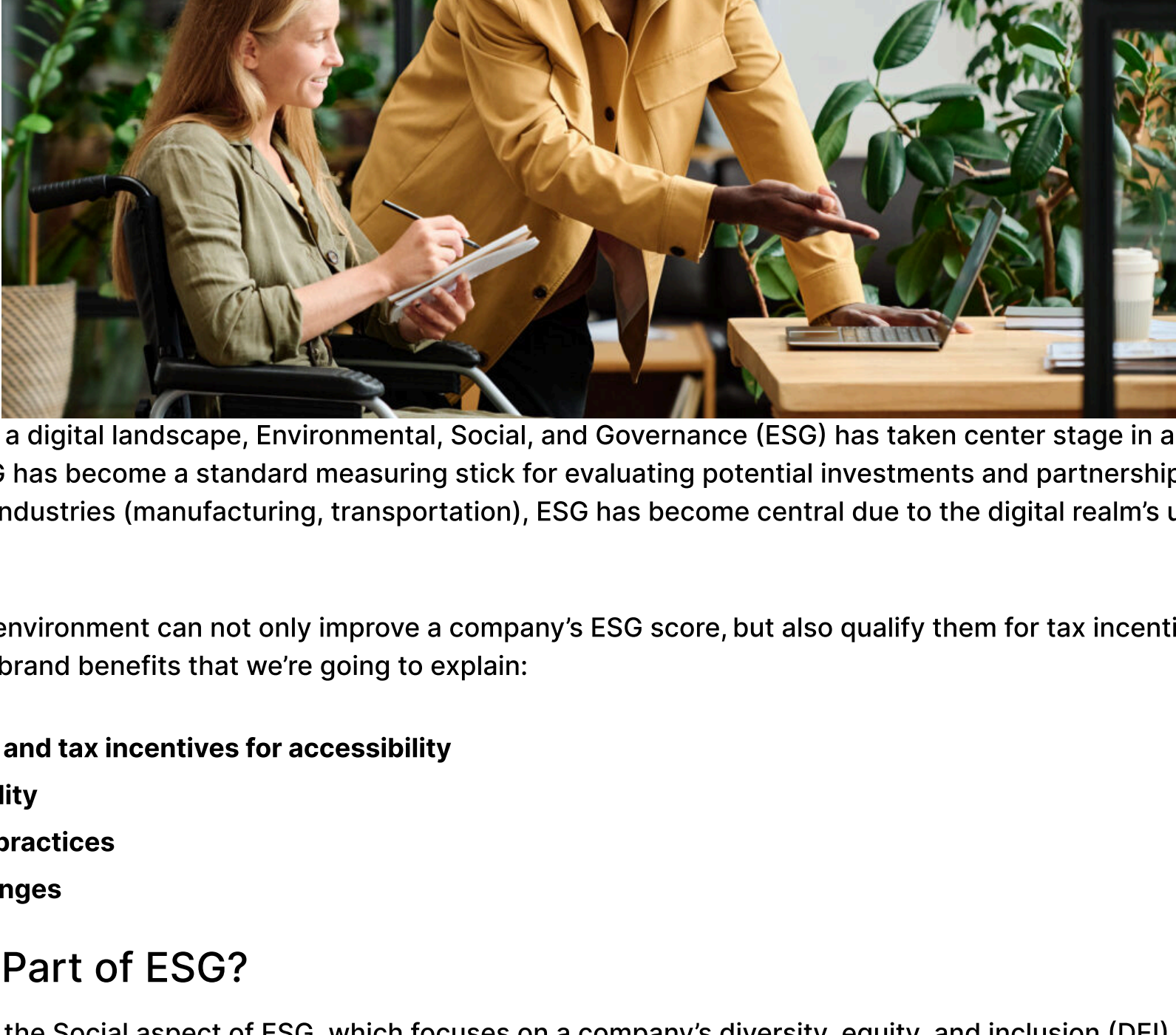


Business Incentives to Boost ESG Score with Accessibility

© Juana Poareo(https://es.sorenson.com/en/author/jpoareo/)



As businesses evolve in a digital landscape, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) has taken center stage in any well-formed enterprise strategy. ESG has become a standard measuring stick for evaluating potential investments and partnerships. Although typically the focus of traditional industries (manufacturing, transportation), ESG has become central due to the digital realm's unique challenges—including accessibility.

Creating an accessible environment can not only improve a company's ESG score, but also qualify them for tax incentives and provide additional financial and brand benefits that we're going to explain:

- **Economic benefits and tax incentives for accessibility**
- **ESG and Accessibility**
- **Accessibility best practices**
- **Overcoming challenges**

Is Accessibility Part of ESG?

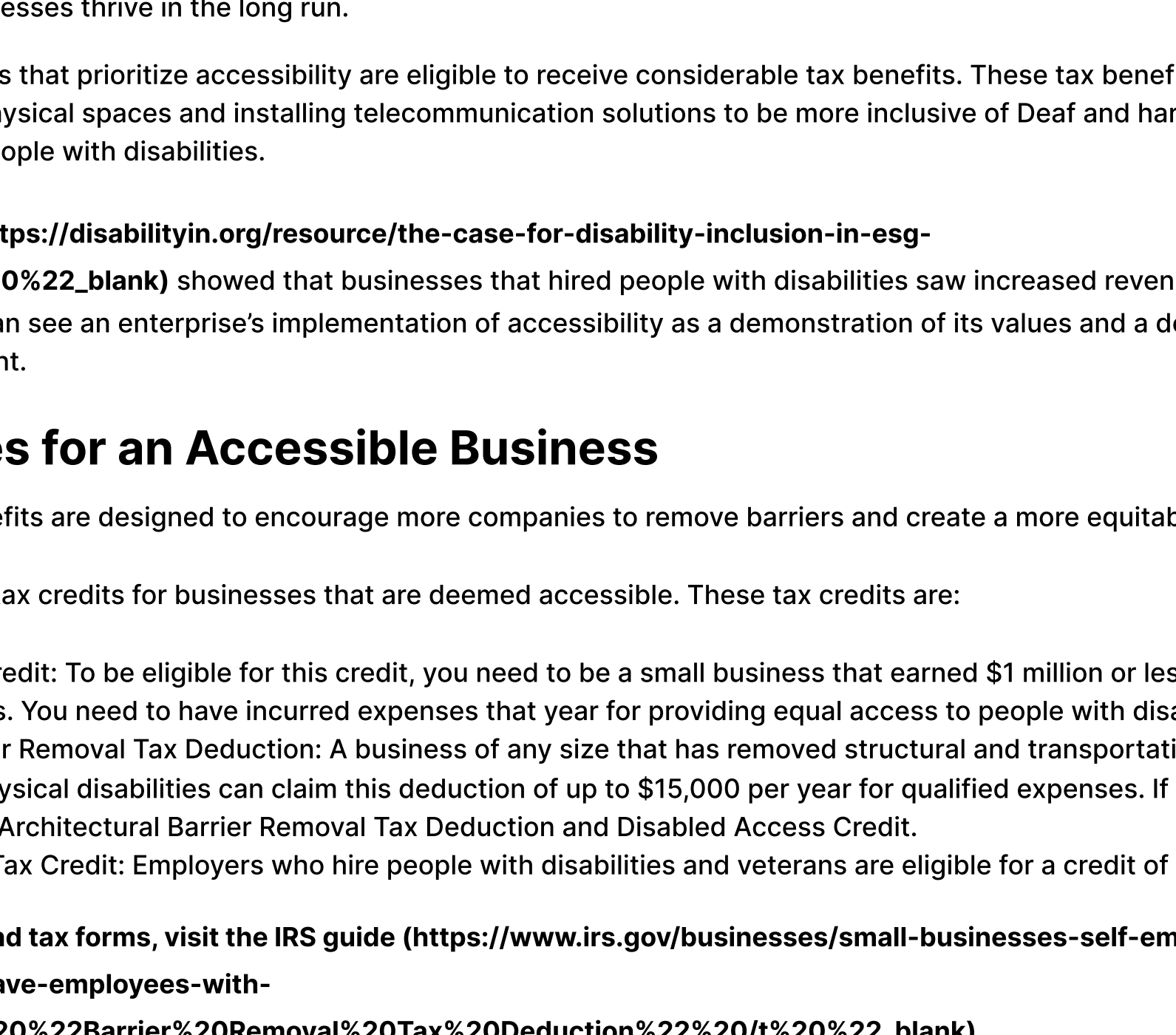
Accessibility falls under the Social aspect of ESG, which focuses on a company's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices.

Accessibility and inclusion in business means everyone can use services and products regardless of ability. You might ask yourself, "What is accessibility for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing?" It could be sign language interpreters, captioning services, visual alerts, and text-based communications.

By embracing accessibility, businesses demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility and equity, enhancing their overall ESG profile.

ESG and Accessibility

ESG initiatives marry company goals with purpose, emphasizing the importance of environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and ethical practices. The Social aspect of ESG benefits society, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, by examining the impact of business actions on consumers, employees, and the wider public. Implementing accessibility is a major part of DEI practices (best known as diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, DEIA), demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility by eradicating barriers for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.



Economic Benefits of Accessibility

Committing to a diverse and inclusive customer experience that includes people with disabilities has several economic benefits:

1. An expanded market: People with disabilities have considerable purchasing power, **with disposable income approaching half a trillion dollars.** (https://www.air.org/resource/report/hidden-market-purchasing-power-working-age-adults-disabilities) By making products and services accessible, **businesses expand their customer base and drive revenue growth** (https://techcrunch.com/2021/07/21/the-real-roi-of-making-your-products-more-accessible/).
2. Innovation and product development: Implementing accessibility fosters innovation and creativity. Companies leading the way in accessible design create user-friendly experiences that resonate with diverse audiences.
3. Competitive edge and brand loyalty: Customers are demonstrating more loyalty to socially inclusive businesses that make online and in-person experiences user-friendly for everyone.
4. Risk mitigation: Prioritizing accessibility helps to avoid potential legal issues, protects reputations, and prevents financial problems, ensuring that businesses thrive in the long run.

Furthermore, businesses that prioritize accessibility are eligible to receive considerable tax benefits. These tax benefits are offset costs of businesses adjusting physical spaces and installing telecommunication solutions to be more inclusive of Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals and other people with disabilities.

An Accenture study (https://disabilityin.org/resource/the-case-for-disability-inclusion-in-esg-investing/%22%20/%20%22_blank) showed that businesses that hired people with disabilities saw increased revenue and profit. Behind the profits, the public can see an enterprise's implementation of accessibility as a demonstration of its values and a desire to reach a diverse customer base and talent.

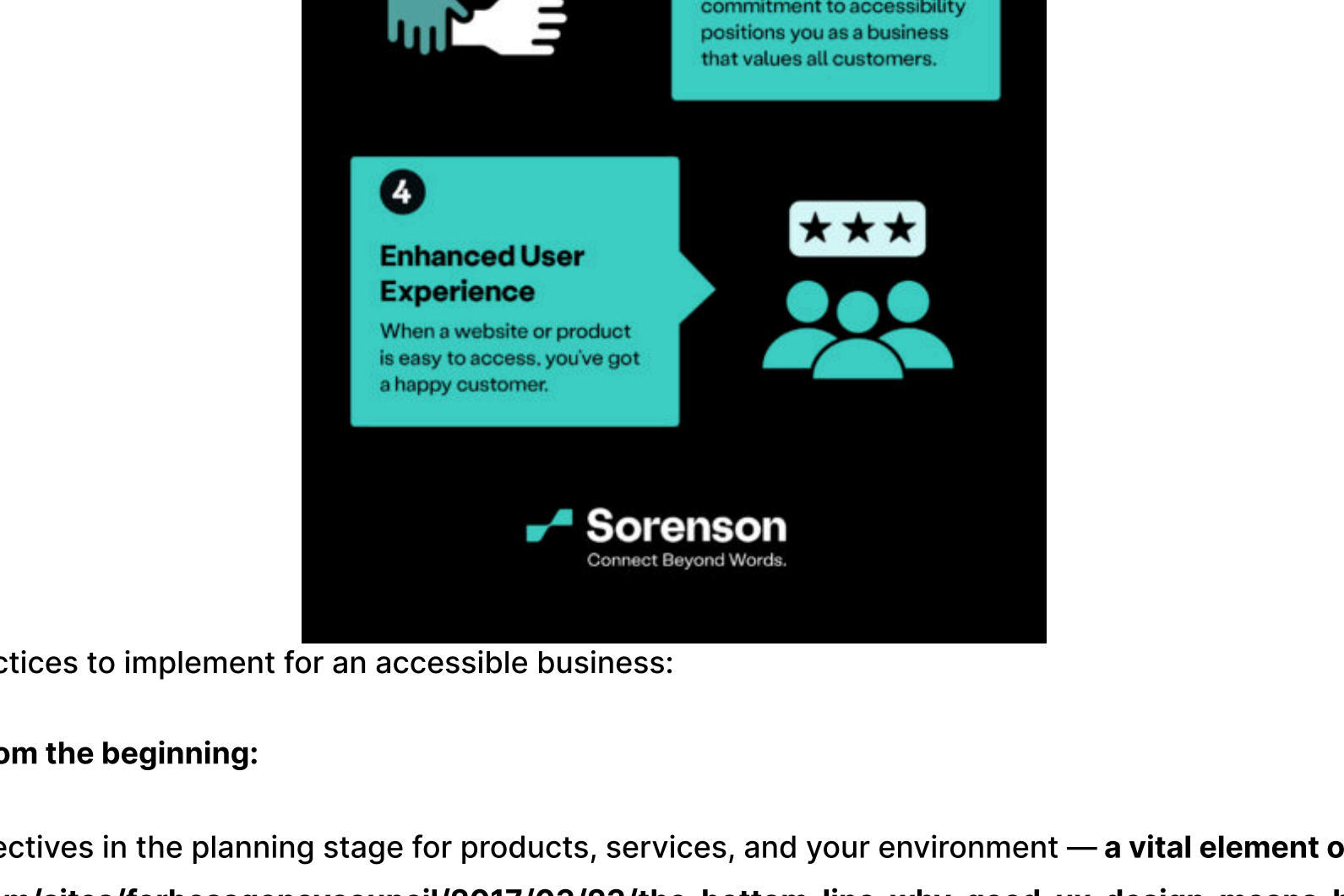
Tax Incentives for an Accessible Business

Tax incentives and benefits are designed to encourage more companies to remove barriers and create a more equitable society.

The IRS provides three tax credits for businesses that are deemed accessible. These tax credits are:

1. Disabled Access Credit: To be eligible for this credit, you need to be a small business that earned \$1 million or less and had 30 or fewer full-time employees. You need to have incurred expenses that year for providing equal access to people with disabilities.
2. Architectural Barrier Removal Tax Deduction: A business of any size that has removed structural and transportation barriers for seniors and people with physical disabilities can claim this deduction of up to \$15,000 per year for qualified expenses. If applicable, a business can claim both the Architectural Barrier Removal Tax Deduction and Disabled Access Credit.
3. Work Opportunity Tax Credit: Employers who hire people with disabilities and veterans are eligible for a credit of up to \$9,600.

For more information and tax forms, visit the IRS guide (https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/tax-benefits-for-businesses-who-have-employees-with-disabilities/%22%20/%20%22Barrier%20Removal%20Tax%20Deduction%22%20/%20%22_blank).



Starbucks is a prime example of a corporation combining profit with social good. The company boosted its brand image by **opening the first ASL store in Washington, D.C. and demonstrated a commitment to reaching the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities** (https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2018/all-signs-point-to-washington-dc/).

A Case Study: NPR

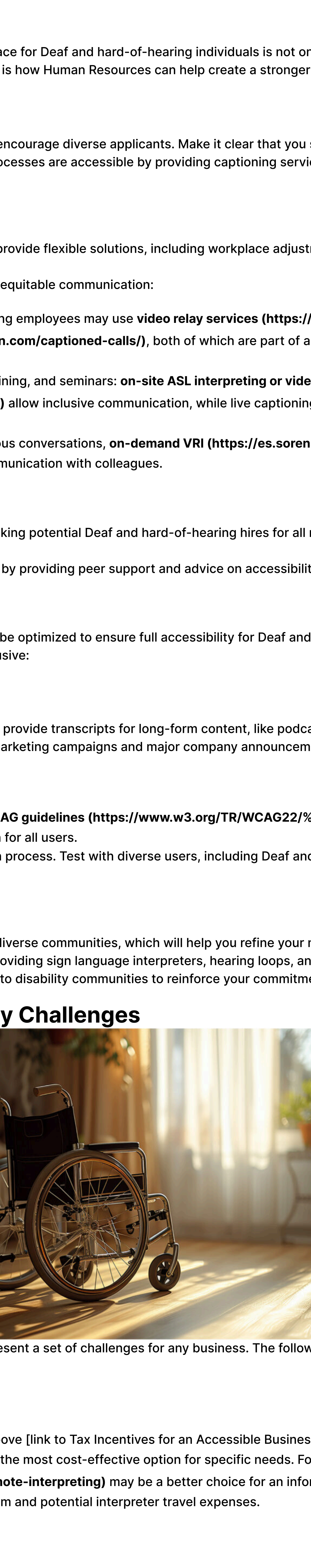
National Public Radio (NPR) hosts This American Life, a weekly podcast. In 2011, NPR began providing transcripts for weekly podcast episodes in response to new FCC regulations. While NPR initially aimed to adhere to legal requirements, **the case study showed that transcripts increased traffic and listeners to their podcast** (https://www.3playmedia.com/why-3play/case-studies/this-american-life/%22%20/%20%22_blank).

Not only do transcripts benefit Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, but they also help ESL learners and people who prefer reading over listening.

Aligning accessibility with ESG initiatives can empower an enterprise to present as a positive influence in society that fosters continued innovation and inclusion.

Accessibility Best Practices

Implementing best practices for accessibility can boost customer satisfaction, extend market reach, and promote a positive company culture.



Here are some best practices to implement for an accessible business:

Include accessibility from the beginning:

Consider diverse perspectives in the planning stage for products, services, and your environment — a **vital element of universal design** (https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/03/23/the-bottom-line-why-good-ux-design-means-better-business/?sh=6c7b83ca2396). If you engage people with disabilities — including the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities — **through surveys, focus groups, and consultation with advocacy groups early on, you'll be a step ahead of accessibility** (https://es.sorenson.com/blog/si/a-word-on-accessibility-from-a-deaf-person-and-vp-of-brand-marketing/).

Leverage accessible communication technology:

- Equip workrooms and meeting spaces with assistive listening devices (hearing loops). **Include VRI interpreting services** (https://es.sorenson.com/si/video-remote-interpreting/).
- Provide real-time captioning for presentations and virtual meetings.
- Ensure your website is accessible for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing by providing transcripts for audio content and closed captioning for videos. Use plain language for textual content and avoid jargon.

Make your physical environment accessible:

Install both audio and visual alert systems for alarms and doorbells to provide accessibility for hard-of-hearing and low-vision individuals.

Encourage an inclusive work culture:

Integrate disability into workplace training on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) and set expectations for respect. This training can also include guidance for effective collaboration with colleagues of different abilities and how to best use accessibility tools.

Be transparent:

Communicate your accessibility initiatives to your customers and the public. This will not only boost your brand image and reputation but also make accessibility more familiar to others. By actively removing barriers for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, a business can improve the experience for customers and employees. Achieving accessibility is a continual process that involves learning and adapting to create the ideal user experience.

A thorough accessibility plan spans every aspect of your business, both internally and externally. For example, let's look at how accessible practices might play out in different departments.

Human Resources

Creating an accessible and inclusive workplace for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals is not only an accessibility matter but it is a crucial aspect of building a diverse workforce. Here is how Human Resources can help create a stronger workforce:

1. Recruitment and onboarding

- Use plain language in job postings and encourage diverse applicants. Make it clear that you support accessibility in your company.
- Ensure the application and interview processes are accessible by providing captioning services and sign language interpreters. Offer the same for the onboarding process.

2. Workplace accommodations

- Review employees' specific needs and provide flexible solutions, including workplace adjustments, software, and communication technology.
- Make assistive technology available for equitable communication:

For phone calls: Deaf and hard-of-hearing employees may use **video relay services** (https://es.sorenson.com/vrs/) (VRS) or **call captioning service** (https://es.sorenson.com/si/captioned-calls/), both of which are part of a federally funded program at no cost to eligible individuals or their employers.

For scheduled meetings, interviews, training, and seminars: **on-site ASL interpreting or video remote interpreting (VRI)** (https://es.sorenson.com/si/business/) allow inclusive communication, while live captioning and transcription boosts comprehension and retention for all participants.

For impromptu meetings and spontaneous conversations, **on-demand VRI** (https://es.sorenson.com/si/sorenson-express/) and speech-to-text apps support daily communication with colleagues.

3. An inclusive culture

- Create equitable hiring practices by seeking potential Deaf and hard-of-hearing hires for all roles within a business, including leadership roles.
- Support Deaf and hard-of-hearing staff by providing peer support and advice on accessibility and inclusion.

Marketing and Outreach

Your marketing and outreach strategies can be optimized to ensure full accessibility for Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. Here's how you can adapt your strategy to be more inclusive:

1. Accessible media

- Caption all video and audio content and provide transcripts for long-form content, like podcasts.
- Include sign language interpreting for marketing campaigns and major company announcements.

2. Accessible website design

- **Ensure your website complies with WCAG guidelines** (https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/%22%20/%20%22_blank), which aim to facilitate navigation and comprehension for all users.
- Incorporate accessibility into the design process. Test with diverse users, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing volunteers, to find and fix any barriers.

3. Community engagement

- Solicit feedback and testimonials from diverse communities, which will help you refine your marketing strategies.
- Ensure your events are accessible by providing sign language interpreters, hearing loops, and captioning services.
- Support events and projects of interest to disability communities to reinforce your commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Overcoming Accessibility Challenges



Implementing accessibility measures can present a set of challenges for any business. The following are some common challenges and accompanying solutions:

1. Budget concerns

- Take advantage of the tax incentives above [link to Tax Incentives for an Accessible Business] if you have eligible expenses.
- Employ a variety of solutions to choose the most cost-effective option for specific needs. For example, **video remote interpreting (VRI)** (https://es.sorenson.com/si/video-remote-interpreting) may be a better choice for an informal half-hour meeting than on-site interpreting that has a two-hour minimum and potential interpreter travel expenses.
- Consider making changes in phases.

2. Technological barriers

- Invest in assistive technologies and provide platforms to make them accessible to all users.

3. Resistance to change

- Adopting a culture of inclusion can take some getting used to, so provide education about its role in company goals and the long-term benefits.
- Assemble support from leadership to model inclusive behavior.

Conclusion

Creating an accessible environment for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing is a smart business decision: It puts you in compliance with legal regulations, contributes to a strong ESG profile, provides long-term financial benefits, and makes you eligible for tax incentives to offset up-front costs.

Implementing accessibility within the ESG framework positively impacts reputation, brand image, employee satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Such impacts extend beyond business and can affect societal changes.

It's important to remember that accessibility isn't a one-and-done process but a continual one that lays a path for growing, learning, and adapting.

Sorenson offers accessibility design consultants who can help you develop a tailored plan for your business that matches your specific needs to appropriate solutions. When you inquire about services, we pair you with a consultant who fits your industry's needs.

Request a consultation » (https://es.sorenson.com/si/business/#form)

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CaptionCall and CaptionCall Mobile are available in the United States only. FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS ANYONE BUT REGISTERED USERS WITH HEARING LOSS FROM USING INTERNET PROTOCOL (IP) CAPTIONED TELEPHONES WITH THE CAPTIONS TURNED ON. IP captioned telephone service may use a two-party line. The operator generates captions of what the other party to the call says. These captions are then sent to your phone. There is a cost for each minute of captions generated, paid from a federally administered fund. No costs are passed along to individuals who qualify for the service. The CaptionCall phone and CaptionCall Mobile app remain the property of Sorenson in order to provide ongoing support, service, and upgrades. Patient information: es.sorenson.com/legal (https://es.sorenson.com/legal)

FCC rules permit you to port your telephone number to the VRS provider of your choice. If you request a new number, Sorenson will provide you with one for the geographic area where you live or work. To ensure proper routing of PRT calls, it is important that you provide, and update in the event it changes, the physical address (i.e., the Registered Location) from which you are placing the call. You can update your Registered Location in your device settings or by calling (866) 756-6729 (toll-free 1-866-756-6729). To learn how to update on your device visit (https://es.sorenson.com/vrs/vrs/manage-account/). Emergency calls made via internet-based TRS may not function the same as traditional PRT service. For example, you may not be able to dial 911 if there is an internet-service failure or if you lose electrical power, and your PRT call may not be routed correctly if you have not updated your Registered Location. Hearing point-to-point video users will not be able to place emergency calls. For more information on the process of obtaining ten-digit numbers and the limitations and risks associated with using Sorenson's VRS to place a PRT call, please visit https://es.sorenson.com/vrs/toll-free-numbers/ (https://es.sorenson.com/legal). For information on toll-free numbering, please visit https://es.sorenson.com/vrs/toll-free-numbers/ (https://es.sorenson.com/vrs/toll-free-numbers/).

Sorenson VRS is only available if you are eligible for VRS and have registered in the FCC's User Registration Database. The cost of VRS is paid by a federally administered fund. Accordingly, use of Sorenson VRS calling for video conferencing is subject to compliance with FCC regulations and Sorenson VRS EULA. Under federal law, you may use VRS only if you have a speech or hearing disability and need VRS in order to communicate. Also, call participants must be in a different location than the other individuals on the call.

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