Lessons Learned
Building an accessible support team

Kyndra LoCoco, Accessibility Partner & Community Programs Manager, Google
“...As long as there are barriers for some, there’s still work to be done.”

Sundar Pichai
CEO of Alphabet & Google
Summary

Google is committed to making accessibility a core consideration from the earliest stages of product design through release. In 2017, the Accessibility team continued this promise by building a more accessible support team to help people who use assistive technology with their Google products. The team also answers questions about accessibility features and functionalities in Google products.

In an effort to provide resources for more companies to build their support teams with accessibility in mind, we’re sharing key lessons we learned from building the Google Disability Support team.

A special thanks to Microsoft, who helped us every step of the way.
Support Google’s customers
Google support agents provide 1:1 support to help answer and troubleshoot questions related to accessibility and/or assistive technology.

Improve accessibility within Google products
Google support agents reproduce and escalate potential issues to product teams. They also highlight top user feedback and feature requests.
**Snapshot: key milestones**

- **2016**
  - Pitched the Disability Support team to leadership
  - Launched the pilot
    - 1 site (US)
    - 1 language (English)
    - 2 support agents
    - Email only
  - [Pilot] 277+ inquiries, 98% Satisfaction rate

- **2017**
  - Launched publicly
    - 1 site (US)
    - 1 language (English)
    - 10 support agents
    - Email & Chat only
  - [1st year] Handled 13k+ inquiries, filed 780+ product suggestions and maintained >82%+ satisfaction rating.

- **2018**
  - Launched team in EMEA
    - 2 sites (US & Europe)
    - 6 languages
    - 20 support agents
    - Email, Chat, Phone & BME
  - [ASL] 16% of total US contact volume
  - [BME] 33% of total contact volume
    - *see slide 23 for more
  - Launched American Sign Language (ASL)
  - Launched Be My Eyes and phone support
  - [Launch] 640+ inquiries, 91.65% Satisfaction rate

- **2019**
  - Handed off operations to Google’s central support operations team to secure standardization
  - Launched American Sign Language (ASL)
  - 2 sites (US & Europe)
  - 7 languages
  - 24 support agents
  - Email, Chat, Phone, BME & ASL channels

- **2020**

*Intentionally did not “market” the Disability Support team until BME & ASL launched in an effort to control volume & quality*
Pitch: secure leadership buy-in
Why is accessibility **important**?

- Usability
- Compliance
- Revenue
- Ethics
People live with some form of disability (WHO)

It is estimated that by 2050 over 900 million people alone will have disabling hearing loss (WHO)

80% of disabilities are acquired between the ages of 18-64, the workforce age (Global Economics of Disability Report)
But disability affects everyone

7.7 Billion

Everyone

Better products overall

Allies/Friends and family of people with disabilities

Have a disability, but don't identify with the community

Self-identified disabled people (1 billion)

Products can be life changing

1 Billion

Self-Identified

Non-Identified

Allies
It’s also just **good for business**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$8T</th>
<th>87%</th>
<th>80%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Together with their friends and family, people with disabilities have a spending power of over $8 trillion</td>
<td>Of people will purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue they cared about</td>
<td>Of millennials expect companies to make a public commitment to good corporate citizenship.</td>
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*(Global Economics of Disability Report) (Cone Communications CSR Study) (Horizon Media)*

“Seeing these products and how they’re helping people with disabilities shows me that Google is for the people.”

- Consumer, Los Angeles
## Major points comparison

Depending on your organizational structure there may be a number of ways to build your support team. Consider providing leadership options through a major points comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Scalable</th>
<th>Short-term costs</th>
<th>Long-term costs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hire temps for pilot</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>$X</td>
<td>$X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage (X) team</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>$X</td>
<td>$X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train existing CSRs</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>$X</td>
<td>$X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated team</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>$X</td>
<td>$X</td>
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*The Google Disability Support team was built as a dedicated centralized team allowing scalability through deeper integration efforts across Google’s support operations while maintaining quality and standardization centrally.*
Identify key milestones & timelines

Consider measuring impact by identifying *exit criteria and key objectives* throughout a projected timeline. High-level example objectives and exit criteria below.

- **Q4 2020**
  - [Secure buy-in]
    - Receive leadership buy-in and budget approval
  - Conduct on-site vendor visits & kick-off contracts

- **Q1 2021**
  - [Hire + train]
    - [X] agents
  - Vendor to begin recruiting

- **Q2 2021**
  - [Scale Volume] X/MoM
    - Maintain [X] CSAT Score
    - Maintain [X] SLA %
  - Identify support metric targets

- **Q3 2021**
  - [Launch X Channel]
    - Reduce handle time by [X]
    - Tgt: [X] CSAT Score
    - Tgt: [X] SLA %

- **Q4 2021**
  - [Launch Pilot]
    - Comms Plan
  - [Identify TUIs]
    - Top User Issues

*Exit criteria for the Google Disability Support team references scaling outside of an incubation center and into public launch*
Key lesson learned: disability vs. accessibility

“Disability” is widely used, accepted and searched for globally (Google Trends). Consider naming your support team or dedicated line with “Disability” instead of “Accessibility” to bring clarity to the focus of the team and reduce out of scope cases (OOS).

*The Central Accessibility team saw 70%+ OOS contacts on “contact us forms” prior to launching the Disability Support team.
Pilot: prove the business model
Running a Pilot: start small, fail fast, learn faster

January
- Hired and trained two support agents
- Announced pilot to ~7500 external community members

February
- Requested feedback after each case interaction
- Reduced SLA from 72 to 24 business hours after reaching 98% SLA

March - May
- Identified top user issues (TUIs)
- Maintained 75%+ CSAT score while reducing SLA and scaling volume
- Analyzed results against exit criteria:
  - Agent profile works
  - Fully integrated into Google’s Case Management System (CMS)
  - Canned Response articles utilized
  - [X] Case volume
  - [X] CSAT score
  - [X] SLA %
  - [X] Cost / Case

June
- Integrated into Google’s case management tool
- Partnered with TELUS International
- Began efforts to launch publicly outside of California
- Reduced SLA from 72 to 24 business hours after reaching 98% SLA

Maintained 75%+ CSAT score while reducing SLA and scaling volume

High-level results on the next slide
What we learned: by the numbers

*Top User Issues (TUIs)*

- **11.7%** Hardware | Assistant (Google Home Mini, Assistant commands, setup support, etc.)
- **29%** Android | TalkBack (Screen reader support)
- **12.1%** General Accessibility (Feature requests, feedback, etc.)
- **18.2%** G Suite (Docs, Drive, Gmail, etc.)

98% of case interactions were replied to within 72 hours.

78% of people were either satisfied or extremely satisfied.

*TUIs were key for determining cost projections by product team and XFN leadership buy-in required*
What we learned: by user feedback

“This! is fantastic! I can't wait to give this a try! Looking forward to chat and phone options!”

“Really a very good initiative. I do hope support will be offered in other languages as it is expanded.”
Key lessons learned: build with and for people with disabilities

1  **Hire people who personally use assistive technology**
   Even when providing the correct answer, community members noticed the support agents didn’t use assistive technology themselves: “The answer was correct but I can tell the agent doesn’t use (assistive technology) themselves since [they] didn’t provide workarounds a user themselves would know.”

2  **Identify and partner with experienced vendors**
   When partnering with a vendor, do your due-diligence. Conduct on-site visits, speak with existing support agents (without management present), shadow existing processes, etc. Look for vendors who already have strong inclusive programs in place such as The Chicago Lighthouse and TELUS International (current vendor). The disability Support team also partnered with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) to train support agents.

3  **Ensure your support tools are accessible**
   Ensure your support tools are accessible. Conduct thorough accessibility testing on your own support channels and tools. Go above standard testing to determine both usability and usefulness. Work with your engineering team to prioritize fixes where needed prior to launch - if available, prioritize it as a launch blocker.

4  **Meet people where they are**
   Typical support channels should be available, but think outside the box. Look to work with partners and vendors who already have existing communities (read more about this on the next slide).
Launch: meet people where they are
Key lesson learned: meet people where they are

At the time of launch, we offered multiple support channels, limited language support and hour coverage. Volume was minimal and the average handle time was higher than other support products across Google. Essentially, we didn’t feel like we were connecting with the community in the best way we could. We looked to partner with companies like Be My Eyes and Connect Direct to improve this.
33% Of total volume

68% \downarrow Shorter average handle time *compared to phone

90% Customer satisfaction rating

No product integration required
Partnering together: Google, Microsoft & Be My Eyes

g.co/blindsupport
16% Of total US volume

83% ↓ Shorter average handle time *compared to phone

92.86% Customer satisfaction rating
ASL Now: supported through Connect Direct

Hi! Thank you for contacting Google Disability Support!
Scale: think outside the box
Key lesson learned: scaling outside the US

Consider cultural differences

In addition to the typical forecast planning (i.e., cost per case, headcount, time zone, languages, etc.), consider **cultural differences** and the ability to recruit experienced support agents.

Consider places that meet all of your requirements in addition to proven **positive cultural perception for people with disabilities** (i.e., accessibility laws, typical jargon usage, etc.)

*In addition to the US office, the Google Disability Support team is located in Ireland.*
Welcome to the helpful home

“Hey Google, open Be My Eyes for [Company name]”
Other ways to leverage your support team

1. **Engineering shadowing sessions:**
   Set up on-site and/or virtual visits between engineers and customer support agents. Getting 1:1 time between engineers and their end users is invaluable for product development.

2. **Use recordings for feedback:**
   Consider recording support interactions (with the approval of the user) for User Research and Development teams to receive product feedback. Note, both Google’s partners, Be My Eyes and Connect Direct offer this option.

3. **Employee to employee support:**
   Consider offering employees who have disabilities additional support through your existing channels in their day-to-day environment.

4. **Deeper integration across support teams:**
   If you’re like Google and you have a number of support teams across your organization, consider identifying and training “accessibility champions” across each team in addition to a centralized team.
g.co/disabilitysupport