



Roundtable: Enabling Technologies for Disabled Talent

According to official **statistics**, one billion people across the world have a disability and, for those living with a disability, 75% find their condition has an impact on their employment opportunities. However, despite a growing awareness of the barriers that face disabled people, these figures indicate that more needs to be done - and enabling technologies for disabled talent can undoubtedly play a major role in increasing inclusion.

Microsoft recently announced that it has welcomed the Government's plans to help more people with disabilities into work, stating that technology can play a vital part in helping remove the barriers they face in the workplace and elsewhere. But while the tech giant has created a range of products to help disabled people, it is not alone in this school of thought. There are now an increasing number of tools available, with the sole purpose of enhancing the application process for those with impairments or disabilities, or enabling them to excel in their role once in work.

RIDI hosted a roundtable in **October 2018** inviting recruiters, and businesses sharing the same goal to explore how enabling technology can positively impact the Government's pledge to half the disability employment gap over the next **10 years**. The discussion and key recommendations are summarised on the following pages.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY

An attendee, **Ross Linnett**, founder of cloud-based web accessibility solution **Recite Me**, explained how the software - which includes text to speech functionality, dyslexia software, an interactive dictionary and a translation tool with over **100** languages - enables users to customise it in a way that suits them.

With one in five people struggling to access online content - and reports from the **Business Disability Forum** revealing that **71%** of disabled people will click away from websites they struggle to use or access content on - it seems tailored recruitment websites are more crucial now than ever before.

In terms of growing reach, organisations can benefit from web accessibility software such as this, and it also helps businesses to comply with anti-discrimination legislation in the UK, EU and worldwide. Currently an estimated **285** million people have a visual impairment of some kind and **10-15%** of the global population has dyslexia, software programs such as **Recite Me** offer a way for content

to be accessed across all devices and tailored for each individual user.

During the discussion, one point all attendees agreed on is that an absence of software such as this can truly dampen career paths. Ross shared his own personal journey as a jobseeker with dyslexia whereby he opted for roles in industries such as engineering that veered away from writing. While he stressed that everyone has their own experience with the impairment, he described his own battle as being, **“like running, but running uphill.”** It seems, designing websites to an accessibility standard is no longer a ‘nice to have’ but a ‘must have’, a sentiment echoed round the table. Online accessibility needs to become commonplace for organisations today, and it must be a business imperative.



SOURCING THE VERY BEST TALENT

Another attendee who spoke on the day, was **Claire Jones** from **ClearTalents™** In Recruitment; an **online tool** which offers all job applicants a platform to communicate their own individual needs. **ClearTalents** ensures there is no unconscious bias by adopting a progressive disclosure approach, advising the recruiter of the need at the point in the recruitment process it becomes relevant. Hiring managers are then very informed as to when and how to make appropriate adjustments. As Claire explained, **“It’s about educating employers who might be afraid to ask those necessary questions, and bringing new technology to the market place.”** Users can complete a personal profile and the platform, in turn, assesses the information to advise hiring managers on practical suggestions which can assist potential candidates in performing at their best during the recruitment process and working environment. While **80.6%** of people without disabilities are employed, this figure drops dramatically to **49.2%** for those with disabilities. With the Government’s paper on ‘Improving lives and the future of work, health and disability’ mandating employers to increase the recruitment and retention of disabled people and provide an inclusive workplace for them to progress and thrive - this is now an obligation businesses need to be actively working towards.

On the day it was outlined how there is a fear that reasonable adjustments may be perceived by employers as expensive or inconvenient, and this can create an environment where disabled jobseekers don’t want disclose their needs in fear of being pigeon holed. As **Claire** stated, research shows, **“Less than 5% of people would proactively put their hand in the air to disclose a disability.”**

Reasonable adjustments are rarely expensive. For example they may include flexible hours, a quiet space to work or special software. When more expensive adjustments such as a lift, are required, the Government’s Access to Work Fund can usually help. The **average cost** of a reasonable adjustment according to the Disability Rights Commission, is just **£75**. Yet, while the obligation does rest with the employer, online tools such as **ClearTalents™** give disabled candidates a voice where they can state a need for an adjustment explicitly or find out exactly what they need through answering an online questionnaire.

A message which was evident throughout **Claire’s** discussion was that there needs to be help and encouragement for jobseekers during the application process. Recruiters often speak about their struggles to source the very best talent and in today’s market, finding good people is getting tougher and tougher. Attendees round the table also voiced how often an employee will state a disability or impairment only months after starting their role. So what is the solution?

With the help of technology guiding firms on how to help, those with impairments can feel at ease in sharing their disability at the time of application and discussing what kind of workplace changes would benefit them the most. This will ensure that disabled individuals have equal opportunities to put their best foot forward and shine during the interview and on boarding process.



GUIDANT GLOBAL'S JOURNEY

Sharing her firm's story on its Disability Confident journey, **Charlotte Woodward**, Director of People Services at **Guidant Global** contributed largely to the discussion. As a Gold partner of **RIDI**, the company is taking significant steps to engage disabled talent. As **Charlotte** stated, **"We have a lot of information, but not enough confidence and that was the equity we needed to move forward."** Launching a **12** month activity plan to make the biggest difference when both recruiting internal roles and encouraging Guidant consultants to act as advisors to clients on employing disabled people, the brand is reinforcing what it means to be Disability Confident Recruiters. When questioned on the challenges in the first **12** months, **Charlotte** replied **"Reaching everyone. There are about 300 of us at Guidant and ensuring we reach everyone on site and help them understand how they can employ disabled people is not always easy."**

Through the use of webinars and infographics, technology is helping the firm to overcome this hurdle.

Discussion also centred around the use of technology as a great enabler to remove unconscious bias in the recruitment process. For example, attendees looked at using artificial intelligence to anonymise CVs, and adopt 'blind' recruitment processes - but most agreed the online platforms that enhance inclusivity and accessibility for those with disabilities during recruitment are proving most effective in improving disability inclusion.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Attendees on the day overwhelmingly agreed that companies 'delivering through diversity' and embracing different skillsets and backgrounds are repeatedly proven to enhance their business growth and performance. For example, in a data set of over **1,000** companies in over **12** countries **McKinsey reports** that, statistically there is a significant correlation between diverse leadership teams and financial performance. In addition, a study from the **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)** found that disabled individuals outperform every other group for 'innovation' and 'professional ambition'. This leads us back to why companies which aren't utilising technology to engage disabled jobseekers and staff risk missing out on some of the best talent.

Another sentiment echoed was that, despite the awareness many organisations have around disability, the 'old way' of recruiting is still embedded in many practices today. For some companies, the process has not changed for years - but we are now in a digital era and the landscape is adapting. Firms need to make sure they give employees confidence and recognise it is not always about asking the 'right' questions or saying the 'wrong' words,

but trying and asking questions to enable candidates to perform to their strengths. While most attendees agreed we are on the right side of history, where businesses are progressively open to people with disabilities, it's not just about being inclusive, it's about the proactive element and adopting new software to maximise efficiency. This way recruiters and hiring managers can understand exactly what disabled individuals need to level the playing field and widen talent pools.

As a final point that, it was agreed that, to achieve true inclusion, it is up to organisations to pioneer technology to break through the barriers, and see the personal strengths of each individual. Diversity is key to any workplace and this follows **RIDI's** ethos, that disabled employees are an incredibly valuable, yet often overlooked, area of the workforce. Those which are still slow in their approach risk missing out on a rich pool of disabled talent. It requires a collaborative effort but this will allow organisations to choose people who will truly thrive in their environment and have a career they deserve, where their potential will be recognised.

Visit our website to find how you can get involved: www.ridi.org.uk

