

Keynote Address: “From Digital Divide to Digital Diversity – The Imperative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies”

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It is really an honor for me to be here today at the first G3ict Global Forum and to be with all of you who have been personally embraced the need to make progress to meet the need on accessibility. I am also very proud to represent IBM, which is an enterprise and a company, which has truly embraced accessibility and inclusion for more than 90 years.

First, I just wanted to talk a bit about the definition of accessibility. In order to do so, I wanted to use an artifact from this new internet-based information paradigm called Wikipedia. Wikipedia is actually a free-content, multi-lingual encyclopedia that has been created through the collaboration of contributors all around the world. The site itself is called a wiki, which means that everyone can read or add articles. In Wikipedia, the definition of accessibility is the degree to which a system is usable by as many people as possible and more specifically for people with disabilities. Wikipedia says accessibility is about giving equal access to everyone. At IBM, accessibility is enabling human capability to innovation so that everyone can maximize his/her potentials regardless of age and ability.

We could look at a continuum about what we think about ability. Clearly, traditionally disability is when one is considered to be no or low vision, low or no hearing, poor or restricted mobility, but with what we have learned from those we’ve been able to think about removing those barriers and benefiting a number of other significant populations that have tremendous impact socially, economically and politically. First, as I have mentioned here this morning, let us talk about the aging and mature population. I will just give you some statistics. In the year 2025, it is expected that over 20% of the population of industrialized nations will be over the age of 60. If we think about Australia, the number of individuals between the ages of 60 and 64 and is expected to double between the next 10 years. When we think about China, while today only 11% of the population is estimated to be 60 years of age or older that number by the year 2040 will be 28%. In

Japan, within the next 10 years it is expected that 26% of the population will be over the age of 65. And when you think about the profound impact that has on the work place, in the year 2000 in Italy, it was estimated that while 22 million of Italian citizens are receiving pension, only 21 million were actually in the work force. When we think about that in this context of the United States, the expectation is that in the year 2020, 50% of the US work force will be at age 55 or over.

The next thing that we see is the person who may be uncomfortable or reluctant to use computers or other information technology. We also know that accessible IT can benefit those who are challenged with below basic levels of literacy, or think about people living in the region where nation for which is the language is not one they speak natively. Some of them speak it not at all; some of them speak it not well. But let us bring this all back around to the genesis here, which is of the world's 6 billion people, 1 billion have traditional disabilities. In the US we look at this portion of the population and see that in terms of disposable income, it represents about 225 billion in disposable income. So think about these billion people who represent not only significant market opportunity but they also represent constituencies and tremendously skilled and experienced employees. All of these we believe need argument for accessibility.

One might argue that accessibility started as perhaps a philanthropic effort, but those motivations changed due to a number of forces. Clearly, legislative and government forces, and by those I mean social, procurement, and employment. These motivations are changing globally and perhaps are best expressed in terms of business value. Let me tell you what I mean by that. So first, the internet, which is based on standards that I was talking about, brought into the new era of customer experience and also consumer loyalty. That is the ability to get to the providers simply with clicks of the mouse. Having online information and services to the people is the basic requirement in companies to provide positive customer experience. Interestingly, what we have found out is that consumers are also constituents. Some of the consumer's experiences have forced the need for more easily accessible government services.

Second, organization makes significant investment in information technology and other services. It is a critical driver to enable both businesses and governments. How well those technologies are used or adopted, and therefore the financial and investment of those systems, is certainly going to be governed and impacted by how positive and how productive these users experiences are.

Third, we believe that accessibility is not simply a result of good design. It is about improving the quality of the information and communication technology as a tool that in turn improves the quality of our life.

I want to share with you how about we, IBM, as a Private Sector Enterprise, participated in accessibility. We are at once an employer and a provider of information technology and capability, and we are also an innovator on behalf of our clients. The one thing there that makes a difference and that makes us unique is that we are provider of information technology. Certainly, most private sector companies faced many of the same challenges that we do. As an employer; we hired our first employee to accessibility in the year 1914, and that was simply because our founder, Mr. Watson, believed that the most important thing was to hire the individual who was the most talented and well prepared for the job. That philosophy continues today, and as a result we vigorously pursue diversity accessibility in our global work force. This is what we call our Global Work Force Diversity Initiative, and as a perspective employer, we focus on the need for more compressive academic forces and curricula for inclusive IT design.

Now, second as I mentioned, as a provider of information technologies and capabilities, we have a very long history of developing accessibility not just for our own use but also for that of our clients. We developed the Braille printer in 1975, and a talking typewriter in 1980. We subsequently produced one of the best screen readers for the blind. We created in 1985 the IBM Human Ability and Accessibility Center which continues to support the development of technologies that assist people with disability and the maturing population. We have appropriate instructions that mandate that the hardware, software, our services and our marketing material are all accessible, and our division

reports status on accessibility quarterly. We created capabilities like IBM Easy Web Browsing which will allow novice users, senior citizens and people with limited vision and even eye fatigue to access website information. As an innovator, we help our clients to enhance their market reach through the adoption of Internet-based information, to increase revenues to a broad set of communities and markets and even to improve their own employee productivity through the use of accessible tools and mitigate their risk as well as giving them a satisfied rate of a whole range of global accessibility.

Many of you are just getting started on your path to accessibility transformation. Those of you who have already moved along this path have tested and proven principles that can guide new starts in this process. One of the things that we have found is that the greatest value that organizations received from accessibility is realized when the tools are applied to specific customers and constituents based on their own needs. So we would say let the needs of the people who depend on your organization shape your approach rather than simply technology or legislation. Also, keep your eye on the wonderful aspect of working with accessibility that is allowing you to serve people while you are serving your institution or organization. It is one of the rare opportunities that we can truly call a win-win opportunity. Now for those of you who have made progress, you are one of the wonderful resources of information for those starting their journey to accessibility transformation. There are many ways for you to share your thoughts and experience with others. I mentioned Wikipedia; it is a great tool to share the insights that you've gained along the way. It is the basis for a way to collect and distribute human knowledge on a topic as critical as accessibility. Even when progress is established though, we would caution that it needs to be sustained, so we would encourage those institutions that have moved on through this process to make sure that they find way to continue in that capacity through their organization, through their senior management, through their communities with disabled people, in technology organizations, and everywhere. This is something that needs to be sustained and we need to do it together.

My final comments would be that accessibility is really about no barriers. Innovation and accessibility and inclusive IT, whether that is new technology or new standards, new policies or new partnership, is truly innovation that matters for the world.