



***“An Inclusive Europe: Persons with Disabilities,
a Positive Human Capital in Today’s Society”***

**EBU Conference
Vienna, Austria
11th-14th November 2010**

***“Strategic approaches on how to deal with companies and legislators
to apply the principle of design for all to goods, services and
systems: examples of good practice”***

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Biographical Information

Bart Simons (Belgium) studied applied economics at K.U.Leuven University and works as web accessibility consultant since seven years. Being blind since birth he experienced the access to information challenge at first hand. He currently works for AnySurfer, a Belgian quality mark for accessible websites. There he trains webmasters and content authors to improve the accessibility of their information. Since 2007 Bart chairs the EBU commission on Access to Information.

Summary

People with disabilities want to fully participate in society and to live as independently as possible. Today's rapidly changing society offers many new possibilities but also creates new barriers. People with disabilities are motivated to overcome the barriers in order to benefit from the possibilities. However, product designers, architects, receptionists, content authors have also a responsibility to make their products, environments, buildings, documents and websites accessible.

The best approach for accessibility is the design for all principle. This means that a product is usable out of the box by everyone, that a wheelchair user can enter through the main entrance, that a blind visitor can find his way in a bus station etc.

First of all, we need awareness: people with disabilities also buy your product, visit your museum, use your software, and browse your website. Secondly, we need to understand their special needs: know about existing solutions and be creative to solve problems that might arise.

In this talk, we look at a variety of goods, products and services and give good examples and suggestions for design for all. We will speak about buildings, voting

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machines, websites, washing machines, job application procedures, elevators, manuals, thermostats and the iPhone.

In the design for all era, assistive technology dealers should not be concerned about their job security. Since more and more mainstream products speak, the development of high quality synthetic voices in all European languages should be high on their agenda. Furthermore, demand for white canes, magnifiers and braille embossers will remain.

However, for other products they might want to adapt their business models: in addition to producing hardware daisy players, colour detectors and GPS appliances they could consider to develop software to fulfil those tasks on mainstream accessible devices.

Staff of organisations for people with disabilities might need to shift their focus to become a centre of expertise for testing and training. They should be prepared to inform industry about the needs of people with disabilities and to assist them in testing the accessibility of new designs (buildings, streets, websites, products, software, digital documents etc.).

On the other hand people with disabilities expect their organisations to assist them in selecting a product for their specific needs and in training them how to use it.

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