

# Employing People with Disabilities: The Business Case

Businesses can boost their competitive edge by making people with disabilities an integral part of their workforce and their customer base



## Expanded Talent Pool

Finding and retaining skilled employees with the right qualifications and level of experience can be a challenge for any business. In addition, economists are estimating a shortage of 10-15 million workers in the upcoming decade due to an aging and shrinking workforce.

**438,000 of the state's 3.8 million working age adults have a disability**

Employers can proactively seek candidates they may otherwise overlook. One talent pool that businesses can tap into is that of individuals with disabilities. According to a 2008 U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy survey of 3,800 companies, less than 20% employ people with disabilities. However, there are approximately 54 million people living in the U.S. (about 1 in 5 people) who have reported to be living with a disability.

## Increased Worker Productivity

Many businesses that employ individuals with disabilities report reduced employee turnover, increased employee loyalty, and increased morale and productivity of other employees.

**WorkWithoutLimits**  
Putting abilities to work in Massachusetts.

Work Without Limits is a public/private partnership that brings together people with disabilities, family members, policy researchers, policy makers, service planners, employment service providers, employers, and other stakeholders to maximize work opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, addresses the needs of employers, and strengthens the Massachusetts workforce.

**46% of accommodations cost absolutely nothing while 45% of accommodations have a one-time cost, typically around \$500**

A 2007 study by DePaul University found:

- Employees with disabilities were just as dependable and productive as employees without disabilities and had nearly identical job performance ratings.
- Very few reasonable accommodations were provided to employees with disabilities, and the average cost of the accommodations was \$313.

Job accommodations can play a vital role in facilitating employment, whether individuals have a pre-existing disability or are returning to work following an injury or illness. The accommodations result in multiple benefits including:

- Retention of a qualified employee
- Increase in the worker's productivity
- Elimination of cost to train a new employee.

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## Diversity

By the middle of this century, over half of the working population will be minorities and people with disabilities already represent the country's largest minority group. This will increase as the working-age population develops age-related health conditions and disabilities.

As many Baby Boomers approach retirement-age, not all can or will retire. In 2000, Baby Boomers represented almost half of the U.S. labor workforce and AARP reported that 69% of older workers plan to continue working past age 65. Between age, ethnicity, language and disability, employers must consider how the face of the American worker is changing.

**30% of America's 69.6 million families have at least one family member with a disability**

## Increased Market Share

Individuals with disabilities represent a market for goods and services with \$220 Billion in discretionary income and \$1 Trillion in aggregate income. And as more and more individuals with disabilities enter the workforce, their purchasing power will increase.

Employees with disabilities can give businesses an inside advantage to an expanded customer base. When deciding how to spend their money, people with disabilities will patronize businesses that are sensitive to and educated about their needs and know how to accommodate them. Like everyone else, they want quality products and services at competitive prices. In order to market successfully to a specific target market, businesses have to have employees who mirror that specific target market.

**Companies can reach as many as 4 out of every 10 consumers with marketing programs aimed at people with disabilities and their family members**

## Good Public Relations

Hiring individuals with disabilities can increase a company's brand image with consumers. A 2005 study conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education at UMass Boston found that:

- Consumers have positive attitudes towards businesses that hire individuals with disabilities.
- When asked "what information about a company would give you a favorable impression of that company," hiring individuals with disabilities was third on the list after offering health insurance and protecting the environment.
- 92% of consumers surveyed felt more favorable toward businesses that hire individuals with disabilities and 87% said they would prefer to patronize businesses that hire individuals with disabilities.

## Win-Win Strategy

Making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities encourages a culture of caring and respect for diversity in the employer, and a positive consumer response. As the National Organization on Disability says, "employing people with disabilities is good for the individual, the business, and society. This is a 'win-win-win' strategy."