

MAJOR BUSINESSES ARE FINALLY ANSWERING THE CRIES FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION – BUT WE AREN'T THERE YET

- *Major corporations such as Airbnb, Mitsubishi Chemical, Nationwide, SAP, UniCredit and Wipro sign up to global disability inclusion movement – The Valuable 500*
- *On Global Accessibility Awareness Day, The Valuable 500 calls on business leaders to learn from the lessons around disability inclusion highlighted by COVID-19 crisis*
- *The latest group of corporations joining The Valuable 500 movements takes the total number of pledges up to 275*

21.05.20, LONDON: Today, The Valuable 500 marks Global Accessibility Awareness Day and the UN's World Day for Cultural Diversity and Dialogue by calling on business leaders around the world to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure disability inclusion is central to their leadership agendas.

This comes as Airbnb, BMI Healthcare, Charles Russell Speechlys, DPD, Ecolab, Fidelity International, Mitsubishi Chemical, Nationwide, pladis, SAP, Scottish Water, Smurfit Kappa, Soneva, SSEN, Stephenson Harwood, UniCredit and Wipro are announced as the latest companies to join The Valuable 500 – the global movement which is working to get 500 of the world's largest businesses to commit to placing disability inclusion on their business leadership agendas.

Currently, 15% of people live with some form of disability. When you include the family of those living with a disability, this number rises to 53%. This 53% wield a significant amount of business potential, from spending power with a disposable annual income totalling \$8 trillion, to talent and skills.

Launched on the main stage at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in January 2019, 275 companies have since pledged to join The Valuable 500 and put disability on the business leadership agenda – with an additional 200 organisations actively discussing how they can join the movement. The combined revenue of its members is now over €4 trillion, with over 10 million employees and reaching across 26 countries globally.

The Valuable 500 is calling on business leaders to act on the structural inequalities against people with disabilities when it comes to accessibility and inclusion, which the COVID-19 crisis has brought to the fore.

These issues are evident throughout the business value chain, from reasonable accommodations for employees to customers' accessibility to vital public safety information disseminated on websites and other forms of media.

In 2019, the UK's Click-Away Pound survey found that business lost £17.1 billion due to customers abandoning a retail website because of lack of accessibility. In a period of social distancing where digital communication has become even more integrated and relied upon every day, in both business and social spheres, captioning and audio description on digital media and websites is still not the norm.

A [report](#) launched at the end of last year by UK union organisation UNISON, revealed that 67% of disabled workers surveyed across the UK had reasonable adjustments in the workplace requests rejected. Yet, months later many of these adjustments have been made in response to the Coronavirus.

As the UK begins to analyse what life might look like post lockdown; disability activists are calling for the degrees of flexibility and accommodation currently introduced to continue to allow a more accessible business landscape going forward.

There has been widespread action from the business community in stepping forward to support a broad cross-section of society in the face of the pandemic. Businesses have responded rapidly and with great agility to the impact of the virus, taking actions to protect employees and customers alike, from dedicated shopping hours for the vulnerable to full-paid sick leave for vulnerable employers who need to self-isolate. The pandemic has also demonstrated the value of a diversity of lived experience in businesses during this unprecedented time.

Many of the Valuable 500 companies have already produced initiatives changing the lives of those with disabilities. Microsoft have created the Disability Answer Desk to provide an inclusive tech support team for customers with disabilities. In India 4 million IT workers had to shift to working from home overnight, however this transition was easy for IBM workers, who already had accessibility built into their systems. And looking beyond the current conditions we are currently living, Barclays and WPP have announced flexible working initiatives post crisis which will promote accessibility across all levels.

Caroline Casey, Founder of The Valuable 500, commented:

“As people globally are implored to stay at home to prevent the spread of coronavirus, we are now entering a world where vast swathes of society can personally relate to what it is like to be socially excluded. It has awoken a collective empathy, both in society and business more broadly, that this is often the norm for people with disabilities.

“Businesses have proven that they can adapt and revolutionise working models in a short time frame when forced to do so – now, business leaders must continue this approach in levelling the playing field when it comes to equal accessibility and opportunity for all in the business community. The onus is equally on business leaders as it is the rest of society to take a firm, proactive stance in leading this change.”

Caroline will also be taking part in the Creative Diversity Dialogue today, to mark International Diversity Day. BBC Director General **Tony Hall** and UN Deputy Secretary General Amina J Mohammed will host a high-level global virtual dialogue in association with Linked-In Live on how the creative industry builds back better post pandemic with Diversity & Inclusion at the heart of the “new normal”.

The latest Valuable 500 companies announced today join a community including some of the world’s largest corporations across a plethora of sectors, from technology and finance to the creative industries: Accenture, BBC, BuzzFeed, Coca-Cola European Partners, Microsoft and Virgin Media are among its members.

Many of The Valuable 500 community have played an integral role in stepping forward to support communities during the pandemic. UniCredit strengthened its remote banking channels and worked with its Foundation to support communities and healthcare professionals in all its markets; in Italy, the Group has extended its employee healthcare cover to include Covid-19. Unilever will offer €500 million (approximately \$540 million USD) of cash flow relief worldwide to support livelihoods across its extended value chain, while O2 has ensured its customers can access important sites, such as citizensadvice.org.uk and scope.org.uk, without using data allowance.

Caroline Casey added:

“We are excited to welcome the new sign-ups joining The Valuable 500 community today and are proud of their demonstrative commitment to acting on the importance of disability inclusion during this global public health crisis. We are confident that they will be at the forefront of the businesses capitalising on the collective awakening of empathy to ensure disability inclusion is firmly integrated into the business landscape.”

The campaign is striving to have 500 global business leaders and CEOs signed up to the initiative by January 2021, coinciding with Davos 2021.

Brian Chesky, CEO and Co-Founder of Airbnb, said:

“Airbnb’s mission is to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere and this, of course, includes people with disabilities. We are working hard to make sure our products and services are widely accessible, especially for hosts and guests with disabilities. Airbnb is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse community, and we are delighted to join Valuable 500.”

Karen Prins, CEO of BMI Healthcare and David Cooper, Director of Human Resources of BMI Healthcare, said:

“We are committed to building an organisation in which opportunity comes with ability, there is neither prejudice nor favour, and every individual’s needs are met and supported in a way which makes their working lives, as enriched and as fulfilling as it can be.

“Our policies support equality; our people are encouraged to respect each other and appreciate that discrimination on any basis, including disability, plays no part in anything that we do or decision we make.”

Christopher Page, Senior Partner at Charles Russell Speechlys, said:

“Charles Russell Speechlys is proud to have taken the positive step of signing up to the Valuable 500. We all know that there is undoubtedly much more that can and should be done to open up the worlds of work and of client experiences to ensure that they are more inclusive and more accessible to those living with a disability. Being a signatory shows we are prepared to be held to account in helping to achieve that by: reviewing how we attract and support a diverse workforce to reach their full potential; considering how we can best support all of our clients whatever their needs; and ensuring disability inclusion remains on the leadership agenda.”

Anne Richards, CEO at Fidelity International, said:

“Fidelity International are proud to be joining The Valuable 500 movement, driving forward our commitment to inclusivity for all our customers and employees. We want to play our part in creating a society where everyone can thrive so we are delighted to offer our support to this excellent campaign.”

Salman Amin, CEO of pladis, said:

“At pladis, our focus begins with Inclusion, knowing that it is only through creating the right environment that we will successfully make strides in our inclusion and diversity promise and thrive as a business. Joining the The Valuable 500 movement offers a commitment to our people, customers, suppliers and all our stakeholders that pladis is stepping forward and will play a part in moving the dial in this vital area.”

Brian Duffy, President EMEA North and Global Executive Sponsor of Diversity and Inclusion, SAP, said:

“As Global Executive Sponsor of Diversity and Inclusion for SAP’s Customer Success organization, I am incredibly proud of the work we do every day to ensure our employees feel empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. We have a host of initiatives to help us achieve our diversity and inclusion goals – including our Autism at Work program and Business Women’s Network, among other important employee network groups. Joining the Valuable 500 network will help further our efforts in this area.

“Individuals entering the workforce today want to be part of organizations with a strong sense of purpose, and the skills and differences of all people need to be accommodated in the workplace. By tackling diversity and inclusion from a holistic, industry-wide perspective, we can create a culture with richer ideas that will help drive innovation within our sector.

“COVID-19 is presenting challenges for every business. It is about embracing the challenges we’re facing together and learning from them to create healthier and more accessible workplaces for all of us. I for one am excited to see what the future holds.”

Tony Smurfit, CEO of Smurfit Kappa, said:

“We are delighted to be part of The Valuable 500 as part of our ongoing disability awareness and inclusion strategy. At Smurfit Kappa, we recognise that the only thing we truly have in common is diversity. Our EveryOne programme strives to harness the power of our differences including disability and make the most of them.”

Colin Nicol, Managing Director of SSEN, said:

“There’s no quick fix or one-off initiative to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce. As a provider of an essential service, we are committed to making our business more reflective of the society we serve and are progressing long-term actions to foster an inclusive working environment. As part of this, we welcome the opportunity to join the Valuable500 and help drive positive action on disability inclusion.”

Eifion Morris, CEO of Stephenson Harwood, said:

“There is so much value in diversity - bringing different perspectives, voices, and ideas into our business, but it's when we truly include all of our colleagues that we reap the benefits. That's why joining the Valuable 500 movement, and committing to disability inclusion is so important.”

Jean Pierre Mustier, CEO of UniCredit, said:

“Diversity and inclusion are key for companies, bringing a better working environment and supporting risk mitigation and management. Now more than ever, during a very difficult time for so many, we must stand together and respect all our differences. Joining the Valuable 500 once again demonstrates our strong commitment to diversity and inclusion as well as building on our ongoing efforts that include dedicated policies, trainings, key external partnerships and internal engagement initiatives on disability management.”

Sunita Cherian, Global I&D Head, Wipro Limited said:

“At Wipro, nurturing diversity and inclusion is integral to our culture and we are committed to it. We celebrate plurality of ideas, perspectives and experiences that come from varied backgrounds. Being part of the Valuable500 global movement underscores our commitment to foster an inclusive workplace and society at large.”

For more information please visit: www.thevaluable500.com

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Notes to Editors

About The Valuable 500

Launched by social entrepreneur and activist Caroline Casey at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in January 2019, The Valuable 500 aims to put disability on the global business leadership agenda.



The Valuable 500 was created by Binc, the organisation founded by Caroline Casey in 2015, with a mission to ignite a historic global movement for a new age of business inclusion - capitalising on Caroline Casey's 18-year track record of success engaging over 450 organisations. The campaign has won three awards: a Cannes Lion, D&AD, and a BIMA.

Our goal is to persuade 500 multinational companies that have at least 1,000 employees to make a public commitment to advance disability inclusion in their organisation. By engaging the most influential business leaders and brands, we want to create a tipping point within business that unlocks the business, social and economic value of the 1.3 billion people living with disabilities around the world, and the millions of us who will become disabled over time

We believe that if business takes a lead, society and government will follow, truly inclusive businesses can build truly inclusive societies.

About The Valuable 500: Phase 2

We have approached over 2,800 leaders across the globe to commit to specific actions including putting disability performance on their leadership agenda. The deadline to join the Valuable 500 has been extended to January 2021, coinciding with the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, and we will continue to build momentum and work with business leaders to complete the sign-up formalities to reach our goal of 500.

We also will inaugurate Phase II development in 2020: a three-year effort to turn The Valuable 500 into a community of like-minded business peers committed to raising their game on disability by sharing models, lessons learned, and energy. This will include:

- Helping our 500 CEOs boost inclusivity best practice at the leadership level through our Executive Inclusivity Programme
- Developing a peer-to-peer network of CEOs committed to inclusion
- Providing research and insight around inclusivity and business disability performance
- Empowering our CEOs to integrate disability across the entire value chain and
- Continuing to change the global narrative around disability.