Technology Improving Lives

Helping More Americans Do Good Work

(NAPSA)—People with disabilities represent 20 percent of the U.S. population or 52.6 million people. This is an important demographic and within the past few years, federal laws have required the U.S. government to provide federal workers with accessible technologies—ranging from printers, faxes and computers to software applications on the Internet—to meet the needs of the disabled. These technological improvements have been found helpful to others as well.

"Accessibility technology can be found in many facets of our everyday lives," said John Kemp, cofounder and director of the American Association of People with Disabilities. "We are able to open laptops today with one hand as a result of accessibility technology. The tone when an elevator door opens was originally designed for people with vision impairments, but is beneficial to all. The enhancements accessible technology brings to our lives are an everyday phenomenon, regardless of whether or not you have a disability."

Furthermore, the baby boomer generation will soon reach retirement age but 80 percent of Americans plan to work well past that point. Twenty percent of the population will be 65 or older by 2030 and at least half of that group is likely to have a disability. The rising number of senior citizens creates additional demand for technology adaptive to their needs. For this reason, a shift in how people view accessibility seems to be needed. By taking an inclusive approach to technology development, the same technologies that benefit the disabled will help the baby boomer population remain productive for years to come.

Several forward-thinking organizations help bring accessible technologies to the aging. For example, SeniorNet, the largest provider of computer and Internet education for older adults in the U.S., has partnered with IBM to develop "WebAdapt2Me." This Web Adaptation Technology lets users reformat Web pages according to individual preferences and makes the Web more accessible by enhancing the readability of Web pages by increasing the font size, transforming colors on a Web site to colors easily seen by people with cataracts and making the browser and keyboard easier to use.

Another innovative technology is IBM's Home Page Reader. This talking Web browser "reads" Web pages aloud. The software helps the blind and visually-impaired surf the Web and can be used by Web developers who want to ensure that their sites are accessible to people with low or no vision.

These technologies are an important step in helping the nation stay productive. Together, thoughtful legislation and innovative technology accessibility can greatly improve many people's day-to-day lives.

You can learn more online at http://www.ibm.com/able.

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Note to Editors: *October is People with Disabilities Month, but this story may be run at any time.*