

# How and why to make your recruiting process accessible for all

When you're looking for qualified people to join your business, how accessible is your recruiting process?

Think about this for a minute.

In 2006, the United Nations adopted the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It internationally established accessibility as a basic human right for "all persons with all types of disabilities."

And there are accessibility laws in many countries and jurisdictions. In the U.S., for example, there's the well-known Americans With Disabilities Act. In Canada, there's the landmark Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Passed in 2005, the AODA was the first legislation of its kind in Canada. And it made the Province of Ontario one of the first jurisdictions world-wide to have an accessibility law. Then in June 2019, Canada's federal government passed the Accessible Canada Act (ACA). Although it's important to note the ACA applies only to federally regulated business sectors.

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The driver behind all these laws is removal of barriers to inclusion that people who have a disability continue to face in society every day. The belief is that everyone — in Canada and elsewhere in the world — deserves the opportunity to participate fully in their community and workplace; and to have an equal chance at success. This includes when they're applying for jobs. What does all of this mean? That it's a good idea to review your recruiting process for accessibility.

In theory, there should be almost no accessibility challenges — including in the talent recruiting process — left in Canada or other countries with accessibility laws. But statistics and research show that there's still much to do on diversity and inclusion (D&I). In Canada, for example, the national employment rate of people who have a disability is 59% compared to 80% for people without disabilities. This means

opportunities are being missed by both businesses, and by people who have a disability.

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There are numerous success stories and case studies that show when individuals, business, public sector agencies and educational institutions work together, employment opportunities for people who have a disability increase. Making sure their talent recruitment is inclusive is one thing businesses can do to help ensure they are increasing access to opportunity. Every business needs to recruit talent. But making your recruiting process accessible and inclusive means being intentional. It requires developing and implementing strategies that will sustain and increase accessibility for job seekers, your current employees and your customers as well.

### **Opportunity for improvements**

It starts with where and how you look for qualified talent. (This was covered in part one of this article series, *Right mindset and being proactive are the keys to sourcing “hidden” talent.*) Today, pretty much the number-one way for anyone — regardless of whether they have a disability — to apply for a job is online. Through either one of the many job-listings websites, or directly through a company’s “careers” portal. And that can be problematic.

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There is a lot of room and opportunity for businesses to make their online application portals and processes more user-friendly for applicants who have a disability. The PEAT survey found there are seven top accessibility issues in online recruiting:

- Complex navigation
- Timeout restrictions
- Lack of video captions
- No alt text for images

- Bad screen contrast
- Inaccessible form fields
- Mouse-only clicking options for buttons

The good news is, as Toronto internet lawyer Gil Zvulony noted in an essay on internet law and accessibility, published on his firm's website, "The solutions to these problems are in most cases very simple. A redesign of the website is rarely necessary."

There are numerous plugins for accessibility available including ones for:

- User customization of font sizes and colour schemes
- Making form fields more accessible
- Text-to-speech conversion
- Testing your website for accessibility

*There are websites that check your site's accessibility level and compliance with WCAG 2.0 and 2.1. Thinking of your business on a global level for a moment, these guidelines are part of being compliant with accessibility legislation in several countries.*

### **Why meeting WCAG is crucial**

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) is an internationally accepted standard for web accessibility developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Following WCAG 2.0 will make content accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities, including:

- Blindness and low vision
- Deafness and hearing loss
- Learning disabilities
- Cognitive impairments
- Mobility impairments
- Speech impairments

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moment, these guidelines are part of being compliant with accessibility legislation such as:

- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Australia Disability Discrimination Act
- E-Government Act (Austria)
- Law on Accessibility (Brazil)
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
- Accessibility for Manitobans Act
- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

The WCAG 2.0 set out standards for things such as:

- Making sure videos (including recruiting videos) on your website are captioned
- Use of high-contrast colours
- Voice recognition and text to speech
- Good, clear site design
- Easy navigation
- Large links, buttons and controls
- Customizable text, ie., size adjustment
- Keyboard compatibility for completing actions such as application form submission

It doesn't matter whether your business is a small-to-medium enterprise (SME), or a corporation with several locations. The tools for testing and refining the accessibility of your online application portal and process exist. But making this first part of your recruiting process more accessible and inclusive requires having the right mindset, too.

There's a difference between making sure your career portal meets WCAG 2.0 standards and is therefore legislation compliant; and being proactive. It's about wanting candidates to apply online by creating a quality online application experience for candidates who do or don't have a disability, thus increasing accessibility for all.

### **Revisit your job postings**

Of course, before a qualified applicant who happens to have a disability fills out that online job application, they're going to read your job posting. This is another area where there is opportunity for many businesses to make the recruiting process more accessible.

Sometimes job descriptions inadvertently exclude qualified candidates who have a disability because of the way they're written. It's a good idea to follow some best practices when you're writing a job posting for two important reasons. First, it helps

attract top talent including people who have a disability. Second, it shows your company's commitment to creating an inclusive work environment for all employees.

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Here are [seven tips for creating highly effective job postings](#) that can help you make this part of your recruiting process more inclusive and accessible.

One of the most important things you can do in a job description is communicate your brand message about D&I within your organization. This is because your brand is everything you say and do, and *how* you say and do it. Include a paragraph about your company's policy on D&I. Communicating your core beliefs on inclusion, accessibility and accommodation helps attract qualified candidates, regardless of whether they have a disability. They'll see your organization as a company that can meet their needs. That makes you an employer of choice.

### **Staying on the interview rails**

You've narrowed down your short list. It's time to bring in potential "rock stars" for that first interview. And this is where reviewing your recruiting process, and being proactive, can really help prevent things from going awry at the interview stage. Think about where your business is located, and where you're going to hold interviews. These days, an initial, brief pre-interview by phone or video is pretty much the standard. And with captioning and voice-to-text technology that's available, making accommodations in these interviews is easy.

The challenge can come when it's time for the in-person interview with the recruiter, hiring manager or a panel of interviewers.

*It's important to take into account more than just the physical space or technology you have for interviewing any candidates you attract.*

In your interview process, you could end up losing out on a candidate. All because perhaps the floor, interview room or entire building where you're holding in-person interviews, isn't accessible. To avoid issues, make sure you have a plan — and a place — in mind for the location to hold interviews. Also make sure the interviewer or interview panel is well trained in D&I.

It's important to take into account more than just the physical space or technology you have for interviewing any candidates you attract. You also need to make sure your hiring teams have been through unconscious bias training and reflect the diversity you want to continue enhancing. Making your recruiting process inclusive by being proactive rather than reactive can raise your brand profile and business reputation in a positive way. It shows everyone involved in the recruiting process that your organization is committed to D&I.

The accessibility solutions you provide for interviews will also depend on each individual candidate. That's why it's good to do a comprehensive audit of your entire recruiting process for D&I.

### **Getting expert help**

Sometimes the interview process also has a test and assessment component. Timed editing and writing tests are common when you're hiring for a marketing communications role, for example. Or perhaps a coding test for someone applying for a developer role.

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But a traditional, formal interview and assessment may not bring out the best in all candidates, regardless of disability. You can consult with a professional employment service agency to develop enhancements of your interview and assessment processes that work for everyone.

You may be reading this and starting to feel overwhelmed. But most often, businesses discover that making their recruiting processes more accessible and inclusive is much simpler than they anticipated.

Consulting with an outside organization that has expertise in the disability sector can help make refining your entire recruiting process beneficial for everyone involved.

The time to do it is now. For too long, as Laura Sherbin and Julia Taylor Kennedy of the Center for Talent Innovation in New York City noted in a December 2017 Harvard Business Review article, “companies have viewed employees with disabilities through the lens of compliance and accommodation. There’s no better time to start to look at disability through a different lens: of inclusion and infinite possibility.”

**Next in this series about inclusive recruiting and onboarding:** Harnessing the power of AI and other technology to make your workplace more inclusive.

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