

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN THE WORKPLACE

"Assistive technology has leveled the playing field. Many of my employees, who are brilliant software developers or work in accounting, do so because of the assistive technology available today."

— Joyce Bender, President & CEO, Bender Consulting Services

Assistive Technology Defined

Assistive technology (AT) helps employees with disabilities perform job tasks that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. AT includes products such as walkers and wheelchairs, as well as hardware, software, and peripherals that assist employees with disabilities in accessing computers or other information technology (IT) products and services. Examples of AT products and devices utilized in the workplace include:

- A keyboard with large keys or a special mouse that allows a sales executive with limited hand function to operate a computer.
- Software that reads text on a screen, in a computer-generated voice, for a database developer who is blind.
- Computer software that enlarges screen content for a recruiter with low vision.
- A TTY (text telephone) device for a Chief Financial Officer who is deaf.
- A device that speaks text out loud for a researcher with speech impairments as he or she types.



More and more businesses competing for candidates are recruiting people with disabilities for highly skilled jobs. To prepare for them, smart employers are incorporating AT into their overall plans for designing and upgrading IT. The adoption of design principles that benefit all employees—commonly called universal design—and the availability of multiple and diverse AT products create a work environment that is welcoming and inclusive of qualified job candidates with disabilities.

The Future of Assistive Technology

In today's fast-moving, technology-driven marketplace, the AT and IT industries are collaborating to create products with greater interoperability in order to expand their consumer markets. As a result, they are also producing more and better solutions to help businesses tap into the talent pool of candidates with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is working with the business community to advance understanding of how AT can improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. As part of this, business leaders across a range of company sizes and industry sectors have identified four key strategies that enhance the employment of persons with disabilities through AT:

- Establishing a network of internal "champions" that includes top corporate leadership to promote disability employment through AT.
- Making the business case for employing people with disabilities and investing in AT.
- Refining and advancing corporate policies, practices, and programs to include people with disabilities.
- Implementing infrastructures and strategies that enable companies to realize the promises reflected in these policies, practices, and programs.

To learn more about how businesses can effectively promote and benefit from AT and to view a more detailed report on a *Business Dialogue, Roadmaps for Enhancing Employment of Persons with Disabilities Through Accessible Technology*, visit the website of the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) at www.usbln.org or the Assistive Technology Industry Association at www.atia.org.

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For more information contact ODEP's cost-free resources:


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