

## Gadget firms tackled on usability

**Technology firms are being targeted in a bid to make hardware and software easier to use for everyone.**

The initiative, backed by disability charities and big firms like BT, aims to make hi-tech firms take usability more seriously.

They want to get companies thinking about how to make goods and services easy to use while design work is done.

Firms signing up will be expected to make big changes to all the things they do that customers encounter.

### Building block

The initiative, which has been given the name of the E-Inclusion Charter, has the backing of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID), Disabled Living Foundation, technology consultancy Scientific Generics and the Alliance for Digital Inclusion.

Despite the involvement of charities that try to raise awareness of accessibility issues, Guido Gybels, director of new technologies at the RNID, said the charter aimed to help everyone.

"We are not talking about small groups of people with specialist needs," he said.

Instead, said Mr Gybels, the charter wanted to make companies apply accessibility and usability to everything they produce - no matter who buys it or uses it.

"This is about making the experience better for every single one of your customers," he said.

It was also intended to go beyond the basic obligations that laws on equal access impose on businesses.

It was not just those with disabilities that could benefit from products that are straight-forward to use, he said. Studies had shown the business benefits from applying the principles of usability and user testing to products and services.

"We recognise that technology can be both a cause of and a solution to exclusion," said Heidi Lloyd, spokeswoman for the Alliance for Digital Inclusion (ADI). "Through this charter, we hope to maximise the potential that technology has to offer everyone."

The ADI has among its members BT, Cisco, Intel, Microsoft and IBM.

In particular, the backers of the charter are looking to sign up the makers of computers, mobile phones and TVs and get them making products easier to navigate and use.

"The charter is a starting point rather than an objective in itself," said Mr Gybels. "If you sign up to it, it's not just a piece of paper, it's an undertaking to bring about real change."

Sally Lincoln, commercial director of accessibility firm Nomensa, said knowledge of usability issues and adoption of best practice was patchy across all sectors of industry.

"Fundamentally, there needs to be an attitude change amongst the industry," she said. "Brands, government services and agencies all need to realise that inclusivity does not mean compromising on creativity and innovation."

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