

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/the-future-is-accessible/>

From Tommy Hilfiger's adaptive clothing line to Microsoft's accessible Xbox controller, major companies are investing in products that take accessibility to the next level. Accomable founder and Airbnb product manager Srin Madipalli presents five takeaways for entrepreneurs interested in developing opportunities with the disability community. Among them: Start early, because retrofitting can be difficult. And also, hire people with disabilities, because lived experience is invaluable.



Transcript

- And so, you know as much as we're doing this at Airbnb, and making a really concerted, and intentional investment to improve things, I really do think there are some other core things that other companies are doing as well.. And again it revolves around sort of trying to bridge sort of the offline and online experience.. So, I don't know how this is actually performed in the big picture but Tommy Hilfiger now have an adaptive line of clothing where, you know, they have clothing ranges that are more easier to use if you're a wheelchair user or if you have a prosthetic limb and they've really thought about how they can modify clothing to make it easier if you have an accessibility need.. About eighteen months ago, I think, Google launched a new service on Google Maps where they were adding accessible navigation routes on Google Maps.. This was a really great example of an intervention where it had nothing to do with accessibility of Google Maps itself, but they were using their technology to find real world information so you could discover it on Google Maps.. Here is the X-Box adaptive controller that Microsoft created, again, a couple of years ago.. This was a controller made to make the X-Box easier to use for folks who have accessibility needs.. I thought this was a really cool example of a company making an investment to make their product or service easier to use and an adaptive controller, it wasn't just for one type of disability.. I think there's lots of different kinds of disabilities this controller considers when it's being used in real life.. So again, it's an example of where even the Microsoft game or whatever the product was may have hit compliance on an accessibility standard, here Microsoft have made the investment to make sure that the controller allows somebody with a disability to use it..

Just a great example of converging technology with the real life experience.. Here are just some sort of take home messages that I'd love to leave with you all today.. That are hopefully covered in some of these slides.. Firstly, as mentioned, start with empathy and speak to users with disabilities.. Make sure you test what you build.. Iterate and make sure you're testing with that audience to get that feedback.. One thing that a lot of companies and organizations struggle with is that they often think about accessibility many years down the line.. The earlier that it is done the easier it is to fix problems.. The more scale you have, the harder it gets to retrofit solutions and it's not just accessibility.. I think it goes to so many other problems that society is facing..

The longer that they aren't dealt with, the bigger they get.. So the earlier you can address some of these things in my view, the better.. Some thing that I'm really passionate about is actually doing what we can to hire people with disabilities.. It's a massively underserved and under tapped in community of talent and resource.. Where possible, there's so many amazing and talented people looking for roles and I think not just on the accessibility front.. It also then gives you fantastic insights and lived experience on developing products.. And finally, as much as investing in this area is the right thing to do, I also hope people see this as like an amazing opportunity from a business perspective as well.. That this is an underserved need and the best entrepreneurial opportunities often come from needs that are underserved.. So if you are thinking for entrepreneurial ideas, to think of this community as something where you could build solutions for..