

NEWS



from Pia

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The medium is the message

Alternative print formats can help reach a wider audience

The responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities reaches far and wide – even more so following the recent implementation of the Equality Act 2010. The print industry is central to communication between organisations and the public, and is committed to supporting companies in implementing reasonable adjustments. The print industry can help deliver a strong message on behalf of its customers: “every customer matters”.

A good print supplier is so much more than that to its customers; it will often find itself in the role of adviser as well as designer, printer and finisher. Many print companies now offer their customers a whole communication strategy, involving a range of solutions and using a variety of media. So, why not consider alternative formats to print?

Current estimates suggest that there are approximately two million people with sight loss in the UK – and many more who may need alternative formats for reasons other than visual impairment. Dyslexic people may benefit from specific colour contrasts or large print versions, while those with learning disabilities may be helped by having an easy-read version. Given these needs, it makes sense for printers to develop their knowledge on ways to communicate with as wide a range of potential customers as possible, and to know someone who can make that communication more accessible.

Commercial routes

Traditionally, the work of transcribing print into alternative formats was the work of charities. However, there is now a growing band of commercial organisations providing a competitive service in communicating with people with disabilities.

Much like the modern print company, providers of alternative formats won't necessarily be able to produce every format in-house. But, they should have the knowledge and experience to manage a wide range of them. They will also be able to provide samples and comprehensive advice to printers dealing with an enquiry from a customer for the first time.

With the growing number and quality of transcription providers, an organisation need not wait weeks for an alternative format and should expect the quality and corporate image to match the original document. Most transcribers also know that any extra income they make by giving their customers poor advice about what formats and quantities to buy just means that they won't make any more money out of those customers ever again. So, a good transcription company will be committed to being honest, professional and helpful with everyone who calls.

If your organisation is considering offering alternative formats as part of your range of communication solutions, here are some things that will be useful to remember:

Shop around

There are many alternative format providers. They fall into different categories and have different strengths, so look around until you're comfortable with the service you're receiving.

Expect advice

Any alternative format provider worth their salt will offer you advice, whether it's requested or not. They should also have an opinion about the needs of the end-user and a desire to meet everyone's expectations.

Get samples

Not all providers will meet your standards. Any transcription company should be able to send you samples of their work to help you choose your supplier.

Do it in parallel

Wherever possible, involve your alternative format provider through the whole process. It makes the work less of a rush later on and less likely to contain errors. Encouraging your customers to consider alternative formats should help you win more business. You may even get some tips on making the print version more accessible to the general public. Most people in the alternative format industry will be more than willing to help.

If you want more advice on buying alternative formats, go to the Resources section of Pia's website (www.pia.co.uk) and see its webpage on Advice for the Uninitiated.