

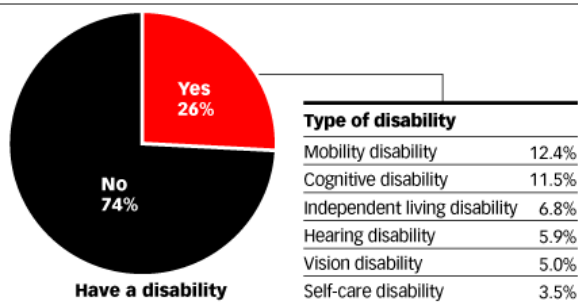
# People with disabilities are an underserved community with money to spend

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**Victoria Petrock**

People with disabilities make up a large, but diverse and underserved, segment of the US population. According to recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 67 million adults in the US—or 26% of the population—reported living with at least one type of disability.

**Share of US Adults with Disabilities, by Type, 2018**  
% of population



Note: ages 18+  
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)," July 26, 2019

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In fact, the disability community includes more than two in every five adults ages 65 and older (43.8%), more than one in four women

(27.2%), and nearly two in five non-Hispanic Native Americans or Alaska Natives, making it the nation’s largest minority.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) calculated in 2018 that the 20 million US working adults (ages 16 to 24) with disabilities—not including their extended families, support networks, and allies—had a collective after-tax disposable income of \$490 billion, slightly lower than those of Black (\$501 billion) and Hispanic consumers (\$582 billion). Discretionary income averaged about \$17,000 per person, or \$21 billion in aggregate, more than the \$19 billion for the Black and Hispanic market segments combined.

**Comparison of US Disposable & Discretionary Income Among Select Demographic Groups, 2014**

	<b>With disabilities</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
<b>Individuals with discretionary income</b>			
Share of people with discretionary income	5.3%	8.7%	6.3%
Mean income before taxes	\$121,112	\$96,963	\$107,842
Mean income after taxes (disposable income)	\$86,954	\$71,467	\$78,486
Discretionary income	\$17,410	\$1,923	\$8,942
<b>Total (billions)</b>	<b>\$21</b>	<b>\$3</b>	<b>\$16</b>
<b>All individuals</b>			
Mean income before taxes	\$26,487	\$24,732	\$23,757
—Mean income after taxes (disposable income)	\$23,300	\$20,974	\$20,225
<b>Total (billions)</b>	<b>\$490</b>	<b>\$501</b>	<b>\$582</b>

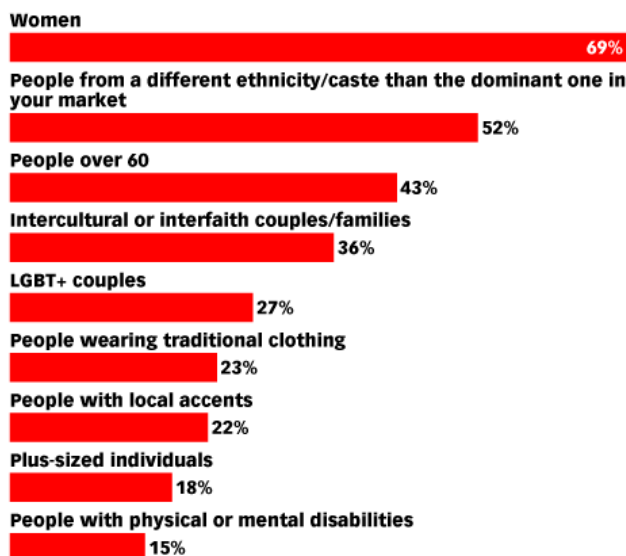
*Note: ages 16-64; disability segmentation based on Census Bureau categories: vision difficulty, hearing difficulty, self-care difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, cognitive difficulty, and independent living difficulty*  
Source: American Institutes for Research (AIR), "A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults With Disabilities" based on the US Census Bureau, April 17, 2020

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While this buying power represents a sizable opportunity for marketers, many are missing the mark. Though people with disabilities have a variety of needs, marketers routinely target them with “one size fits all” ad campaigns or otherwise exclude, stereotype, or misrepresent them. An October 2019 survey by iProspect found that an abysmal 15% of marketers worldwide recalled people with disabilities being portrayed positively in their recent campaigns, putting the disability community at the bottom of the list.

## Which Groups Can Marketers Worldwide Recall Being Represented Positively in Their Recent Campaigns?

% of respondents, Oct 2019



Note: campaigns that ran within the last 6 months  
Source: iProspect, "Future Focus 2020," Feb 11, 2020

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This is unacceptable, according to Christina Mallon, global head of inclusive design and digital accessibility at Wunderman Thompson. "The representation in marketing needs to be inclusive and accurately represent the demographics of the world," she said. "If one in five people has a disability, there should be more people in ads with visible disabilities, as well as more storytelling around people with disabilities, including those with invisible disabilities."

Even when they are represented, people with disabilities are often portrayed inauthentically. "I've seen several ads that include amputees, but they were just models whose legs had been removed during photo editing," said Craig Radford, vice president of strategy and business development at Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), which provides technology, resources, and services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. "It's important that marketing shows actual individuals with disabilities."

Another common pitfall occurs when companies promote accessibility in their marketing but don't back up their claims with action or fail to make their websites and other materials accessible. "Marketing like you are accessible is not the same as actually being accessible," Radford

said. “Some hotel chains have created heartfelt commercials showing a person using sign language at the front desk. But in reality, millions of deaf people go to hotels and can’t get that experience.”

Michael Janger, assistant professor of marketing at Gallaudet University and a market research consultant, believes marketers can avoid many of these miscues by doing their homework. “There’s a lack of research about people with disabilities, so marketers must collect more data to understand their needs and wants,” he said. “The more you know what they want, what they like, and what their buying habits are, the better able you are to make your product, marketing efforts, and communications accessible to them.”

To learn more about the large and diverse disability community, and how to make products and experiences more accessible to those within it, eMarketer PRO subscribers can read our recent report:

**Report** by Victoria Petrock Nov 05, 2020

## Getting Accessible Marketing Right

### GETTING ACCESSIBLE MARKETING RIGHT

Inclusive Design and New  
Tech Remove Barriers and  
Increase Reach

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