

IT'S TIME TO DESIGN PACKAGING FOR EVERYONE

By Rhiannon McGregor

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By differentiating between consumers with different mobility needs, retailers are re-enforcing separation, not inclusivity. This needs to change – fast.



Light Bell by Ian Bok

‘ Microsoft’s approach exemplifies the ethos that designing for disability does not mean compromising on design integrity. ’

— Rhiannon McGregor, foresight writer, LS:N Global

When it comes to packaging, the zeitgeist is very much around sustainability. Reducing plastic waste is undeniably the critical environmental issue, but there is another equally pertinent but much less discussed problem. With 15% of the world's population living with a serious disability (Source: World Health Organization), opening products can be a real challenge.

With online retail continuing to grow exponentially – online sales of non-food items in the UK grew from 11.6% of the total market in December 2012 to 24.1% in December 2017 (source: British Retail Consortium) – the receipt of products at home is becoming **a vital point of contact** between brand and consumers. Having to rely on others to assist is problematic as it completely strips customers of their independence and disrupts this rapport.

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Microsoft recently released an unboxing GIF of its new Xbox Adaptive Controller on Twitter. As well as modifying the controller itself, Microsoft has thought holistically about how it could use levers and pulleys to ensure that those with limited ability are able to open it with ease. 'We treat packaging as part of the product,' says Kevin Marshall, creative director of design and global packaging at Microsoft. 'Packaging really has the potential to validate and shape consumer experiences.'

We've seen how big name brands operating in the digital space tailor their products for people with visual impairments – **Pinterest** and **Maybelline** are just two such examples – but this is the first time a household name has seriously tackled packaging to make it more inclusive. 'We were focused on helping gamers with limited mobility have a more enjoyable experience, and we wanted to follow that ethos with the packaging we created,' says Mark Weiser, packaging designer, global packaging and content, at Microsoft. 'We wanted to end up with a very empowering experience, so these gamers are able to unbox it themselves and kick off gaming confidently.'

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Microsoft's approach exemplifies the ethos that designing for disability does not mean compromising on design integrity. The design team spent a year working with 100 members of the gaming community, all with various degrees of mobility, to ensure that the result was not something 'othered' but instead a product that would provide a better unpacking experience for all.

As Robin Sheppard, co-founder and chairman of Bespoke Hotels Group explained in a recent **interview** with LS:N Global, brands across sectors need to think about inclusive design as better design. 'I recall reading that many people who were able-bodied, when offered a disabled room, said they didn't want it because they felt it was a downgrade,' says Sheppard, explaining why he created the Bespoke Access Awards, an international design prize that aims to improve access in the hospitality industry.

While the innovations around a plastic-free future are crucial, brands must ensure that they lend equal weight to building a better relationship with all consumers – regardless of where they sit on the mobility spectrum – through innovative, inclusive design.

*To find out more about the forward-thinking brands thinking creatively about accessible design, read our **Implicit Inclusivity** design direction.*