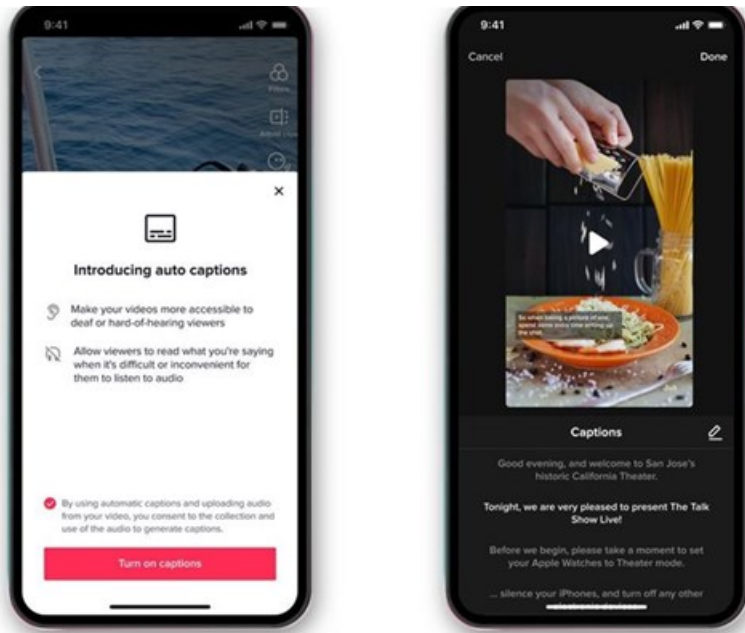


Silent barriers: The marketing industry's overlooked issue of accessibility

By Katherine McInnes, issued by Meltwater

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According to the WHO, [around 15%](#) of the world's population lives with some form of disability - making them the world's largest minority. Despite this reality, the marketing industry has failed to include them sufficiently over the years.



[The 2023 Marketing Trends Guide](#) dives into this topic to unpack what has caused this vast underrepresentation. On the one hand, there has been a lack of advertising that includes and highlights disabled people, and on the other, there is still a widespread lack of customised and inclusive websites and apps. With social pressure rising, and companies' forced to follow through on their DEI promises, signs are emerging that change is on its way.

We have Gen Z to thank for this in part; consumers who have advocated for captions on social media to the point where it has become a common sight in the last two years. Younger generations also seem to love captioning, which has led to important advances for people with hearing loss.

In 2021, for example, both TikTok and Instagram introduced the possibility of automatic captioning, and last year Instagram introduced auto-generated subtitles for videos in the feed. LinkedIn has also started to offer real-time captioning for audio events, with many more platforms likely to follow suit as the year progresses. Especially in light of the success of TikTok's cousin CapCut, a video editing tool where users can easily create subtitles synchronised with audio.

To help marketers behind the scenes, Google has also expanded its inclusive marketing resource, [All In](#), to encompass disability inclusion and accessibility. Examples of increased accessibility on the PR front include, for instance, Beyoncé and Lizzo apologising and removing disability slurs from their newly released songs, after facing a lot of criticism on social media from people with disabilities. These developments demonstrate not only the awareness of social media users to these types of slurs, but also the widespread influence they have.

So we are making great progress, right?

In light of these recent developments, it may seem as if the marketing industry is moving in the right direction, but it is rather that the awareness of the issue has increased, with much work still to be done. A Business Disability Forum survey

of disabled consumers found that [42% of respondents](#) were unable to complete an online purchase because of inaccessible websites or apps and 47% of respondents could not find information about a product's accessibility features.

With ESG being an important method of retaining customer loyalty, further advancements must be achieved...

Here it is Google that's leading the way, continuing to make steps in the right direction, expanding its All In inclusive marketing resource to include disability inclusion and accessibility. This move encourages marketers to think about whether their content is accessible by disabled people and whether their campaigns are created with accessibility in mind from the start. When marketers fail to do so, campaigns risk becoming incompatible with assistive technology, thereby limiting the ability of millions of people to interact. And this is not only an ethical loss for companies, but also a financial one.

More accessibility in the Metaverse?

The trend suggests that more and more platforms will start investing in more accurate automatic captioning for video, live and audio events. When it comes to physical events, marketers should focus on customisable spaces and get creative with multi-sensory experiences. And that's where the Metaverse – the now-criticised hype concept of 2022 – comes in.

In fact, the Metaverse can offer great opportunities when it comes to inclusion and increased accessibility. Just a few months ago, the European Disability Forum discussed how people with disabilities are empowered to explore environments that would otherwise be inaccessible to them made possible by these new tools for better experiences. And it's an important discussion for today's marketers to take part in.

How might digital identities actually affect representation? What are the opportunities and risks? Will the next phase of the internet be equally inaccessible if the development of websites and apps does put inclusion and accessibility front and centre? The marketing industry as a whole needs to take these questions seriously.

Keywords related to accessibility in 2022 according to Meltwater

Finally, it's worth mentioning that "accessibility" was tweeted 2.5 million times in 2022, peaking on Global Accessibility Awareness Day on 18 May. This number will most likely only continue to rise this year. Consumers will continue to demand more and more inclusion and representation, and businesses need to make it a priority from the start. Social responsibility, whether it's sustainability or inclusion, requires genuine ambition that goes beyond being perceived as a responsible brand and actually walking the talk.

Read more about representation in marketing content and how you can incorporate that into your strategy in our [2023 Marketing Trends Guide](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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