

UK Retailers Lose Out On £11.75bn by Ignoring Needs of Disabled Shoppers Online

Friday 2 December, 2016 – UK retailers could be missing out on online sales estimated at £11.75 billion a year because their web sites fail to consider the needs of people with disabilities, according to research from one of Europe's leading disability and diversity consultancies, Freeney Williams.

Nearly three quarters of disabled online consumers (71%) will simply click away from web sites that they find difficult to use due to the effect of their disability. That represents 4.3 million online shoppers with a collective purchasing power of £11.75 billion, which is around 10% of the total UK online spend.

The research also found that almost three quarters (73%) of survey participants with access needs experienced problems on more than a quarter of websites they visit for the first time.

Most businesses will be unaware that they are losing income because only 7% of disabled customers who have difficulty using a site will contact them.

In fact, 85% of participants with access needs limit their shopping to sites that they know are accessible and 81% have chosen to pay more for a product from an accessible website rather than buy the same product for less from a website that was harder to use.

The 'purple pound' (the spending power of disabled people) is a huge missed opportunity for many UK retailers. More than half (58%) of users with access needs said they shopped online at least once a week and 82% said they would spend more if websites were more accessible. Analysis of UK online spend by CapGemini combined with demographic data from the Office of National Statistics suggests that the potential online spending power of disabled UK adults who have access needs when using the internet could be worth as much as £16.55 billion a year.

The main reasons disabled users cited for 'clicking-away' from a web site were because pages are crowded with too much content (67%), there is poor link information and navigation (61%), they need to fill in poorly-designed forms (58%), there are distracting moving images and graphics (44%), or poor legibility due to colour contrast and text layout (44%).

There are a number of impairment types which may affect a disabled person's ability to use the internet. These may include varying degrees of hearing and visual impairment, limited manual dexterity, and neuro-diversity issues such as dyslexia and Asperger syndrome amongst others.

Rick Williams, Managing Director of Freeney Williams and Chair of Age UK (Brighton and Hove), said: ““After 20 years of legislation, most high street retailers in the UK understand they need to take disabled shoppers' needs into account when designing 'bricks and mortar' shops. Although the same law applies to their online presence, many of those businesses seem oblivious to the need to make their websites accessible. The UK has an ageing population, and we believe the accessibility issues identified in our research will only increase over time.”

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, Penny Mordaunt, said: “UK disabled households have a combined spending power of more than £200 billion, presenting a huge opportunity for those businesses that are not already targeting this market. This report sends a strong message about the benefits of accessible online services for both disabled people and businesses. Whether it's adapting a shop, restaurant or website, there are simple things that businesses can do to improve the lives of disabled people whilst tapping into their valuable spending power.”

Susan Scott-Parker OBE, CEO of Business Disability International, said: “We assume that customers matter to the average business, so it's only logical to assume that businesses will ensure it's easy for as many people as possible to spend their money online. But apparently, this isn't the case. This important report shows that UK retailers have decided they can ignore the 15% to 20% of people in the UK with disabilities. Given the minimal costs associated with good website design, why would any business make it needlessly difficult for so many potential customers to spend their money? Any senior business leader now has even more reason to persuade the business to up its digital game, not just because the law requires it but because it makes commercial sense.”

James Taylor, head of policy and public affairs at disability charity Scope, said: “Inaccessible websites mean businesses are missing out on a valuable opportunity to reach disabled consumers.

“The purple pound is worth over £200 billion year, and retailers should be doing more to serve this market and compete for a share of their considerable spending power.

“We hope this report highlights the urgent need to tackle the digital divide and review of the effectiveness of the law on web accessibility.”

The survey was launched on 14 January 2016 and closed on 8 July 2016 and the 362 people with disabilities completed an online questionnaire.

Visit <http://www.clickawaypound.com/cap16finalreport.html> for a copy of the full report.

Notes for editors

Calculation of the 'purple pound'

Based on estimates of average spend per capita those customers who click away have a spending power of £11.75 billion in the UK alone or potentially around 10% of the total UK online spend in 2016.

- The most recent ONS estimate of the UK population is 65.11 million in mid-2015 ¹; 52.87 million are aged over 16, of whom 87.9% (46.47 million) have internet access.
- CAPGemini projected overall UK online spending to be £126 billion by the beginning of 2016 ² equating to an average spend per head of the UK population with internet access of £2710.
- In 2016, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimated there were 8.6 million internet users with a disability in the UK ³.
- This Survey found that 71% of internet users with a disability have access needs; this translates to 6.1 million people.
- Taking an average spend per head of £2710, the online spending power of 6.1 million disabled people with access needs in 2016 is £16.55 billion.
- The Survey found that 71% of the total 6.1 million disabled internet users with access needs (4.3 million people) simply click-away when confronted with a problematic website.
- These figures equate to a click-away figure in the UK alone of £11.75 billion lost in 2016 from those sites which are not accessible.

About Freeney Williams

Freeneey Williams Limited is one of Europe's leading disability and diversity consultancies. It works extensively in all sectors to achieve long-lasting and self-sustaining change designed to meet the needs of employers and service providers in the real world.

The consultancy enables companies and organisations to successfully:

- Recruit, employ and retain disabled people and ensure they are effective members of the workforce
- Develop and sell products or services that are accessible to all customers
- Meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010

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¹ UK Population mid-year estimate 2015. ONS, June 2016

² IMRG Capgemini e-Retail Sales Index, 2015

³ Statistical Bulletin: Internet Users in the UK. ONS, May 2016