



## BT's adoption of customer centric design



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### ABSTRACT

Between 2005 and 2010 BT underwent a major transformation from a company with a special section devoted to 'older and disabled consumers' to a company with an inclusive design strategy. The mainstreaming of these issues responded to a demand for better, more user-friendly communications products and growing awareness of the importance of previously marginalised consumer groups. It also took place alongside the development and publication of BS7000-6, a guide to inclusive design management. Based on several product design case studies, this paper reflects on how and why this transformation was seen as necessary for future success, and how the transformation was achieved. The evolution of BT's approach has continued since, but this paper looks back in time, and documents the transformation up to 2010 and reflects the state of the company in 2010 rather than at the time of publication.

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## 1. Background

The recent history of British Telecommunications plc (BT) is one of business transformation. It is the story of a company that has grown and prospered through being competitive, customer focused and innovative, that has learned to compete and win against some of the world's biggest companies to become a truly global operation. BT serves customers in more than 170 countries. It has one of the largest IP networks in the world and is adding one new city to that network every 7 days. This paper presents a snapshot of the development of BT's approach to inclusive design over the 5 years to 2010, and reflects the state of the company in 2010 rather than at the time of publication.

BT is a world class employer and makes significant contribution to Corporate and Social Responsibility projects around the world. It has been rated number 1 in the telecommunications sector in the Dow Jones Global Sustainability Index for eight consecutive years. It has twice been winner of the Queen's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable Development.

BT's vision is to be dedicated to helping customers thrive in a changing world. The world we live in and the way we communicate are changing. It wants to help all its customers make their lives and businesses better with products and services that are tailored to

their needs and easy to use. This means getting ever closer to customers, understanding their lifestyles and their businesses, and establishing long-term relationships with them. BT is passionate about customers and is working to meet the needs they have today and innovating to meet the needs they will have tomorrow.

Customer centric design will help BT to achieve its vision and get things right for its customers.

BT has built on a long tradition started by the General Post Office (GPO) to ensure that disabled people have access to communications solutions. It began as long ago as 1915 when switchboard technology was adapted for servicemen blinded during World War I. When British Telecom was privatised in 1984, a team was established to specifically look after the interests of disabled customers and started with wheelchair access to payphones. In 1992, BT became one of the first utility companies to offer bills in Braille and large print (years before it was required by legislation) and the same year considered accessibility in its Converse phones. 'Design for All' was the province of enlightened product managers and 1998 saw the launch of BT's first Big Button phone, designed for us by Alloy. This has become something of a design icon and the more modern version today continues to be a best seller.

BT has been a leader in inclusion in a number of ways, going beyond legal and regulatory obligations. In 2002 it incorporated sign language users into a mainstream TV advert achieving high tracking results for new information and Brand appeal and in 2006 was the first FTSE100 company to publish information in sign language on its website.

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In 2005 The British Standards Institution (BSI, 2005) launched a new “Inclusive Design” standard to encourage organisations to think about the way they developed their products. It defines inclusive design as the “Design of mainstream products and/or services that are accessible to, and usable by, as many people as reasonably possible on a global basis, in a wide variety of situations and to the greatest extent possible without the need for special adaptation or specialised design.” This standard is a useful starting point for companies committed to improve the usability of their products and services.

## 2. Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Before 2005, BT's approach to inclusive design was ad hoc and dependent upon the awareness of individual product managers and lobbying for particular features by the disability team, based on their knowledge of the needs of older and disabled people. The business case was not yet made and it was more likely to be seen as the socially responsible thing to do rather than being commercially sound practice.

BT's journey to the adoption of inclusive design was triggered by Scope, who introduced it to the group of organisations forming the Centre for Inclusive Technology and Design (CITD). This group won funding from the then Department of Trade and Industry to raise awareness of inclusive design and develop skills amongst blue chip companies. Participation in one of CITD's workshops led to BT's Community Support Committee funding a 3 year project that commissioned the development of the online inclusive design toolkit ([www.inclusivedesigntoolkit.com](http://www.inclusivedesigntoolkit.com)). This was launched publicly in July 2007 and in its first year the toolkit received over 1.75 million hits. It is widely used by design and engineering students and was included as a resource in the RSA's design directions inclusive world project 2008 that included a BT sponsored award. BT continues to support and promote the toolkit.

## 3. Collaboration with universities

BT has a long history of working closely with Universities and it was a meeting at MIT with Marvin Minsky in 2000 which really changed its thinking about how people interact with technology. Marvin's work in artificial intelligence had showed how our knowledge of the world and the ‘common sense’ we develop in early life allows us to ‘fill in the gaps’ in the information we receive. If information is designed to make best use of our ‘common sense’ then we will feel it is easy to understand and ‘intuitive’, therefore really understanding how people think and their models of the world is key. Working closely with the University of Cambridge this thinking was turned into the Internet design methodology which was first published in “Inclusive design: Design for the whole population” (Clarkson et al., 2003).

## 4. Customer centric design

Alongside the corporate social responsibility funded development of the toolkit, grew the realisation that inclusive design had business benefits and supported the need for products that were easy to use. Philips (2004) found that about two thirds of the population as a whole have difficulties with technological products and provided evidence that millions of people were frustrated or having difficulty using products.

The endorsement of senior management was critical in moving from ad hoc inclusive design to embedding it as a business as usual activity. It fitted BT's ‘customer first’ strategies and awareness of inclusive design was raised under the banner of ‘customer centric design’. Within BT, the My Customer programme provides its

people with ways to tackle things head-on that need to be fixed for the customer, working together to solve day-to-day customer issues and developing new ideas to accelerate a great customer experience. To increase the visibility of customer centric design and tackle the need to incorporate inclusive design principles into product design and development processes, a team established a My Customer Challenge Cup project.

The project was sponsored by Warren Buckley, now Managing Director for BT Retail Customer Services. He saw the business potential. “I sponsored the Challenge Cup entry for Inclusive Design as a means to highlight the business opportunity of investing in systems, training, processes and cultural change that would see inclusiveness become ingrained in the corporate psyche.”

The project succeeded in developing guidelines for BT's portfolio change process, in setting up an intranet site to explain customer centric design and provide resources for product managers including a new computer based training package.

In 2007, customer centric design workshops began for the product community and at the end of the year, the Inclusion Centre of Excellence was established providing expert advice and consultation on accessibility and usability during product development. With the increased awareness and inclusive design practice amongst product managers, in 2009 the inclusive design consultancy was taken over by BT Design's Usability team.

## 5. Business transformation

In July 2007 BT commenced a Business transformation journey which would completely re-shape the company and create the environment where customer centric design could truly become a part of business as usual. The business re-organised around a relentless focus on its customers, with an underlying Right-First-Time (RFT) programme acting as a watch-word for every employee. The aim of the RFT programme has been to ensure that everyone in BT does their job right-first-time, whether they are directly interacting with customers or in a more supporting role. Indications to date are that BT's people really “get” this concept and are enthused and motivated by it.

### 5.1. Concept to market process

BT has shaped its service delivery with one of its three key processes being Concept-to-Market (C2M). C2M is particularly important from a customer centric design perspective as it is the process which is used across the whole of BT to design, build and launch new propositions for its customers. By propositions BT means the things it offers for sale to its customers; so that could be a product, a bundle, a special pricing offer or a service.

During 2008 it made a concerted push on making the C2M process the cornerstone of everything it launched for its customers, with a total focus on delivering excellent RFT performance. The C2M process provides a structure to take an initial customer concept through the stages of Specification and Planning, Design and Build, Test and Trial, Launch, and finally In Life Review. Between each stage there are key decision points. It emphasises the importance of customer insight and testing, in terms of both the proposition itself and the customer experience around buying it, paying for it and getting help where required. It presented an obvious and natural home for a more formalised approach to ensuring that customer centric design was part of every new proposition.

One of the ways BT is making the C2M process become “the way we work” on every proposition is through using a system called Quantum, which has been developed by BT Retail's Business Division. Quantum operates as an electronic version of the C2M

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