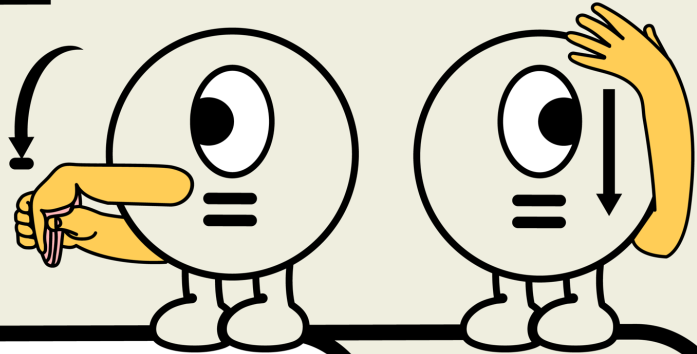


the



inclusive code

Executive summary

Introducing, The Inclusive Code.

Aotearoa is officially a superdiverse nation. Yet many communities are often overlooked or underrepresented in marketing, advertising and communications.

Excluding audiences is not only detrimental to society, but a major missed opportunity to deliver better commercial or organisational outcomes.

The Inclusive Code is a support to help the industry improve their practice.

The Inclusive Code is a series of insider's guides designed in partnership with communities that deserve better, more authentic inclusion in our work.

Executive summary

The Inclusive Code: Chapter 1

The first chapter of The Inclusive Code has been co-created with a rōpū of leaders and experts within the disabled community.

Through the process of co-creation, we discovered the greatest barriers to inclusion, are harmful 'habits', or default ways of approaching disability. These habits are commonplace, and usually well intentioned, making them difficult to identify as exclusionary and problematic.

These habits include:

Perfect excuse

Gatekeeping

Cherry picking

Tunnel
visioning

Babying

This guide will help you identify these habits, offering some actions that will help you disrupt exclusionary thinking in your own practice, organisation, and even personal life.

What is The Inclusive Code?

The Inclusive Code is a series of tools, co-created to help us overcome barriers to change.

Use this guide to help you think differently about disability in marketing and advertising.

We have identified five common habits (or pitfalls) marketing practitioners encounter when approaching disability in their work.

These habits are commonplace, and usually well intentioned, making them difficult to identify as exclusionary and problematic.

This guide will help you identify these habits along with misconceptions that accompany each, offering some actions that will help you disrupt exclusionary thinking in your own practice, organisation, and even personal life.

Habit: Perfect Excuse Gatekeeping Cherry Picking

Perfect Excuse

Let's get started

Creative Partner SPECIAL Digital Partner NEW TERRITORY

Online Tool

Plain Language Guide

People understand plain language

Information in plain language is easier and cheaper to translate into alternate formats.

Know your audience.

Use everyday language that readers are familiar with.

Use short, clear sentences (15-20 words).

One idea in a sentence is best.

Keep paragraphs short with one subject in one paragraph.

Avoid using a multi-syllable word when a shorter one will do.

Avoid jargon, acronyms, technical words and details. If you must use an acronym, always provide a full version the first time you mention it.

Use active rather than passive verbs, e.g. "All government agencies signed the Charter" rather than "the Charter was signed by all government agencies".

Use "you" and "we".

Give straightforward instructions, e.g. "please sign this Charter".

Be helpful, human and polite.

It's okay to use bulleted lists.

Use clear print principles

The following information has been reproduced with permission from the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc.

Make body size 12 point type the minimum size recommended for a general audience and 16 point the minimum size recommended for people with vision impairment/low vision, or people with learning disability.

Use a strong sans-serif font, such as Arial.

Avoid highly stylised or simulated handwriting and typefaces.

Typefaces are available in different weights. Avoid light options because there is less contrast between paper and text.

Avoid italics, which can make text difficult to read for some people.

Bold type can be used to emphasise text.

Avoid using all capital letters in words. The human eye reads by recognising the shape of words and a word in all capitals interferes with this recognition.

SPECIAL

Written Report

Habit 1

The perfect excuse

'Using the perfect excuse' is the approach of holding yourself to standards so high, you can't reach them. These standards force you to opt out, instead of progressing imperfectly.

How to beat it

Redefine 'commitment' as consistent steps, not single showstoppers.

Foster long-term relationships with disabled consultants.

Be transparent. Show your limits and set expectations.

Always close the loop on consultation, even when you can't fully implement advice.

Use your voice to share the experts' advice.

SPECIAL

Take-Away Cards

The case for inclusivity

The industry has significant influence

The industry has considerable power.

Significant money is invested into the dissemination of the important messages to the masses.

With power comes great influence.

The ubiquitousness of marketing efforts, means the industry is one of the major forces influencing societal views, establishing dominant narratives, perceptions and stereotypes.

As an industry we have an obligation to wield this influence responsibly.

\$3.359 B

Advertising spend in Aotearoa in 2023.

ASA, 2024

Inclusivity supports relevance

New Zealand is officially considered 'super diverse'.

It has the fourth highest proportion of overseas-born residents among the OECD nations. Auckland has been ranked as the fourth most ethnically diverse city in the world. 1 in 5 people are of Māori descent. 1.1 million are aged over 60, and almost 5% are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

When we're not designing our work with diversity in mind, we risk becoming irrelevant to large parts of society.

Stats NZ, 2023, Ministry of Ethnic Peoples

1 / 4

Of NZ's population born overseas.

Stats NZ, 2020

Including commonly excluded communities provides major opportunity

Inclusivity is not just a moral imperative, or a 'feel good' action. It provides a major commercial opportunity too. The spending power of underserved communities is considerable:

\$27.92 T

Global spending power of disabled people and their families.

Purple Goat, 2023

\$6.489 T

Global spending power of LGBTQIA+ community.

Forbes, 2024

\$50 M

Spending power of Māori in Aotearoa.

OCG Career Makers, 2023

Inclusivity improves effectiveness

Evidence from around the world shows embracing inclusivity can improve the effectiveness of advertising across a number of brand health indicators and commercial outcomes.

43%

Higher purchase consideration for brands with progressive advertising.

WARC, 2024

29%

Higher loyalty for brands with progressive advertising.

WARC, 2024

+16%

In long-term sales for brands with progressive advertising.

WARC, 2024

20%

More likely to drive brand choice when adverts feature positive female representation.

IPSOS, 2023

+53

In brand equity when advertising shows under-represented groups in a positive way.

Kantar, 2024

Introducing The Inclusive Code

What is The Inclusive Code?

A series of tools co-created with marginalised communities.

Empowering practitioners to make work that truly connects and represents.

How will The Inclusive Code help?

While there is a solid case to create change that make the industry itself, and our outputs more effective, change can feel hard.

People don't have the lived experience, skills, or understanding to know what to do. It can be daunting to dive in.

The Inclusive Code has been created to help people overcome these barriers.

These tools bring together lived experience and sector expertise to get people past initial barriers, toward a path forward.

I don't have any experience so I can't add value

It'll cost too much and take too long to do properly

I don't want to get it wrong

It doesn't quite fit with the creative vision

I'm pretty sure I'm getting it right already...

How is The Inclusive Code developed?

Development approach

Partners:

Partner with leaders in the focus community to design the approach for creating the resource.

Collective of contributors:

Bring together a collective of contributors with diverse lived experiences and expertise to shape the content.

Iterative development:

To centre the guidance of contributors with lived experiences, there is no pre-determined output, this should be shaped by the broader team through the development process.

Foundation principles

The approach for developing this resource, was underpinned by four key principles.

'Nothing about us, without us'

- Disabled people with lived-experience should be at the centre of creating the solution.

A collective of voices

- No single voice can speak for an entire community, guidance should be informed by multiple contributors and perspectives.

Progress over perfection

- Industry practitioners have competing demands, limited resources and varying levels of knowledge about disability. There is no silver bullet solution that will be universally useful. We set out to create something that would help to keep progressing on their journey.

More doing, less thinking

- Change happens in action, not in thinking. We wanted to create something people could quickly put into practice, rather than a high level 'thought piece.'

Chapter 1 of The Inclusive Code: Disability

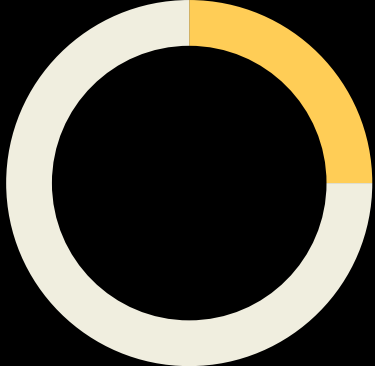
Chapter 1: Disability

The first chapter of The Inclusive Code focuses on the inclusion of the disabled community.

This focus acknowledges that disabled people make up a quarter of the population, but are underrepresented in our industry with only 8% of practitioners having lived experience with disability.

Better representation of disability in the industry workforce will contribute to more inclusivity — this resource is not a replacement for pursuing that goal — but we hope it will help to bridge the knowledge gap as we work toward that goal. We also believe that elevating knowledge will create a more welcoming workplace that will attract a more diverse workforce.

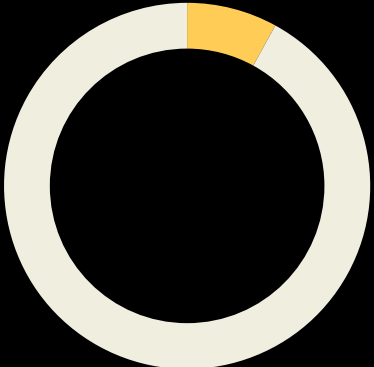
Underrepresented in the industry



25%

Of New Zealanders have a physical, sensory, learning, mental health or other disability.

Office of Disability Issues, 2023



8%

Of New Zealand's marketing and communications industry have lived experience with disability.

Global DEI Census 2023 Aotearoa Market Report, 2023

Lead authors

The co-authors of the first chapter resource (disability) are a collective of lived-experience experts and advocates (The Collective).

They bring varied experience and expertise both in terms of disability (lived and advocacy work), and relevant subject matter (advertising and marketing, writing, music, disability training, teaching, and disability role development).



Pati Umaga

My name is Fonoti Pati Umaga, I am a musician and an advocate for Pacific and Disabled communities. In 2005 I had a fall that left me with a disability. I received the Queens Service Medal (QSM) in the [2012 New Year Honours](#). In 2016 I travelled to Samoa to receive the matai (Chief) title Fonoti. In 2019 I was the first recipient of [Creative New Zealand's Arts Pasifika Awards](#), Pacific Toa Award and inducted into the Attitude Awards Hall of Fame that same year. I currently work as a Senior Adviser Pacific and Disability at the Crown Response Unit. I am also producing and recording three music projects.



Grace Stratton

Grace started All is for All when she was just 19, while studying a Law and Comms Double Degree at AUT. Since then, she's seen All is for All grow from strength to strength. Grace has worked with a wide range of industries – from government agencies to big-name fashion labels – all in the name of creating change. Her work has landed her on some major lists, including InStyle Magazine's Badass 50 in 2019, and Forbes's 30 under 30 in 2021. But for Grace, the biggest highlight so far is seeing All is for All connect so many people with so many new opportunities.

Co-authors



Sean Prenter

Sean advocates with his disabled peers as Co-President of the New Zealand National Disabled Students' Association while completing his Masters in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. He has represented New Zealand at the Global Disability Summit 2022, CAMP2030 New York 2023, and as a 2024 Prime Minister's Scholar to India, championing access, inclusion and dignity.



Hope Cotton

Hope is a Deaf and disabled advocate based in Te Whanganui A Tara Wellington. Hope has been involved in many community advocacy groups. She is currently studying Political Communication and English Literature at Te Herenga Waka. In her free time, you can find her writing poetry or baking.



Shane McInroe

Shane McInroe is a dedicated advocate for the rights of disabled people and is deeply committed to seeing the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) principles put into practice. As a member of the National Leadership Team for Enabling Good Lives, Shane brings his wealth of experience and passion to the forefront of disability advocacy.



Thomas Chin

Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whaoa

Thomas is a law graduate with Cerebral Palsy. Within his various roles throughout the disability space, he applies a disability lens across industries. Being of Chinese and Māori heritage, Thomas passionately integrates his culture into his work and various other kaupapa.



Karen Pointon QSM

Ngapuhi Te Iwi
Ngati Hine Te Hapu
Ko Karen Pointon toku ingoa.

I am Deaf and use NZSL to communicate. My husband is profoundly Deaf, too. I have a passion to work alongside Tāngata Turi me Tāngata Whaikaha o Aotearoa. I am committed to working in partnership with Māori and disability organisations.



JG

J is a public servant born with a communication disorder. He holds multiple master's degrees from different New Zealand universities and prefers anonymity.

“I think that, for me, one of the ultimate goals is that we want disabled people to be leading the change rather than being led, which is what has always happened to us in the past. People keep putting their own perspectives on us as to how we should be represented or how we should be portrayed. But I think what [The Inclusive Code] could potentially challenge that”

Fonotī Pati Umaga, ‘The Inclusive Code’ lead author

Defining disability

Disability is conceptualised in different ways. The most common models include:

- The Medical Model
- The Social Model
- The Human Rights Model

The Social Model says that people are disabled by way that society is constructed — systemic barriers, derogatory barriers or social exclusion — not their body.

The Human Rights Model recognises disability is a natural part of human diversity and that diversity must be respected and supported in all its forms.

The Inclusive Code subscribes to the Social Model of Disability and the Human Rights Model, therefore we use the term 'disabled people' throughout. We acknowledge some people prefer other terminology.

Medical Model

Where disability is a disease or defect within an individual.

Social Model

Where disability is a socially constructed phenomenon.

Human Rights Model

Where disability is a normal part of human diversity.

The issue: Lack of visibility

International figures show extremely low levels of visibility of disability in advertising with only 1% of primetime ads featuring disabled people.

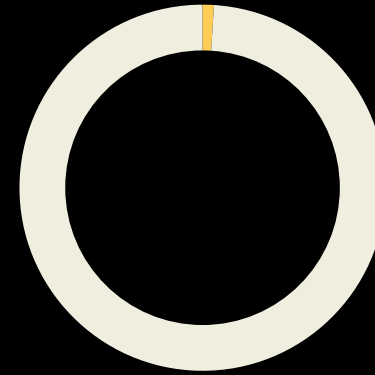
A lack of visibility fuels societal ignorance through a lack of exposure of disabled people, their culture, and the diversity of disability.

Advertisers are hesitant to include disabled people in their advertisements out of a fear of getting it wrong and harming both disabled communities and their own brand image. It can be seen as timely, and labour intensive, involving processes that they're unfamiliar with.

Despite this, within the broader public, we see a desire for change, 75% of people believe that level of visibility is not good enough.

AANA 2023, Forbes 2021

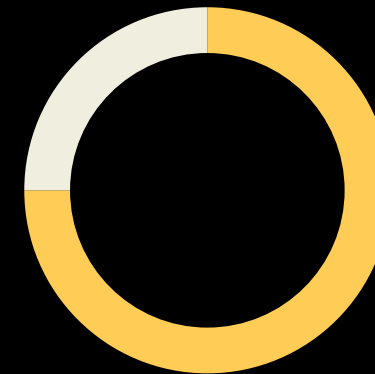
Underrepresented in the industry



1%

**Of primetime ads
feature disabled people.**

Nielsen, 2021



75%

**Of people think representation
of disabled people in
advertising is not good enough.**

Dylan Alcott Foundation X TRA, 2024

The issue: Misrepresentation

Even when disabled people are visible, the disabled experience is often misrepresented.

Misrepresentations, stem from some common issues:

Limited definition of disability

Casting is commonly restricted to visible disabilities and for products and services targeted at disabled communities, these are frequently health or personal care categories, namely pharmaceuticals.

Nielson, 2021

Tick box representation

Disabled people's involvement can be approached as a tick box activity, rather than a genuine commitment towards better outcomes. This results in the bare minimum and leaves disabled individuals feeling like they're being used as props in ads, rather than being empowered to authentically represent the communities they belong to.

Reynolds, 2022

Uninformed narratives

Depictions of disability are commonly done through the lens of non-disabled people. Disabled people are cast, rather than consulted in the ad-making process. This results in advertisements that rely on uninformed narratives and perpetuate assumptions of non-disabled.

Unilever, 2023

The issue: Misrepresentation (stereotypes)

Stereotypes that misrepresent the disabled experience reinforce problematic perceptions. Common ones include:

The villain is led astray by their disability-related suffering, often with a mental illness and tendency for violence.

The hero is portrayed as an extraordinary talent 'despite' their disability.

The victim is commonly used to evoke sympathy (e.g. charities seeking donations) They are portrayed as helpless and need to be "saved".

The butt-of-the-joke is when disabled people are used as entertainment for non-disabled. They are made fun of in a way that results in people laughing at them, not with them.

Lastly, **the innocent**, is where disabled people are shown as naive, sweet, angelic and childlike, often to expose the flaws of a non-disabled character and play into the storyline of redemption, making disabled people feel more like a prop. It is patronising, makes disabled people look vulnerable; perpetuating a desire to 'protect' them.

Aruma, 2019; Timke, 2019; Bauer, 2005; Kartchner, 2021

Stereotyping

The hero, villain, angel, victim, innocent, or butt-of-the-joke.

Timke, 2019

Inspiration porn

Exceptional stories for non-disabled.

Holland et al., 2023

Neglect of intersectionality

Focusing on disability as the whole person.

JustCopy, 2022

Medicalisation

Seeing a disability as a disease to be cured.

Khan, 2022

The issue: Misrepresentation (limited narratives)

Misrepresentation also stems from limited narratives, common ones include:

‘Inspiration Porn’, a phenomenon where a disabled person becomes a tool for inspiring those without disabilities.

Neglect of intersectionality reduces identities down to one thing, framing disability as the whole of a person. This narrow-minded view does not capture the complexities of individuals or the different communities they identify with.

Reducing people solely to their disabilities creates societal barriers, emphasising the disability over the person and hindering a holistic view of their identity. It also neglects to recognise the struggles they may face being a part of several underserved communities.

Medicalisation, is a medical lens that depicts disability as something that needs to be fixed or cured. This approach, coinciding with the neglect of intersectionality, further reduces a disabled person's identity to their condition. It also presents disability as a negative aspect of their identity, or a problem, and positions non-disabled as superior, creating a divide and generating societal pity.

Just Copy, 2022; Khan, 2012; Office for Disability Issues, 2023

Stereotyping

The hero, villain, angel, victim, innocent, or butt-of-the-joke.

Timke, 2019

Inspiration porn

Exceptional stories for non-disabled.

Holland et al., 2023

Neglect of intersectionality

Focusing on disability as the whole person.

JustCopy, 2022

Medicalisation

Seeing a disability as a disease to be cured.

Khan, 2022

“I had such a big expectation on me because all the disabled people I saw in the media were either “so sad, don't be them” or like, “I'm so angelic and inspirational and perfect”. I felt like that in order to be worthy of any kind of love or affection, I had to be perfect. I put so much pressure on myself and that validation that my mental health got really bad. I just felt like I couldn't be human and acknowledged for my worth, unless I was this perfect person that was never a burden. I had never met other disabled people. So, I just put all the stereotypes I saw on the TV onto myself. I think it's really important for disabled people to see themselves in the media for it to be good representation and a positive representation.”

Hope, 'The Inclusive Code' co-author

The issue: Poor accessibility (standards)

Beyond the problems with portrayal there is one fundamental human right that is not being met by a significant portion of advertising; accessibility.

Approximately a fifth of New Zealand's population has difficulty accessing media content. This means a substantial proportion of advertising fails to reach or doesn't effectively engage d/Deaf and disabled people, contributing to societal inequity.

Although there are some existing standards, they are not being activated in a satisfactory way, they are not specific to the industry, they are fragmented and they are largely forgotten. Activist groups and industry bodies have developed guidelines, but there is no one-stop shop for practitioners to find everything they need to ensure they are appropriately meeting accessibility standards.

Able, 2023

Lack of
Standards

NZSL Video
Interpretation

Captions

Text
Presentation

Plain Language

The issue:

Poor accessibility (language options)

Often information is not provided in different formats that consider different needs and preferences, for example, some useful options include:

NZSL video interpretation is where sign language translation for both pre-recorded and live videos is provided. This is crucial because English is often not the first language of d/Deaf individuals, meaning that reading captions demands additional effort. This creates further inequity and potential harm for d/Deaf people, especially when communicating high-stake and emergency information.

Captioning on videos displays text on videos that narrate spoken words and other meaningful sounds. There are specific guidelines for captioning videos that need to be considered so that it is a positive experience for those who rely on captions. This includes synchronisation of captions, web accessibility standards, open or closed caption, and thinking about what is considered a 'meaningful sound'.

New Zealand Government, 2022

Lack of
Standards

NZSL Video
Interpretation

Captions

Text
Presentation

Plain Language

The issue:

Poor accessibility (presentation styles)

How information is presented impacts how disabled people (often those with learning disabilities or people who are hard of hearing and d/Deaf) can process the information effectively.

There are two main ways of presenting information to consider:

Making things easy to read.

Things such as; avoiding the use of all capital letters, breaking text down into short sentences, reducing the amount of text used, using a minimum of 14pt for fonts and avoiding italics or linking fonts can make information easier to process. There are some existing guidelines that are worth reviewing but it's important to consider your specific communication task in their application (e.g. signage font size, vs. document fonts size).

Using Plain Language.

Plain Language guidance includes simplifying language and giving an explanation to important words or terms.

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2023

Lack of Standards

NZSL Video Interpretation

Captions

Text Presentation

Plain Language

“It is an equal right of a person to be able to access media like everyone else and be treated the same way. New Zealand media is excluding an entire community. Hearing loss is isolating enough in itself. We feel a disconnection from society already...”

Natasha Gallardo, CEO for The National Foundation for the Deaf

The Inclusive Code: 5 habits to break

How to use this guide

This guide is...
A way of thinking

This guide is a tool to help you think differently about disability in marketing and advertising.

It is our hope that it will help you peel away some dated modes of thinking that have been inherited and start you on the journey of creating a more inclusive industry to pass on to the next generation.

This guide is not...
A formula

This is not a a step-by-step recipe for inclusion. We wish we could create that, but inclusion is a living, breathing practice. It can't live only as a set of rules, it must also live in our hearts and minds.

We hope you come to this guide with curiosity, that the ideas shared stick with you, and that you can bring them to life in your work. That is the only way they will have any meaning at all.

Five habits to break

We have identified five common pitfalls marketing practitioners encounter when approaching disability in their work.

These ways of operating are commonplace, and usually well intentioned, making them difficult to identify as exclusionary, difficult to call out as problematic, and ultimately, difficult to replace with more inclusive practices.

In this guide, we will help you identify these habits, shine a light on the common misconceptions that accompany these habits, and offer some provocations that will help you disrupt exclusionary thinking in your own practice, in your organisations, and even in your own personal life.

Perfect excuse

Gatekeeping

Cherry picking

**Tunnel
visioning**

Babying

Habit 1: The perfect excuse

Habit 1: The perfect excuse

What it is:

Using the 'Perfect Excuse' is the approach of holding yourself to standards so high, you can't reach them. These standards force you to opt out, instead of progressing imperfectly.

Why it matters:

Much of the change that happens in organisations happens by doing, not talking. Taking steps, whatever we can, provides tangible proof, short-term encouragement, and increased confidence to keep going. If we wait to be well-resourced experts before we begin, we slow down progress.

How to beat it...

Habit 1: The perfect excuse

Misconception:

‘We don’t have the resources to do it properly, and we don’t want to undercook it.’

Reality:

There is opportunity for engagement in any project regardless of time and budget. The key is in nurturing enduring relationships with disabled partners and in demonstrating long-term commitment to transitioning to more inclusive practices.

With this backdrop, engagements on certain jobs can be light-touch and brief without being tokenistic and transactional. Additionally, you can be transparent about your constraints without being ‘undercooked’.

Action:

Approach inclusive practices as small, consistent actions, versus one off major initiatives.

Habit 1: The perfect excuse

Misconception:

‘It’s better to leave it to the experts.’

Reality:

Building capability in creating more inclusive work is valuable for all advertising practitioners by keeping your way of working current and effective.

People often feel uncomfortable championing disability when they’re not an expert, but the experts rely on others working in the industry to support their whakaaro.

Think of a topic you often speak about in your work that you’re not a published expert in e.g. marketing effectiveness. If you chose to never speak about it, how would this negatively impact the work or your organisation?

Action:

Even if you aren’t an expert, use your influence to represent their wisdom.

Habit 1: The perfect excuse

Misconception:

‘You’ll burn bridges with consultants if you don’t implement their advice fully.’

Reality:

There are many competing demands on projects. Disabled consultants are aware of the constraints if they have been fully engaged on the project. It is more important to explain to your partners what advice has and hasn't been acted on, and why some advice hasn't been acted on, than try to hide it.

Action:

Always ‘close the loop’. Set expectations at the outset of your limitations and be transparent about what has and hasn’t been included.

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

What it is:

‘Gatekeeping’ is when people downplay what ‘accessibility’ means, when accessibility should be considered, and to what extent it should be applied.

Typically, this results in accessibility standards being re-defined as ‘well-designed’ and ‘simple’ or only being fully applied when it is mandated e.g when it is a legal requirement.

Why it matters:

‘Gatekeeping’ means disabled people have their information filtered for them by default. For organisations trying to communicate, it means their messages aren’t always getting through effectively.

How to beat it...

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Accessibility is an added extra investment that is only required when you’re specifically targeting disabled people.’

Reality:

Making communications accessible for disabled people benefits everyone. Most accessibility requirements are simple and easily manageable from the start (e.g. avoiding all caps or using accessible colour combinations).

Costs arise only when accessibility is an afterthought, leading to last-minute changes and additional versions.

Action:

Add a simple ‘accessibility’ guide as part of all project kick-offs.

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Beautiful, well-crafted design transcends disabilities.’

Reality:

What is currently considered ‘well-crafted design’ doesn’t always consider the way disabled people process information.

Colours need to be high contrast, all caps and italics can be difficult to read, and minimum pt. size recommendations are often too small.

Action:

Redefine ‘well-crafted design’ to include accessibility standards. Find the guide [here](#).

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Plain, simple, well-written English will be understood by the majority of English speakers.’

Reality:

People with learning disabilities, low levels of literacy, English language learners, d/Deaf and some older people can find standard written information difficult to process.

Easy Read is a way of communicating information using straightforward language, clear sentence structure, and supporting pictures.

Action:

Consider translating your text into Easy Read. Find a guide [here](#).

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Having written language is enough for Deaf communities.’

Reality:

NZ Sign Language is the natural language of our d/Deaf community, meaning it is their first language before English. As with all language, NZSL has embedded within the language many aspects of d/Deaf culture.

Expecting Deaf people to communicate in written English can be equivalent to them communicating in a second language.

Action:

If it's for all of Aotearoa, say it in New Zealand Sign Language. If you want to make written language more accessible to the d/Deaf community, consider writing the translations as simply as possible.

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Hashtags and emojis are a way to add meaning for everyone.’

Reality:

People with low vision typically use screen readers. Both Hashtags and Emojis can cause issues for screen readers.

For example, emojis when used inline read like this:

Moving day [house with garden][grinning face with smiling eyes] check out my new [dog face] neighbour [face with stuck-out tongue and squinting eyes][smiling face with heart eyes].

Action:

Limit emoji and hashtag use in captions. Avoid using them in a sentence to replace a word. If they're included, use them at the end of the caption in limited numbers.

Habit 2: Gatekeeping

Misconception:

‘Content warnings are for the content of communications, not the style.’

Reality:

If there are a lot of flashing or quick changing clips, this could trigger someone with epilepsy, so a trigger warning might be warranted.

Action:

Add content warnings on flashing or fast-changing clips.

Imagine you have a seizure because someone failed to label the flashing in their ad?

Habit 3: Cherry picking

Habit 3: Cherry picking

What is is:

‘Cherry picking’ is the act of selectively engaging with disability only in ways that are comfortable.

This might look like only asking for consultation from experts who ‘get it’ (e.g. those that agree with you) or including disabled characters, but only as ‘side-kicks’.

Why it matters:

‘Cherry picking’ masquerades as progressing efforts to improve disability inclusion but ultimately maintains the status quo.

When non-disabled people decide what disabled voices are heard, this centers non-disabled perspectives, ultimately making them the curators of disabled narratives.

Selective depictions reinforce the same limiting stories about disability.

How to beat it...

Habit 3: Cherry picking

Misconception:

‘Including disabled people as main characters is only important when they’re our target audience.’

Reality:

Representing disabled people is often overlooked unless we’re promoting products and services specifically for the disabled community. When included, it’s often used as a ‘prop’ for main characters (e.g. showing how caring they are).

Disabled people consume all things that non-disabled people do, like clothing, food, transport etc. We don’t need to wait until we’re advertising disability-specific products to include disabled people.

Action:

Try considering disability even when you don’t think you have a ‘reason’.

Habit 3: Cherry picking

Misconception:

‘As long as someone from the disabled community gives positive feedback, we’re good.’

Reality:

Lived-experience does not automatically prepare someone to provide guidance.

Consultants need a range of skills to appropriately consult on ways to connect with and represent the disabled community as a whole.

Imagine you’re the only woman in a meeting where people are debating whether a concept is feminist or not. People ask you to decide and your opinion will be used as the sole evidence for proceeding.

Action:

Work with experts who have lived experience, technical expertise, and are connected into the communities they are speaking for.

Habit 3: Cherry picking

Misconception:

‘Testing with disabled audiences is the best way to check your work is inclusive.’

Reality:

Testing gives us clues, not advice. Gathering insight from clues gained from a sub-culture often needs someone with lived-experience to be able to decipher them.

Action:

Plan a couple of ‘check-ins’ in your process, rather than a test at the end.

If someone asks your opinion once the work is 90% complete, the client is sold, and the deadline is approaching fast. Can you really make change?

Habit 3: Cherry picking

Misconception:

'If a disabled person is included on the team, they'll make sure we're inclusive.'

Reality:

As with any kind of collaboration, the environment has a huge impact on the outputs. Consultants are often unable to meaningfully contribute because the environment itself is not accessible, or other team members do not have the skills required to effectively collaborate with disabled contributors.

Action:

Make a disability collaboration plan that includes the environment needed, and the pre-work required from all team members.

Find a guide to disability etiquette [here](#).

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

What is is:

‘Tunnel Visioning’ is the act of seeing the experience of disability in a narrow way.

This includes:

- Seeing disability as the defining aspect of a disabled person’s identity, rather than seeing them as a multi-faceted person.
- Seeing disability primarily as a physical disability.
- Seeing disability as a negative experience to overcome, or ideally, cure.

Why it matters:

When we see disability through this narrow lens, we create communications that do not reflect the reality of many disabled people’s experience and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

How to beat it...

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

Misconception:

'Most disabled people would prefer to not be disabled.'

Reality:

Many disabled people would choose to keep their disability if presented with the choice.

Disabled people experience the world differently, this shapes their skills, interests, sense of identity, and perspectives, often in positive ways. Their diverse and nuanced insights and experiences challenge conventional narratives and fuel innovation, enriching society on a greater level.

Action:

Imagine the lights have gone out and it is pitch black. Who can 'see', you or the blind person?

Think about the benefits of being disabled and how you might utilise or represent these strengths in your work.

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

Misconception:

‘Being disabled, is the experience of ‘missing’ an ability.’

Reality:

Disabled people are dis-abled by the barriers that have been designed into the world around them, not by themselves. If the world was designed to be inclusive, disabled people could operate with ease.

Action:

Think about how you might do things differently if inclusivity was the baseline, not a bolt-on.

Imagine it’s announced that from tomorrow, no advertising will be permitted to have sound or colour on any channel. How would this change the way you design your campaigns?

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

Misconception:

‘Having a disability would define your experience of life.’

Reality:

A disability is just one part of a person’s identity. Disabled people are multi-dimensional, and the other aspects of their identity influence how they experience their disability.

Imagine you’re reviewing a customer persona and the only characteristic included is age. How might this limit your ability to effectively design solutions for this customer group?

Action:

When considering disabled people, consider the other aspects of their identity that shape who they are.

Habit 4: Tunnel visioning

Misconception:

'We have disabled representation by casting <someone with a physical disability>.'

Reality:

Disabilities can manifest in a multitude of ways including cognitive, emotional, sensory, and physical variations. Showing limited depictions of disability can contribute to a lack of awareness and sense of invisibility.

Action:

Champion the diversity of disabled experiences. Full list of impairments available [here](#).

Habit 5: Babying

Habit 5: Babying

What is is:

'Babying' is approaching disabled people as needing non-disabled people to help or communicate for them.

Why it matters:

While well intentioned, acting in ways that appear virtuous can disempower, suggests inferiority, and contribute to 'othering' disabled people.

How to beat it...

Habit 5: Babying

Misconception:

‘A story that paints a disabled person as exceptional and inspirational is positive representation.’

Reality:

When championing disabled people as inspirational simply for completing daily life, we put them in the category of ‘other’ and make their entire story about overcoming disability.

Imagine you’re not a morning person, but every time you get up early people congratulate you for it. How does it make you feel?

Action:

Redefine disabled achievement by letting disabled people tell you what is worth celebrating.

Habit 5: Babying

Misconception:

‘Showing people proud and embracing their disability is empowering to disabled people.’

Reality:

Everyone relates to their disability differently. For some people, their disability is core to their sense of identity, for others, it is not a defining factor at all.

Imagine everyone only ever praises you for one part of your life — a part that isn’t particularly important to you. How might this feel limiting?

Action:

Think of disabled people as multi-faceted people. Find at least three aspects beyond disability to understand them.

Habit 5: Babying

Misconception:

‘Being involved in inclusivity work is rewarding in itself for disabled people.’

Reality:

Disabled people are often invited to consult on projects for free, with their input alone considered sufficient compensation. Additionally, consultation is often shallow, seeking early endorsement rather than support to deliver an inclusive end result.

Imagine being asked for your casual comments on a project about to start and you say it sounds like a good project. A few months later you see an end-result that does not resemble early concepts and you’re listed as a consultant.

Action:

Articulate and agree on the partnership arrangement with disabled consultants.

Remunerate, reciprocate value, and give credit where it is due.

Five actions we can take

**Redefine
commitment
as consistent
steps.**

**Raise your
accessibility
standards.**

**Create the
conditions
for
collaboration
of all shapes
and sizes.**

**Tell a new
story about
disability.**

**Respect the
value that
disabled
perspectives
delivers.**

Five Key Takeaways

1

Doing better, sometimes feels bad. Challenging the status quo rarely feels good or easy in the moment. Awkwardness is a sign you're in unfamiliar territory. Use this feeling as evidence of learning.

2

Don't let getting it wrong discourage you. We won't always get it right, and often we won't feel we are doing enough. Mistakes are inevitable. Being called out is important. If you're not making them, you're not trying.

3

It's okay to start small (just start). While kōrero and education are important steps to take to become more inclusive, to make a difference we need to implement learnings, no matter how small. These things have a way of snowballing. Begin and keep rolling.

4

Threats to inclusivity hide everywhere. The industry is littered with barriers to inclusivity. Meeting culture, physical spaces, ways of socialising. Give yourself a challenge of noting them as you go.

5

It will broaden your view more than you might think. You might be surprised by how many opportunities you see in the world after spending some time looking at it through a different lens.

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