance
- O2 UK
- Principal Life Insurance
- Procter & Gamble
- Sears Roebuck
- Southwest Airlines
- Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA)
- The Coca-Cola Company
- Verizon Wireless
- Virgin Atlantic
- Wachovia Corp.
- Wells Fargo & Co.

There are 54 million people with disabilities in the United States who, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, control over \$175 billion in discretionary income. Additionally according to 2003 Census data, of the 76 million U.S. baby boomers, one out of four over the age of 50 and one out of two over the age of 65 have a disability. While this presumably makes a strong case for organizations to find new ways to open up their businesses to both segments, it is still largely assumed that companies undertake Web-based and other accessibility initiatives in response to legislation, such as Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act, or lawsuits, such the National Federation of the Blind vs. Target (2007).

However, the study found that many leading companies are beginning to view accessibility as a key component of a broader strategy to reach out to the widest range of consumers in their target markets.

According to Terry Golesworthy, president of The Customer Respect Group,

“In today’s global economy, businesses cannot afford to deliver one-size-fits-all services or products. Erecting artificial barriers that limit—or even stop customers—from conducting business with a company makes no sense. A strategic investment in accessibility is not only sensible, it is a vital component of moving forward with an inclusive approach to be able to work with as many customers as possible to maximize reach, revenues and ultimately profits.”

For more information on the “Accessibility and Business value: Profiles in Success” study, please contact The Customer Respect Group at (978) 834.6700 or email clientservices@customerrespect.com

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The Customer Respect Group is an internationally recognized leader in the creation and measurement of benchmarks in the arena of online customer experience and respect. Benchmarks have been shown to provide an invaluable means to consider comparative performance, learn from the leaders and take advantage of strengths. The Customer Respect Group has objectively measured websites since 2003 and has amassed a huge database of knowledge and data.

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