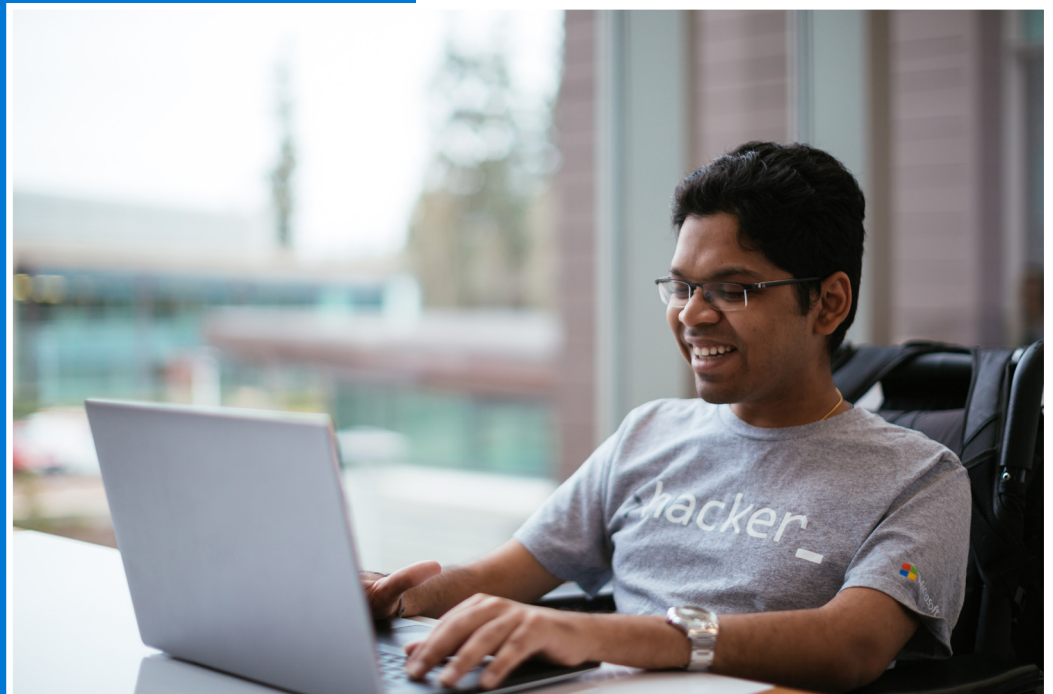




Disability Support Playbook



How to build an inclusive
support team for your
customers with disabilities

Introduction

If a customer called in to customer support and said they were using Assistive Technology (AT) like Jaws, Dragon, or a different Screen Reader – would you know what they meant?

In 2012, with an idea and small team of support agents, Microsoft sketched out what eventually evolved into our [Disability Answer Desk \(DAD\)](#). Today that hunch has led to over 1 million contacts from customers with disabilities and contributed to numerous product improvements used by millions of customers daily.

The goal of this guide is to share our top 5 lessons learned from our journey, and to help [jump-start the conversation for employers](#) looking to provide a more inclusive customer support experience for people with disabilities.

Disability is a strength. This perspective is at the core of Microsoft's mission, to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more, and weaves throughout our company culture. We are committed to designing inclusive products as well as hiring people with disabilities. This diversity of talent and experiences help us innovate. In an industry that thrives on pioneering new ideas, this asset is invaluable.

over
**ONE
MILLION**
calls handled by Disability Answer Desk (DAD) since 2012



Microsoft is ready to jump-start the conversation with other employers

Disability Answer Desk (DAD): Top 5 Lessons Learned

- 1 Start small, scale big:**
Taking small steps can lead to big impact
- 2 Meet customers on their terms:**
New support channels can make a difference
- 3 Don't reinvent the wheel:**
Leverage your existing support infrastructure as a foundation
- 4 Voice of the customer matters:**
Leads to product innovation
- 5 If you build it, they will come:**
How to approach marketing of a new support desk





More than
1 BILLION
people with disabilities



\$6.9 TRILLION
of purchasing power

Source: Forbes, 2016



What's more, focusing on inclusivity and accessibility creates an enormous market opportunity. More than **1 billion people—roughly one-seventh of the global population—experiences a disability.** This community controls **\$6.9 trillion of purchasing power** with 1 in 5 people having a disability. Every customer and person with a disability is different and has different needs from customer support.

This guide shares our experience building the Microsoft Disability Answer Desk (DAD) as a support differentiator and the unique structure behind Disability Answer Desk (DAD), which leverages existing support teams to provide customer satisfaction for people with disabilities. It also identifies the work and expertise needed to support customers with disabilities.

Every company culture is different. No one-size-fits-all answer exists. We hope our Disability Answer Desk (DAD) framework will jumpstart a conversation to begin a disability support team.

Note: In this document, we use person-first language, and understand it is a choice to use identity-first language if preferred.



@AbilityAnyware

How many companies take the time to consider, make the effort, and readily present info on service options to Blind & Deaf individuals? Microsoft does! They have a Disability Answer Desk (DAD) & contact for communication in ASL.

**Disability
Answer Desk**

<https://support.microsoft.com/answerdesk/accessibility>

Call: (800) 936-5900

ASL: (503) 427-1234





Lesson 1

Start small, scale big

Scaling

In 2012, The Disability Answer Desk (DAD) was initially called the Accessibility Answer Desk. However, most of the calls were for internet access and connectivity issues, which was not the intention of this new support desk. We realized the name was very important to ensure we could serve customers with disabilities, so the team was renamed to 'Disability Answer Desk (DAD).'

Although it began with just a few agents and limited coverage hours, the Disability Answer Desk (DAD) has scaled greatly over the years. We have not scaled by adding large numbers of employees. Instead, we have gradually increased capacity through the implementation of technology (e.g., Be My Eyes), different support modalities (e.g., American Sign Language), and supporting various sites and products such as LinkedIn, Xbox, Windows and Microsoft Office 365. As a result of this gradual approach, we've been able to serve over 1 million calls since 2012.

Success metrics

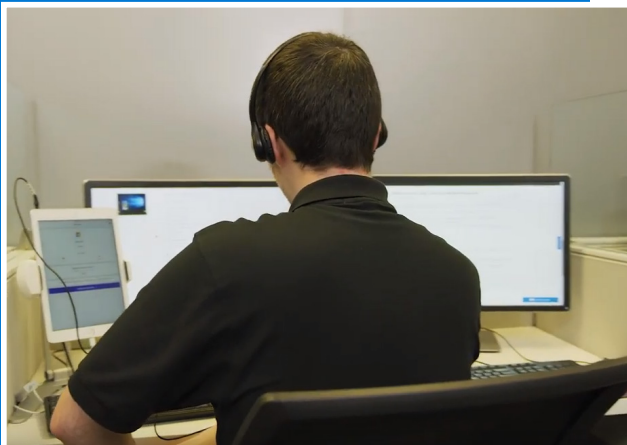
A disability support desk needs to be run like any other model and should have the same success metrics as your other support channels, including average handle time and customer satisfaction.

For example, the **average handle time for Be My Eyes one-way video support dropped ↓40%** compared to when we served via the traditional phone. In addition, our customers' feedback informed numerous bug fixes and new feature requests that benefit all customers.



I just got this wonderful new Surface Pro 4

Marlee Matlin contacts the Microsoft Disability Answer Desk (DAD).



To learn how Be My Eyes enables other large employers to seamlessly connect people who are blind or low vision to support agents, visit their website, [Be My Eyes – Bringing sight to blind and low-vision people](#). Together we can all make the world more inclusive and accessible!

Lesson 2

Meet customers on their terms

Support modalities

Support teams offer a variety of ways to interact, including phone, chat, and online self-assist (e.g., self-help support articles). Multiple options allow for customer choice or preference.

Not all support modalities are accessible in all scenarios. For example, a customer who is deaf or non-verbal may not be able to use a phone, but may prefer to chat instead.

Alternatively, if the chat client or a web form is not accessible to a customer using a screen reader, they may not even be able to contact support. Using a support modality that is not accessible means a customer using a screen reader through a webform, will unfortunately not know what to enter on the form.

Microsoft added two additional support options.

American Sign Language (ASL) enables agents to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing customers. This allows customers who are Deaf to talk directly with agents using ASL instead of going through a third-party Video Relay Service (VRS). The Deaf community has truly embraced adoption of ASL support, in part because it offers the opportunity to employ people who are Deaf and use ASL as their primary language.

Be My Eyes, a one-way video tool, allows customers who are Blind or have Low Vision

to share their screen, product, or tool, and talk directly with agents simultaneously. You can watch the video [Be My Eyes + Microsoft Disability Answer Desk \(DAD\)](#) to see how this tool supports customers in an innovative way that enhances the support experience.

Hiring people with disabilities

In the U.S., the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is twice that of the national average (source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Feb 2019). By supporting customers with disabilities with agents that also have a disability, organizations can better serve people with disabilities, as well as address the employment gap.

It's important to consider that organizations may need to adapt in order to hire more people with disabilities. For example, transportation may be a barrier, so providing opportunities for remote work could expand your pool of qualified candidates, as well as remove employment obstacles.

Disability Answer Desk (DAD) agents who have mobility, vision, and invisible disabilities help managers design a work environment that is even more inclusive for everyone.

Lesson 3

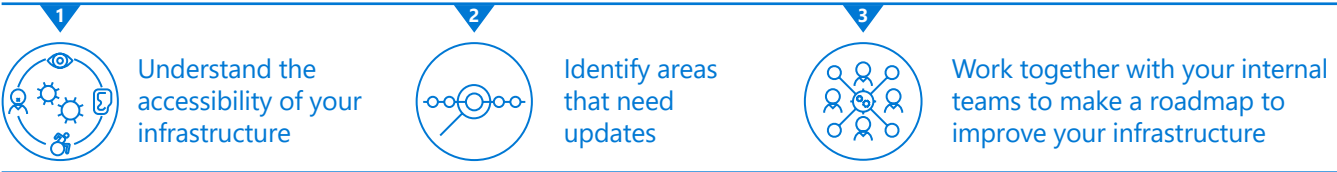
Don't reinvent the wheel

Infrastructure

Microsoft leverages many third-party call center platforms and internal platforms, so **there are no special tooling or systems needed.**

First, understand the level of the accessibility of the infrastructure. Next, identify areas that need updates. Finally, work together with internal teams to make a roadmap to improve the accessibility.

STEPS



This will not be a one-off task. Adhering to inclusivity best practices is an ongoing process. Organizations will need to continue to assess and improve to meet evolving accessibility standards.



“ I am a blind person using JAWS screen reader with Microsoft products and all the individuals at the Disability Answer Desk (DAD) who supported my problem, and worked through everything in a patient professional manner at all times. I was delighted with their approach and the outcome. I would like to register a special thanks to Microsoft for starting a dedicated support. ”

– Disability Answer Desk (DAD) customer, April 2019

Making support tools accessible

Providing accessible technologies to our customers with disabilities is a business imperative, and in some locations around the globe it is also legal requirement.

Laws and regulations relating to accessibility vary across the globe. Many multinational corporations may be subject to a diverse set of these requirements in countries where headquartered, operate, or where products are used. Ensuring accessibility is a priority and journey which includes taking stock of end-to-end support experience.

Training

At the Microsoft Disability Answer Desk (DAD), agents are trained on Microsoft products, disability etiquette, as well as third-party Assistive Technology (AT). People with disabilities choose and use technology that best serve their needs and want customer service that does the same. Providing an inclusive and positive support experience empowers customers to make decisions regarding several products in the ecosystem of Assistive Technology (AT).



Links to third-party training examples:

- [JAWS Surf's Up – training on using JAWS on the web](#)
 - [Narrator user guide](#)
 - [ZoomText training webinars](#)
 - [Accessibility Learning Webinar Series](#)
-



Links to disability etiquette training:

- [Introduction to Disability and Accessibility](#)
 - [Accessibility at a Glance series \(short videos on various topics from interviewing candidates to creating accessible content\)](#)
-

1| Third-party Assistive Technology (AT) training

Training our Disability Answer Desk (DAD) team begins with the most common **third-party Assistive Technology (AT)**. By striving to be brand-agnostic, we remain committed to an exceptional customer experience.

Disability Answer Desk (DAD) trains on third-party Assistive Technology (AT) to ensure a welcoming, customer-first experience. Before starting Disability Answer Desk (DAD), we ‘mystery-shopped’ the support experience. Listening to a customer who was blind call into the support team using a popular third-party screen reader, JAWS, the agent asked him to uninstall the software as part of the normal troubleshooting process. This experience was a lightbulb learning moment, realizing the agent directed him to remove the Assistive Technology (AT) they rely on to interact with technology. Instead, the support agent only complicated their situation—the exact opposite of what customer service teams strive to do.

Being knowledgeable with Assistive Technology (AT)—both Microsoft products and otherwise—builds trust with our customers. And surveys have validated that Disability Answer Desk (DAD) agents’ knowledge in Assistive Technology (AT) result in higher customer satisfaction.

2| Disability etiquette training

Next, all agents are trained in disability etiquette. Language and tone reflect respect—a priority for any customer, and especially people with disabilities.

Terms such as ‘mute,’ ‘handicap,’ ‘slow,’ “differently abled,” and ‘wheelchair-bound’ should not be used. Disability Answer Desk (DAD) agents use inclusive, people first-language. For example, they say person with Autism” or “person with Dyslexia,” although they respect identify first language (e.g. Autistic or Dyslexic).

[A summary of our etiquette training](#) is available publicly to review and share, which is a resource your organization may leverage for your own support team or broader employee inclusivity trainings.

That said, labels, titles, and word choice are a personal preference, and people with disabilities have the right to choose how they are addressed. Agents are trained to adapt to and adopt the terms customers use. Simple things matter.

For example, we encourage our agents to use the term “select” when helping a customer who is using a screen reader instead of saying “click.”

Agent profile

The qualities and skills that make a great disability support agent are equal to what makes any great support agent. People who exhibit:

Flexibility: The ability to adapt to a customer’s preferences and in a format that works best for them. For example, troubleshooting over chat works well for customers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing as well as people working in a noisy environment, such as a coffee shop.

Growth mindset: Assistive Technology (AT) is constantly evolving. Agents that are passionate about learning new skills, like third-party Assistive Technology (AT), best fit within a team that requires ongoing training. It’s also important to show empathy and the ability to understand the perspective of customer.

Cost model

A disability support desk uses largely the same cost model of existing support business, with some variation. It can be based on the number of agents per hour, per head, per incident, or as a managed service.

The cost for an ASL agent is slightly higher than a traditional agent, due to their specialized language expertise.

Other support modalities, like Be My Eyes, require a small one-time integration cost plus service cost.

Accessibility insights

Consider the accessibility of support websites, which should adhere to the internationally accepted standards on web accessibility. For details and guidance, please check out the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#). To check if your website is accessible, use [accessibility insights](#), which you can run throughout your upgrades to see how changes affect the site accessibility in real time.



Lesson 4

Voice of the customer matters

Voice of the customer

Disability Answer Desk (DAD) has facilitated many wins from investing in a disability-focused support structure. The most impactful of these, aside from customer satisfaction (NSAT), was learning from customers with disabilities. Microsoft put listening to the voice of the customer at the center of all we do, and that has enabled the improvement to our products, improved customer support outcomes, and created a more inclusive culture.

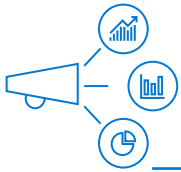
Based on consistent customer requests, **the [Microsoft Accessibility Feedback Forum](#) was created to solicit and act on customer feedback.** This feedback tool tracks what our community loves, dislikes, or wants to change.

This centralized hub for feedback helps engineering teams prioritize requests based on top trends and customer voting.



We created the [Microsoft Accessibility Feedback](#) website to solicit and act upon customer feedback





Sample videos created for ASL and Be My Eyes Service

- [Patrick's story: The Microsoft ASL Support team helps set up live captions & subtitles in PowerPoint](#)
- [Be My Eyes + Microsoft Disability Answer Desk \(DAD\)](#)
- [Windows 10 Anniversary update tech support available in ASL](#)



Several examples of new features created based on customer feedback include:

- **Narrator Home feature** – This feature allows people to more easily understand how to use the Narrator screen reader built into Windows 10.
- **Narrator in Safe Mode** – This feature enables people using screen readers to troubleshoot their computer while in Safe Mode.
- **Option to increase the size of mouse pointers** – This feature helps people with low vision more easily follow the pointer.
- **PowerPoint live captions and subtitles** – This feature helps people who are deaf and hard of hearing more easily follow along in presentations and experience live auto-generated captions.

Lesson 5

If you build it, they will come

Marketing and awareness are key

Starting a disability support desk is a terrific first step. However, customers with disabilities may not use this terrific resource—unless you tell them it exists!

Making customers aware of the disability support desk may be the biggest hurdle to overcome. A full two years passed at Microsoft before we saw critical mass volumes that allowed us to scale our Disability Answer Desk (DAD) offering. **When we began in 2012, our team was a handful of agents. Now, Disability Answer Desk (DAD) employs more than 70 agents and takes over 150,000 calls annually.**

Since the start, we have added [support teams dedicated to customers with disabilities](#) to enable other organizations about our product and services, videos highlighting the Disability Answer Desk (DAD) presence at events like the annual National Federation of the Blind Conference, blog mentions, and [support websites dedicated to disability](#).

All marketing efforts should adhere to accessibility best practices, like videos with captions, audio descriptions, and a voice-over to make a video inclusive and accessible to the very people you are trying to attract.

Consumer vs enterprise

As we learned how to build and run the consumer-focused [Disability Answer Desk \(DAD\)](#), we discovered an opportunity to create the [enterprise Disability Answer Desk \(eDAD\)](#). The focus of the eDAD is to support enterprise customers from various sectors including education, government, and corporate organizations that are looking for guidance on accessibility and disability-focused topics.



In closing: Inclusivity means we are stronger together

Empowering more people to receive tech support empowers them in the future to make a video call to a loved one, to access a presentation from work, or to play a beloved game. Moreover, the feedback from customers with disabilities helps everyone design better, more inclusive products and services. Support for customers with disabilities is not only the right thing to do, but it is also good for business.

Accessibility is about accountability, transparency, and inclusion. We believe that we can accomplish so much more when we come together with others to scale accessibility. That's why we are thrilled that [other companies](#) are making progress on their accessibility customer support efforts, and why we want organizations to join us on this journey.

Creating a disability support desk can also help to transform people with disabilities from customers into fans. And by listening to customers with disabilities, organizations will have ample opportunities to improve products that can benefit everyone.

If you have questions or want to learn more, please email us at : A11ySupportHelp@microsoft.com



