

# MAKING OFFICE TECHNOLOGY MORE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE

*Trending Topics summarizes news, information and perspective on matters affecting businesses and business leaders today. This insight is being provided to keep you up to date on the latest developments and trends influencing these topics. These views do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of PNC. For additional research on these topics, please consult the sources cited in this article.*

People with disabilities account for 21.5% of the U.S. labor force,<sup>1</sup> and employers are actively seeking ways to make their offices, factories and workplaces more inclusive and accommodating for those workers.

Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, companies have added physical accommodations to their workplaces such as ramps, nearby parking, wider doorways and accessible restrooms. These changes make it easier for disabled employees to navigate the workplace and interact with co-workers.

A study by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) reported positive effects for all employees from these accommodations, including higher employee retention, improved morale and productivity, lower compensation and training costs, and improved workplace diversity.<sup>2</sup>

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Many companies have invested in assistive technology to help disabled workers function easily and effectively in the workplace. These devices increase workplace participation, provide independence, and improve productivity for people with disabilities. The range of assistive technology extends from something as simple as an electronic stapler to complex applications such as computer software interfaces.<sup>3</sup>

## Some examples of the latest assistive technology include:

- Companies are developing interfaces for their websites and recruiting tools that don't require the use of a mouse or keyboard. This enables disabled employees to apply for jobs online without the assistance of others.<sup>4</sup>
- Microsoft has developed Eye Control for Windows 10, which enables users to control their personal computers with their eyes, instead of using a mouse or keyboard.<sup>5</sup>
- Aira, a remote personal assistant device for the visually impaired, attaches to smartglasses. It contacts a help center agent if the individual needs assistance navigating unfamiliar or difficult terrain. Aira taps into the camera on the smartglasses and allows the agent to feed information to the individual.<sup>6</sup>
- Microsoft Hearing AI is a smartphone app that uses deep learning to convert text to speech and vice versa, making it easier for a deaf person to communicate with the hearing world. It uses artificial intelligence to interpret sounds such as an alarm and then vibrates to alert the user.<sup>7</sup>

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### Resources to tap

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) provides a free consulting service to help companies advance their efforts to recruit, hire, retain and advance qualified disabled people.<sup>8</sup>

Also noteworthy: The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has established the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT). This initiative promotes the development and adoption of accessible technology by companies to encourage the employment, retention and career development of disabled people.<sup>9</sup>

PEAT also offers TechCheck, an online tool to help employers evaluate their technology accessibility tools and practices, set goals for improving inclusion, and take tangible steps to meet them.<sup>10</sup>

**To discuss these topics in more detail, please contact your PNC Relationship Manager.**

- 1 March 2018 statistics listed on the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) website. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/>
- 2 "Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact," by Beth Loy, Ph.D., a study by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), updated Sept. 1, 2017. Available at: <https://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>
- 3 "Assistive Technology at Work," Institute on Disabilities, Temple University, undated. Available at: <https://disabilities.temple.edu/programs/assistive/atwork/>
- 4 "Developing an Accessible Workplace," a white paper by the Society for Human Resource Management, May 5, 2017. Available at: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developinganaccessibleworkplace.aspx>
- 5 "Eye tracking within Windows 10's Fall Creators Update is an assistive technology with potential," by Mark Hachman, *PCWorld*, Dec. 31, 2017. Available at: <https://www.pcworld.com/article/3229361/windows/eye-tracking-within-windows-10s-fall-creators-update-is-an-assistive-technology-with-potential.html>
- 6 "Three Life-Changing Technologies at the 2017 Assistive Technologies Conference," by Amanda Davis, The Institute blog, IEEE, March 10, 2017. Available at: <http://theinstitute.ieee.org/ieee-roundup/blogs/blog/three-lifechanging-technologies-at-the-2017-assistive-technology-conference>
- 7 "Three Life-Changing Technologies at the 2017 Assistive Technologies Conference," by Amanda Davis, The Institute blog, IEEE, March 10, 2017. Available at: <http://theinstitute.ieee.org/ieee-roundup/blogs/blog/three-lifechanging-technologies-at-the-2017-assistive-technology-conference>
- 8 "Developing an Accessible Workplace," a white paper by the Society for Human Resource Management, May 5, 2017. Available at: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developinganaccessibleworkplace.aspx>
- 9 Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT), U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/resources/PEAT.htm>
- 10 TechCheck overview page, Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT), U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. Available at: <http://www.peatworks.org/techcheck>

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