



Persons with Disabilities & Technology: Untapped Economic Potential

December 3rd is the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. The theme of this year's celebration, **E-Accessibility**, recognizes the importance of technology in the lives of persons with disabilities, as well as the need to improve access to information technology for persons with disabilities. To highlight the importance of this day, as well as its chosen theme, the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) is releasing a series of four themed fact sheets in the lead-up to this day.

There is art in the design of a web site. A site that is accessible to all people has a richer meaning and a deeper beauty because it is able to reach more people in more ways.

~ Jim Angus

(2001) Wired For Accessibility Paper presented to the International Conference about Museums and the Web. Available online.

Fact:

- ❖ **Persons with disabilities are a significant market companies should consider.**
- ❖ It is believed **10-12% of the global population is made up of persons with disabilities.**¹
- ❖ In the US, the **annual discretionary spending of persons with disabilities** has been **estimated at \$175 billion.**¹
- ❖ However, **many companies are ignoring this market segment** when they are designing their web sites. For example, a **recent sample of leading UK retailers** found that **not one had an accessible e-commerce site.** As well, in the US, **of the 50-100 of the most visited sites only 33% passed the most basic accessibility requirements.**¹
- ❖ Numbers out of the US on persons with disabilities (a demographic with strikingly similar socio-economic indicators as Canada) found that **at least ½ of all non-disabled persons has a spouse, parent, child, or friend with a disability,** and that **companies marketing to persons with disabilities can thus reach as many as 4 out of every 10 consumers through disability-friendly campaigns.**²
- ❖ It has been suggested that **as a group, persons with disabilities make up a larger number than any other cultural, racial, or ethnic group.**³
- ❖ **In 2001, the Conference Board of Canada reported that the combined annual disposable income of working-aged persons with disabilities was 25 billion.**³

¹ Disability and the Digital Divide: An Employers' Forum on Disability Briefing for SCR Practitioners. Available online.

² Digh, P. (1998) America's Largest Untapped Market: who they are, the potential they represent. Fortune Magazine. March .

³ U.S. Department of Justice. Customers with Disabilities Mean business.

Solutions:

- ✓ The **process of creating products accessible to persons with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other unique characteristics is known as universal design.**¹
- ✓ **Providing online accessibility** for persons with disabilities has the **potential to greatly benefit the business sector.** For example, **persons with disabilities are more likely than other groups to assume they need and use the internet as other technologies and physical locations remain inaccessible.**²
- ✓ Using the standards developed by the **World Wide Web consortium (W3C)**, website developers can help ensure their site meet current accessibility standards. For more information, visit www.w3c.org.

1 . (2002) Burgstahler, S. The Role of Technology in Preparing Youth with Disabilities For Postsecondary Education and Employment. Unpublished Manuscript.

2 Disability and the Digital Divide: An Employers' Forum on Disability Briefing for SCR Practitioners. Available online