

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/baking-accessibility-into-technology/>

One billion people in the world have a disability of some kind, points out Accomable founder and Airbnb product manager Srin Madipalli. As the online and offline worlds converge, he observes, there are many new opportunities for businesses and products to emphasize accessibility and reach a massive market.



Transcript

- So I just wanna take a step back.. So we'd moved over, I'd moved over from London to San Francisco, but also just here now I wanted to take the time to think about why this area is actually really important, and why I think many sort of future entrepreneurs in this room today, it's something really valuable to think about.. So firstly, in several reports, a statistic from the World Health Organization that a billion people in the world have a disability of some kind.. Now there's many different types of disabilities, across a broad spectrum, but I think if we just sort of call it on there and think about that statistic, that is a huge number of people, and often a massively untapped audience, that many companies, organizations, don't often think about.. Now for those of you have worked in accessibility before, on sort of the tech side, and how sort of, what comes to mind when you think about tech and accessibility, and I imagine a lot of it is things like digital accessibility, compliance, and does it comply to the W3C standard, is it AA, or, lots of well-established and very vital compliance and accessibility measures to make sure that a website is digitally accessible.. However, as the online and offline worlds are converging, we need to think about how accessibility can be baked when technology is facilitating the use of a real-world product.. And so I have some examples here, whether it be a self-driving car, or an Alexa Echo device, or home automation, or even on-demand transport like Uber.. How are all these products and services gonna be usable for people with disabilities, when maybe the foundation or fundamental product itself may not have been built for accessibility in mind.. But when those products and services are becoming so vital and important, how do we make sure people can actually use them? And for me, the anecdote I share, even though things are much better now, when I first moved from London to San Francisco, one of my biggest struggles was the fact there was no transportation.. So at the time Uber and Lyft did not provide any accessible vehicles as part of their service..

So it was literally impossible to get a taxi of any kind around San Francisco.. Luckily now, fortunately things have changed, and there is a lot more service.. But when I first got to San Francisco, I was completely, I felt completely stranded, because I couldn't use the same transport services that everybody else could use.. And so that poses the question, when offline and online converge, how do we ensure accessibility? And I think it's a really important, but also a very complex question, that sits at the intersection of technology, policy, product development, design, and has a lot of really complex, societal questions, that we collectively need to think about..