Abstract

BT is one of the world’s leading providers of communications solutions and services operating in 170 countries. Its principal activities include the provision of networked IT services globally; local, national and international telecommunications services to customers for use at home, work and on the move; broadband and Internet products and services and converged fixed/mobile products and services. BT consists principally of four lines of business: BT Global Services, Openreach, BT Retail and BT Wholesale.

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Perspectives on Inclusive ICT Business by BT

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For industry insiders it will not be a surprise that this journal has chosen ‘Inclusive ICT Business’ as a theme. ICT is omnipresent, playing a pivotal role in many of the developments and challenges faced in the world. But it is a theme that is difficult to define.

It could suggest that parts of ICT are not inclusive, with some products and services having limited appeal. For a whole host of reasons, whether design, marketing, or cost, they may not be attractive to consumers who are older, have disabilities or who are socially disadvantaged, for example. Looked at separately each group is relatively small but together represent a sizeable community potentially excluded from a range of products and services with all the associated negative economic and social implications. Other papers in this journal will no doubt comment further on the challenges this causes and how they could be addressed.

For me, it’s interesting to understand why ICT businesses would choose not be inclusive and whether such an approach makes commercial sense. Commerce is founded on delivering the optimal balance between investment and return. However this potentially leads to the same customer base being addressed; those with average capabilities, interests and pockets, leaving others to be served as niche propositions or addressed as a costly afterthought, if at all.

Fortunately that appears to be in the past, with many people waking up to the benefits of inclusive design. Designing inclusively from the outset can lead to better designed products attractive to a wider audience. Inclusively designed products tend to avoid the true cost of bad design that emerge later on in the product life cycle and have the potential to cause irreparable damage to the brand image through customer frustration.

At BT we’ve recently established a Centre of Excellence to help our proposition and product managers design more inclusively. We’ve also supported the development of the Inclusive Design Toolkit; a free-to-use service for product and service designers (www.inclusivedesigntoolkit.com). Our product managers are trained in this toolkit which, among other things, includes a calculator to help understand how accessibility features can increase a product’s market potential.

But inclusion goes much wider than just products. BT has made broadband available to almost every household in the UK, yet the UK Office for National Statistics estimates that 33% of adults lack the skills or motivation to use the Internet. We’re working to increase digital inclusion in some of the UK’s most deprived communities, in particular through the Everybody Online programme. This pro-

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programme, run by the charity Citizens Online, is currently active in 13 UK communities and has helped increase their Internet use by up to 12%.

Thinking more parochially, our ICT services help our employees work more flexibly, including from home. This makes employment with BT possible for more people, including working parents and people with disabilities, and helps employees achieve a good work-life balance. There are also financial and environmental benefits from lower operational costs and reduced travel. Our workforce is extremely diverse, for example 19% of our people are based outside the UK, and creating a supportive and inclusive culture across BT is essential.

By embracing different ideas, cultures and experiences we hope to become closer to our increasingly diverse customers, stimulate innovation and sustain our transformation and growth. Find out more about our progress from our report *Changing World: Sustained Values 2008*. It can be found online at: http://www btplc com/Societyandenvironment/Socialandenvironmentreport/index.asp.