**Summary**

A Business Case is a rationale for initiating a project or task. Whether formal and highly structured or informal and brief, a good Business Case will articulate both tangible and intangible benefits to the business for dedicating resources to a project. To be effective, consideration will be given to cost, benefit, and resource gap analysis. A good Business Case also considers the cost and risk of inaction. As more retail, educational, government, social service, and personal communication activities have moved online, the Business Case for web accessibility is stronger than ever.

This article defines the purpose and guides how to construct the Business Case for web accessibility that is appropriate and relevant to organizations of different types. Business performance and current research indicate that accessibility integration can help companies realize these benefits.

* **Drive Innovation:** Accessibility features in products and services often solve unanticipated problems.
* **Enhance Your Brand:** Diversity and inclusion efforts so important to business success are accelerated with a clear, well-integrated accessibility commitment.
* **Extend Market Reach:** The global market of people with disabilities is over 1 billion people with a spending power of more than $6 trillion. Accessibility often improves the online experience for all users.
* **Minimize Legal Risk:** Many countries have laws requiring digital accessibility, and the issue is of increased legal concern.

This article includes statistics, examples, and case studies to illustrate the key benefits and risks. Please note that we use “web accessibility” and “websites” throughout this article and that those terms are meant to include web applications and other digital technologies as well.

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**Who Needs a Business Case for Accessibility?**

“Business Case” is a term relevant to organizations and enterprises of all kinds, whether the organization is commercial, educational, non-profit, or governmental. It is the justification for dedicating resources such as money or effort in support of a specific organizational need. We will use “business” in this article to refer to all types of organizations with the understanding that different aspects will be relevant depending on the organizational focus and purpose. For example, government businesses may be more committed to the legal and equity aspects while commercial businesses care more about the brand enhancement provided by an integrated accessibility program.

Determining which of the many benefits of web accessibility are most relevant in your business environment will help you build the most compelling Business Case for your situation. Use these resources to inspire confidence among leaders and decision makers that continued investment in accessibility is good for your business.

***Businesses that integrate accessibility are more likely to be innovative, inclusive enterprises that reach more people with positive brand messaging that meets emerging global legal requirements.***

A research study of Fortune 100 companies indicates that disability inclusion as part of an overall diversity strategy is common practice among high performing businesses.[1](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:1) When accessibility is part of strategic planning, businesses are more readily equipped for success in our connected world of commerce, academia, and civic engagement.

Let’s look at some examples and research outcomes that will help you make the business case that is most effective in your business environment.

**Accessibility is good for business**

***Many organisations are waking up to the fact that embracing accessibility leads to multiple benefits – reducing legal risks, strengthening brand presence, improving customer experience and colleague productivity.***

Paul Smyth, Head of Digital Accessibility, Barclays

The sections below explore key advantages of web accessibility to businesses of all types. Real world examples are presented to show how benefits are realized in the global marketplace.

**Drive Innovation**

Integrating accessibility sparks innovation by removing architectural, digital, and social barriers that can get in the way.[2](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:2) Some examples:

* Accessible design thinking creates flexible interaction options useful beyond the disabled community.
* Research and development of the artificial retina project to help restore sight for blind patients may also help future robots with real-time image-processing systems, effectively enabling them to “see.” [3](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:3)
* Driverless cars, so promising for the independence of blind people, are projected to also help solve traffic fatalities and congestion.
* Innovations like the typewriter, telephone, punch cards, text to speech, email, and voice controls were initially meant to include those with a disability, and all have found a much broader application.[4](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:4)
* Accessibility is closely related to general usability — both aim to define and deliver a more intuitive user experience.
* Interaction design moves beyond screens when accessibility is a consideration and toward interactions that are more human-centered, natural, and contextual.

Accessible design is by nature flexible, allowing content to faithfully render across a broad spectrum of devices, platforms, assistive technologies, and operating systems. In physical environments, everyone takes advantage of lower curbs, automatic door openers, ramps, and other features provided for disability access. On the web, accessibility features become options that are also often used more widely.

A compelling example of how this works comes from the early 2000’s as the online world increasingly adopted mobile devices to browse the web. Those websites which were accessible and standards-compliant were in many cases more mobile-ready as interaction options were already baked in. Imagine the delight of those who were already committed to and had designed for accessibility! This revelation led to the responsive-design trend that has accessibility at its core.[5](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:5)

Apple development practice is another demonstration of how accessibility can drive innovation. Accessibility is a core value at Apple and always has been. They have been innovators in the accessibility space since the inception of the company, both willing to listen and work with outside constituents. [6](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:6) As well, the company anticipates market direction by integrating disability needs into product development. Examples include:

* **iTunes U:** In the early 2000’s, the 26-campus California State University system was unable to take advantage of Apple’s iTunes U educational program because the application was not fully accessible to blind students. Teachers within the UC system were prohibited from using it. This was resolved by innovation, not litigation as Apple listened to CSU’s concerns and worked to make iTunes accessible on both the Mac and Windows platforms. CSU System was soon able to use the program widely.
* **VoiceOver on iPhone:** Early in the evolution of the iPhone, Apple began considering the implications that a touchscreen device would have on the blind. Iterating over several years behind the scenes, the company invested the resources to develop the voice technology that led to VoiceOver, the world’s first gesture-based screen reader. Within weeks of launch, Apple received a special commendation from the National Federation of the Blind “For designing the first fully accessible touchscreen interface.” [7](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:7)

Screen readers on other touch screen devices have now become more prevalent in the industry, and Apple led the charge in striving for inclusion for all. Innovation from voice interactions lead to the wealth of personal digital assistants now found in many homes and offices. Today millions of people use these devices, regardless of ability.

**Case Study: Google**

***The accessibility problems of today are the mainstream breakthroughs of tomorrow.***

Eve Andersson, lead engineer at Google

A 2016 article in the FastCompany online magazine[8](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:8) highlights how Google’s investment in accessibility provides the company with an innovation edge in a broad array of products and services. Eve Andersson, the lead engineer, featured in the article, says “I’m passionate about accessibility, not just because I believe in a level playing field, but because (it) makes life more liveable for everyone.” Among the innovations cited as examples are these:

* contrast minimums, required for people with low vision, help all people see in bright light glare situations
* auto-complete, initially provided for the disabled, is now widely used by all
* voice control, implemented for blind users, has been more widely adopted as a great convenience by millions of others
* artificial intelligence advances are based on research originally done to provide visual context to blind users
* machine learning, initially developed for auto-captioning for the deaf, is now being turned to broader applications

**Enhance Your Brand**

Fewer things are more important to businesses of all kinds than the protection and enhancement of their brands. A clear commitment to accessibility can demonstrate that a business has a genuine sense of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR.) As businesses understand and act on the diverse needs of their stakeholders and make the commitment to sustainable, inclusive marketing and employment practices, they can achieve a range of benefits. Potential outcomes for CSR programs include enhanced brand image and reputation, increased sales and customer loyalty, improved workforce diversity and many other benefits.[9](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:9)

Further studies[10](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:10) emphasize the benefits to the brand of companies that institute policies of broad diversity. Employing people with disabilities is an essential aspect of creating a diverse workforce. To be successful, the technology that employees use, including websites and applications, must be accessible.

A well-recognized example of how a brand can be affected is Microsoft. After long advocacy and some criticism by accessibility advocates [11](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:11), Microsoft made a real and appreciable commitment to accessibility demonstrated by genuine engagement with stakeholders of all abilities.[12](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:12) The resulting improvements to products and services have strengthened its overall brand image [13](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:13), and accessibility efforts are now lauded in the community of people with disabilities.[14](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:14)

Barclay’s shared their approach to diversity and inclusion through the accessibility initiatives in their company and how that approach has made them a better company.

**Case Study: Barclays**

Establishing an organisation-wide accessibility strategy for identifying, anticipating and addressing the additional needs of customers and colleagues with impairments contributes in several ways to our brand identity – through tailored services, fostering an inclusive culture, creating new ways to communicate and consult with existing and potential customers.

***At Barclays, accessibility is about more than just disability. It's about helping everyone to work, bank and live their lives regardless of their age, situation, abilities or circumstances.***

We want to leverage inclusive technology to enable and empower all people to bank, work and reach their full potential. The Barclays Accessibility team does this by supporting digital teams to embed accessibility into our services and culture through effective governance, partnering, training, and tools. Establishing an enterprise-wide accessibility strategy, standards and programmes coupled with senior sponsorship helps support our publicly stated ambition of becoming the most accessible and inclusive FTSE company.

When we shift our thinking away from the minimum legal compliance to focus instead on the commercial opportunity and the creative challenge of building better experiences for everyone, we create a more sustainable, customer orientated approach to digital information and services.

To help everyone understand Barclays accessibility-focused mindset, we’ve created a range of animations which help our colleagues understand what accessibility is all about, who benefits, and what the different types of impairments are. We’ve also shared these animations on our [Accessible Banking YouTube playlist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75qKCi59E1U&amp=&list=PLecqH2uhOR0Zb31X7hh5BzWJv4KGLnuUy).

Barclay’s demonstrates how a strong commitment to accessibility results in distributed responsibility and shared understanding. Accessibility awareness permeates the company culture. The company is perceived as open and fair. People are proud to work there and to do business with Barclay’s. Read the [full Barclay’s case study](https://www.barclayscorporate.com/content/dam/corppublic/corporate/Documents/Accessibility/bmb-case-study.pdf) to learn more.

**Increase Market Reach**

The market of people with disabilities is large, and it is growing as the global population ages. In the UK, disabled people and their families spend at least £249 billion every year, which is known as the UK Purple Pound. In the US, the annual discretionary spending of people with disabilities is over $200 billion. The global estimate of the disability market is $6 trillion, which is equivalent to that of China. Consider these facts when estimating market size:

* At least one billion people - 15% of the world’s population - have a recognized disability[15](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:15)
* As the population ages, many more acquire disability and yet do not identify as a “person with a disability”[16](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:16)
* In countries with life expectancies of over 70 years of age, people spend 11.5 percent of their lifespan living with a disability.[17](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:17)
* Globally, the extended market is estimated at 2.3 billion people who control an incremental $6.9 trillion in annual disposable income.[18](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:18)

A Forrester study commissioned by Microsoft concluded that accessibility could contribute to cost savings when it is integrated into existing and ongoing development cycles. [19](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:19) Technology updates and redesigns that include accessibility along with other best practices have demonstrated reduced costs for maintenance and service. Moreover, according to Microsoft, as accessibility features are included, overall customer satisfaction improves.

***Designing inclusive software results in improved usability and customer satisfaction.***

Microsoft’s app developer guide

Accessible design considerations often lead to improvements in general customer experience and customer loyalty. For customers with disabilities, such improvement is essential for equal access. Worth noting as well are how accessibility provides options that are useful to all customers in various situations. For example, web accessibility also benefits:

* people using mobile phones, smartwatches, smart TVs, and other devices with small screens, different input modes, etc.,
* older people with changing abilities due to ageing,
* people with “temporary disabilities” such as a broken arm or lost glasses,
* challenging situations like bright, glaring sunlight or in noisy environments where audio can’t be heard,
* those with a slow Internet connection, or who have limited or expensive bandwidth - common in rural areas and some geographical regions.

**Case Study: NPR Weekly Broadcast**

This American Life is a broadcast heard on more than 500 National Public Radio (NPR) stations by about 2.1 million listeners each week in the United States. In 2011, in response to new FCC regulations around broadcast media, the broadcaster committed to creating transcripts for their entire archive of recorded programs. A study by their media partner, conducted over several months, concluded that the provision of transcripts not only met legal obligations but returned significant benefits including:

* search traffic increased 6.86%,
* better comprehension for visitors who use English as a second language,
* visitors were able to use transcripts in noisy or sound-sensitive environments,
* ability to more easily translate, and
* ability to search text to reference a specific section of audio.

The study, conducted over more than one year, used Google analytics to capture the following data:

* visitor engagement increased 7.23%,
* unique visitors increased 4.18%, and
* new inbound links to transcript accounted for an increase of 3.89%

Read more detail and the full report of the [This American Life Case Study](https://www.3playmedia.com/customers/case-studies/this-american-life/) and how it was conducted.

**Minimize Legal Risk**

A significant demonstration of the risk of ignoring accessibility requirements was the 2008 settlement by the National Federation of the Blind with Target retailers:

* class damages of $6 million
* plaintiff legal fees over $3 million
* undisclosed defense legal fees
* court oversight of website for several years

Consideration of the cost and risk of inaction is a critical aspect of any Business Case. The risks are real if companies ignore requirements for web accessibility. The cost of litigation and remediation can be significant as more governments recognize and legislate in favor of the universal right to participate in online digital information and services.

As web use is woven into modern life all over the world, regulators began to mandate laws and policies that strengthen the rights of people with disabilities. One of the earliest indications that there could be legal consequences to web accessibility was a complaint put to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) in 2000 about the inaccessibility of the website of the Sydney Olympics. The plaintiff claimed the site was a violation of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992.[20](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:20)

The 2001 decision in the Sydney Olympics suit[21](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:21) raised awareness of the need to address accessibility in the emerging practice of web communication. Over time, the legal risk increased with the adoption of more specific laws and policies in countries throughout the world.

* The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) is a comprehensive human rights document that includes a direct reference to the rights of all people to have equal access to communications technology. Passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, more than 140 countries ratified it by 2016.
* The European Commission adopted the European Accessibility Act, requiring ATMs and banking services, PCs, telephones and TV equipment, telephony and audio-visual services, transport, e-books, and e-commerce meet accessibility requirements.
* In the US, the number of legal actions continues to rise and courts increasingly decide in favor of equal access[22](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:22), often citing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.) Structured Negotiation is another way that legal pressure is brought to bear, encouraging companies to meet accessibility requirements while avoiding litigation. [23](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:23)

Change occurs incrementally and steadily. Legislation continues to define digital accessibility further, creating enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with new laws. An example is Norway where it is now illegal for commercial websites to fail to provide equivalent access for people with disabilities. The government fines commercial companies that do not comply.[24](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:24) Austria has had customer protection regulation in place since 2006 requiring most public websites to meet accessibility standards. Customers that believe they have been discriminated against can take legal action. Parties meet in mediation before they are permitted to go to court. In the United States, by contrast, the regulation is less clear but legal action continues to accelerate [25](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/#fn:25). Between government oversight and regulation on the one hand, and increased legal action on the other, the legal landscape is rapidly changing in favor of equal access.

***With legal risks increasing, smart businesses - particularly those with global activities - are creating accessibility policies and programs to mitigate risk to protect both their assets and their reputations.***

**Case Study: ADA and Website Accessibility**

The case was heard in the U. S. District Court of the Southern District of Florida, Case No. 16-23020. Winn-Dixie is a regional chain of grocery stores, some of which maintain pharmacies. The blind plaintiff was Juan Carlos Gil who shopped at the store in person but was unable to access the website for such information as the store locator, coupons, store events, and specials. The historic suit was the first trial in the history of the ADA about the accessibility of a public accommodation’s website. Winn-Dixie asked the court to dismiss the suit based on their contention that a website is not a public accommodation covered by Title III of the ADA. The court deemed otherwise, allowed the plaintiff to recover attorney fee. The decision included the following conclusions by the court:

* The link between the website and Winn-Dixie Stores was a circumstance that made Title III of the ADA, applicable to “Public Accommodations,” relevant in this situation.
* Website must be made accessible to *“individuals with disabilities who use computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.”*
* Required the store to adopt and post an explicit Accessibility Policy *“to ensure the persons with disabilities have full and equal enjoyment of its website and shall accompany the public policy statement with an accessible means of submitting accessibility questions and problems.”*
* Required annual accessibility training for IT and web staff, so they learn to create and maintain content that meets WCAG criteria.
* Required that any third-party applications or content posted to the Winn-Dixie site must also meet WCAG requirements.

**Share your experience**

User experience research and case studies confirm the many ways that accessible design supports an organization’s ability to innovate, enhance their brand, increase market reach, and minimize legal risk - among many other benefits. The WAI is a global community of practice, and we encourage you to share your examples. If you have a story of how your commitment to accessibility improved your online business model, please submit it via email to wai-eo-editors@w3.org or post it to the [WAI-Engage wiki](https://www.w3.org/community/wai-engage/wiki/Case_studies).

**Conclusion**

Public use of the Internet is more than 25 years old. The web is no longer a novelty but an integrated, critical tool of modern life. As smart businesses integrate accessible design into their development and procurement processes, they understand the need for equal access by all people. The legal risks of ignoring accessibility are significant, and the benefits have also been demonstrated by leaders like Apple, Barclay’s, NPR, IBM, Microsoft and hundreds more. Business leaders and the advocates who influence them can have a tremendous social impact and healthy ROI as they follow a roadmap that leads to equal access. More than one billion people with disabilities in the world are eager to engage with you as customers, clients, partners, employees, and equal participants in civic and social activities. By developing a long-term commitment to accessibility and by using WAI resources to develop policy and implement a strategy to bring that commitment to life, your business will reach this market and is likely to thrive in unexpected and self-sustaining ways.

**Resources**

This article was written after reading and exploring many external resources that shaped our understanding of the current landscape. We have provided links and notes about our research in this [Annotated Bibliography](https://w3c.github.io/wai-bcase/teach-advocate/business-case/bibliography/).

Also, the WAI website has an extensive library of useful support to help companies realize the benefits outlined in this article for integrating accessibility into their development, procurement, and general business practice. Listed below are a few of what we consider especially useful as you start your accessibility program.

* [Developing Organizational Accessibility Policies](https://www.w3.org/WAI/planning/org-policies/) Start with a clear policy.
* [Planning and Managing Accessibility](https://www.w3.org/WAI/planning-and-managing/) A guide for implementation.
* [Perspective Videos](https://www.w3.org/WAI/perspective-videos/) Watch how accessibility impacts users.

These are suggested merely to get started. We hope you will explore throughout the WAI site as you dive deeper into accessibility and begin to realize the related benefits for you and your organization.