



Whitepaper: Trends and Benefits of Outsourcing Accessible Communications

Outsourcing has become an increasingly common business practise in the past few decades. With heightened global competition and ever increasing pressures on the bottom line, it is essential that companies focus maximum energy and attention on their core business.

In this whitepaper, we will explore the history of outsourcing and how this trend continues to unfold as we further progress into the digital age. We will outline the characteristics of accessible communications, and review the clear benefits to outsourcing this function. We will discuss why outsourcing accessible communications is an economically sound solution that preserves resources, reduces corporate risk and significantly strengthens compliance to accessibility legislation – all the while allowing a focus on core business functions

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June, 2014

Executive Summary

As a result of some common corporate behaviours during the 1990s technological boom, many have come to equate the term “outsourcing” to “offshoring”. Outsourcing is the sound business practise of hiring specialized third party firms to provide services and support functions considered to be non-core, and non-strategic to the hiring enterprise. These third party firms are experts in their niche, and provide product and service quality, and cost-effectiveness that is unattainable with in house resources. “Offshoring” is a special class of outsourcing activity where the main objective is cost reduction, often at the expense of product and service quality – and certainly at the expense of domestic employment opportunities. Companies outsource many different activities that are essential ingredients of their successful operation, but are well outside of the core business focus and competency of the enterprise. At the obvious end of the spectrum - a clean office for staff to work in is essential and may contribute to the brand and atmosphere, but office cleaning is not core business, so is naturally outsourced.

As a result of global expansion and competition, the trend of outsourcing is going to continue in far more comprehensive fashion to enable companies to concentrate resources to the core areas of their business and expertise. Many banks, telecommunication firms, healthcare providers, and financial institutions already outsource their IT and conventional billing and statement production, as an example. Some, however, continue to do so themselves, and even maintain capacity to do special processing such as conventional statement reprints, and accessible statement and billing production in house. Given the complexity, risk and cost associated with these functions, as well as clear fact that these are not core business functions – this is a natural area to apply the outsourcing model.

Producing braille and large print, as options alongside accessible online offerings, ensures companies provide their blind, low vision, and print disabled customers with choice and equal access to their information through all touch points, all access methods and in all formats – and if done correctly will ensure that the enterprise is compliant with applicable disability and privacy law. However, securely transforming customer bills and statements correctly into these formats require extensive expertise, experience, and specialized human resources and capital equipment. The same can be said for online/web accessibility; one may think that their website is accessible at a glance, but without the proper software and knowledge of what to look for and industry best practises, the end result can be costly and inaccessible.

Outsourcing alternate format statement processing allows leading banks, credit card companies, telecom service providers and governments to access economies of scale to ensure the highest level of savings, as well as the expertise required to ensure full, and ongoing compliance with applicable law and knowledge of the evolving requirements of their blind, low vision and print disabled customers.

With the rise of the technological era, it is no longer necessary to produce goods at the site of consumption; a customer does not care where their bill or statements are processed and produced as long as it gets to them on time, without errors, and that their personal and private information remains secure and protected at all times.

At T-Base Communications, we have over 20 years of experience helping some of the largest and most valuable brands in North America communicate with their blind, low vision and print disabled customers. As the clear North American market leader, with industry-hardened business practises and security protocols honed by literally hundreds of independent audits and reviews - you can be guaranteed that we provide your customers with the highest quality accessible formats, protecting their private and confidential information, ensuring your full compliance with applicable disability and privacy law, and offering you unrivalled economies of scale as we amortize our people and infrastructure across multiple customers.

A Brief History of Outsourcing

The history of outsourcing is deeply rooted in the growth of the Modern Business Enterprise, which inaugurated in the late 19th century. While it may not have been seen as outsourcing at the time, in retrospect, that's exactly what it was; chariot-builders did not train the horses and captains did not build their ships. They outsourced.

Technological innovation played a large role in the advancement of modern business as a whole; the first wave innovation was transportation, where the advent of steam locomotion, then combustion engines, and ultimately air transport; gone were the days of large groups travelling by sea or carriage. These innovations all contributed to the ever faster transportation of goods, and facilitation of interactions that materially accelerated the pace of business and economic growth.

The second wave of innovation was in the communications industry; the telegraph and then telephone were the first examples of instant communication that allowed different districts to

communicate, and enabled the expansion of businesses into new locations at rate that had previously been deemed impossible.

Infographic: Advancements in Technology and Accessible Communications



Listen to the [audio version](#) of this infographic.



In our present age, timely customer service, delivering value, and communicating effectively are still at the core of every successful business. The technology that is used to facilitate business interactions and communications has evolved extensively through modernization, dramatically intensifying global competition, and forcing enterprises to seek competitive advantage from concentrating their resources on core business – this in turn amplifies the need for outsourcing. The first generation of modern outsourcing appeared at the beginning of the computing era, when companies like IBM were building massive machines that the vast majority of businesses were unable to afford, or accommodate. So, the computing companies and other service providers developed the ability to lend out functionality and capacity of their machines to other businesses.

By the time the 1990's rolled around, technology was fully engrained in all aspects of business, and it was clear that it was only going to continue to expand. The problem was, machines and networks had become so complex that many businesses were burning through valuable resources training their staff how to use them; resources that were not focused on their core business and their product/service delivery was compromised as a result. The solution was to outsource support and maintenance to specialized IT services providers in an attempt to cut costs and focus more on the core expertise and knowledge of the company.

This trend continued, and soon organizations were outsourcing many of the functions necessary to run a company but that were not related to their core business. Outsourcing was used as a strategy to cut costs and access services of a higher quality by companies that specialized in the services that were being outsourced.

It's important to note that 'outsourcing' is not synonymous with 'offshoring'. While offshoring is still in existence, and could be considered abundant within the IT industry, results have been mixed. Successful outsourcing arrangements are much more commonly seen within your own backyard, so to speak.

Characteristics of Accessible Communications

Outsourcing is widely successful for a number of reasons, but one of the most important factors is that it allows businesses to focus on their core services, while cost-effectively leveraging services from companies with competency in specialized areas to contribute to overall business goals.

Ideal outsourcing candidates can be characterized as:

- Not core to main business activity
- Highly specialized in nature
- Requires depth of expertise and specialized equipment to deliver service
- Commonly outsourced by your competition or other similar industries

Secure accessible communications certainly fits this pattern; while forming relationships and communicating effectively with customers is considered a core component of all businesses, producing the accessible bills, statements and other documents in specific formats that enable businesses to communicate accessibly with their blind, low vision and print-disabled customers is not. This is not to say that accessibility is not of the highest importance – it is – but the core business function is the creation of the messaging, and source information, not the transformation, production and distribution of the information to customers.

There are strong legislative and compliance requirements that must be adhered to, making provision of accessibility a high risk activity for businesses. While a business should be responsible for ensuring they are providing accessible formats to their customers, the actual process of designing, transforming and producing the documents and making the online experience fully accessible is something that should be left to the experts whose primary business domain is focused on accessibility and legislative compliance – allowing enterprises to leverage the shared capital and human resources, and investment in expertise that is amortized over the many progressive customers of a leading outsource provider such as T-Base.

Cost of In-House vs. Outsourcing

The costs associated with producing accessible communications in-house are high for a wide range of reasons – and there is much more to the cost than meets the eye.

Not only is the production machinery (braille embossers, dedicate printers, binding systems) that is required expensive and large, but the resources required to maintain and operate the machinery are ongoing. In addition to the overhead and costs associated with the machinery, the specialized software that is used for producing and testing documents and websites must be updated frequently as accessibility requirements change and formatting standards continue to evolve. Constant updates and maintenance require an ongoing investment – and the cost of providing a stale-dated or outmoded solution is even higher, as you enter the realm of compliance risk.

The volume of customers requiring accessible format communications is extremely low in comparison to the number of customers who require conventional online or paper formats. While this may lead some businesses to believe that the costs associated with producing accessible formats would be low due to lower volume, this is not the case.

Businesses may feel that because they have a system for standard communications already in place, simply adding accessible communications would be a natural act, but the methodology is entirely different. Accessible communications require different software, layouts, and templates, all of which must be designed specifically for the intended accessible format. The cost of acquiring a team with the knowledge and expertise needed to produce these layouts and remain compliant is disproportionate to the overall volume of accessible documents when compared to that of conventional communications. In addition to the production costs, there are legal cost implications as well. Accessible financial statements, telecommunication bills, and accessible websites are crucial not only because blind and low vision customers need to be able manage their finances independently and communicate with their service provider, but companies are legally obligated to provide documents in the end user's preferred accessible format and ensure that their websites remain accessible to *all* of their customers.

Merely attempting to provide accessibility does not protect an enterprise from penalties when a company website or communication method is found to be inaccessible to a consumer, or group of consumers. The best protection for an enterprise, or government for that matter, is to be seen making a reasonable business effort to accommodate their customer's needs – and outsourcing to a proven industry leader like T-Base Communications provides that assurance.

The depth of expertise needed for implementing and maintaining accessibility requirements is expensive and complex to maintain, and if done incorrectly could still result in heavy fines and legal fees. Suddenly, the resources used to attain accessibility have gone to waste, the business is not only out the additional resources needed to bring their accessibility practises up to date, but is left with a hefty fine and legal bill – not to mention the incalculable impact on brand equity and market reputation.

Clear Benefits to Outsourcing this Function

Outsourcing accessible communications and accessibility requirements to a third party provider delivers many benefits to the customer;

- Reduced costs
- Reduced corporate risk
- Enables focus on core business value
- Delivers highest quality service to your customers
- Ensure currency with evolving needs, and industry best practises

Cost Advantage

As previously mentioned, the costs associated with managing and producing secure accessible communications are high, especially given the relatively small volume of customers that require alternate formats. At T-Base, we can offer economies of scale as we amortize our investment in capital equipment and people over multiple customers, which ensures that even as the number of customers who are blind or who have low vision increase, costs remain far lower than if a company were to produce the materials themselves.

Enable Focus on Core Competency

By outsourcing secure accessible communications, resources are laser focused on enhancing the core value proposition. This, in turn, delivers more satisfied customers and an improved competitiveness that leads to expanding market share and bottom line performance.

Quality and Capability

Quality control is a crucial part of every business, but sometimes it can be difficult to control when the service does not relate to the core of the business. While a bank, credit card

company, or telecommunications firm may recognize that providing accessible communications to their customers is an obligation under law, they also recognize that the quality of the communication is a direct representation of the brand and must be the best it can possibly be. Outsourcing this specialized function to the market leader, T-Base Communications, provides this assurance.

Risk Mitigation

Outsourcing web accessibility and alternate format communications to a third party expert who is exclusively focused on compliance and consumer needs is the single best way to mitigate risk of being noncompliant with accessibility requirements and legislation.

A company wouldn't have a sales team member represent them in court, or have the building maintenance staff be responsible for negotiating terms of a new lease; the risk would be too high. Instead, the company would hire a legal team to protect company assets and negotiate terms, because the lawyers would have expertise and knowledge in the field, which would substantially reduce the risk of lost assets than if they were to be represented by a non-expert.

Outsourcing accessibility and alternate formats to experts in the industry will ensure the highest level of compliance, and customer satisfaction.

Industry Best Practises

Accessibility requirements are constantly changing and evolving, with changes in consumer preference, and advancements in technology and systems. Standards bodies such as PDF/UA, Braille Authority of North America, and DAISY Consortium amongst many others meet regularly to review and evolve their standards. Companies that specialize in accessibility compliance and alternative format communications, such as T-Base, are the first to adopt these new practises, and best positioned to remain current with industry best practises. In fact, with T-Base, you get the added advantage of our position as a thought leader, an active participant, and an influencer of these important areas.

Why Outsource to T-Base?

T-Base Communications helps organizations communicate effectively with their blind, low vision and print disabled customers who cannot access information in conventional print or online formats, while at the same time ensuring full compliance with all applicable legislation.

North American Market Leader

From transforming standard print into accessible bank statements and accessible call detail summaries to healthcare documents and textbook & educational learning materials, T-Base Communications is North America's leader in the secure design, production and delivery of alternate format communications in braille, large print and audio, as well as online with web accessibility and accessible PDF and serves the largest brands in North America.

Zero Sub-contractors, Zero Offshoring

With secure processing centers in both Canada and the United States, T-Base customers are assured the highest level of security, as documents are produced in the facility that corresponds with their location, by dedicated, long time, security-screened T-Base employees. We do not employ subcontractors for this secure and private statement processing, and you have the full assurance that your valuable customer data does not cross borders, and is afforded the highest levels of protection available.

Longevity

With over twenty years (and counting) of experience serving some of the largest brands across North America, T-Base Communications, equipped with robust corporate standards, and working in state-of-the-art secure production facilities, is dedicated to ensure that your high expectations and exacting requirements are fully met. Outsourcing to T-Base means you leverage the accumulated benefit of literally hundreds of professional security and business process audits carried out by our numerous Fortune 100 customers, or their specialist service providers such as Deloitte, IBM and Ernst and Young. You get access to business continuity and disaster recovery plans, and data handling protocols that have been honed over two decades in business – precisely this business.

Growing Economies of Scale

T-Base Communications has a track record for extending savings with economies of scale, providing proportionate savings gained as production across our large and growing customer base scales up. As the population ages, the number of customers requiring accessible formats will increase, and as a result of economies of scale, so will your organization's savings.

Investment in Innovation

In an effort to drive greater and greater efficiency into our production processes and to ensure that we can offer the broadest range of input and output formats in the alternative format industry, keeping you in lock step with the changing accessible communication needs of your customers, we continuously invest in technology and innovation. Our industry proven business processes, in combination with extensive investment in our software and technology, have been designed to scale, ensuring the capacity and turnaround time that your organization requires.

Industry Influence

T-Base maintains a wide variety of partners that not only meet our high expectations and standards, but also share a common thread: proven expertise in the industry. These relationships ensure that our mutual customers receive outstanding technology and customized solutions from T-Base Communications.

T-Base is proud to be the first privately held alternate format company to be accepted as an associate member of BANA (Braille Authority of North America), the PDF Association, NIMAC - National Instructional Materials Access Center, and the DAISY Consortium. Through these affiliations, our software and continuous training methodology is designed to meet alternate format standards that are regularly updated in response to implemented changes.



We Keep You Safe!

T-Base Communications was founded on trust and our production processes are impeccable as we operate to the same high standard as the mainstream processing and statement/billing centers of our Fortune 100 customers. We routinely handle your most sensitive information - that of your end customers - whether you operate in the financial, telecom or healthcare industry. Our processes and facilities are subject to regular rigorous audits from your expert groups. Having acted on valuable input from hundreds of such audits, when combined with our own expertise honed over years of operation, you are assured of a company that routinely passes security and operational inspection and meets the rigorous industry standards of PCI compliance.

Your Full Service Accessible Communications Department

Our customers consider T-Base Communications as their full service accessible communications department. We produce braille and large print as options alongside accessible online offerings because it's essential that our customers provide their blind, low vision, and print disabled customers with choice and equal access to their information through all touch points, all access methods and in all formats, all under a comprehensive security infrastructure and with unparalleled customer service.

Accessible Monthly Statements and Bills

T-Base specializes in alternate format design, production and delivery of monthly statements, bills, and offers customer guidance and expertise to ensure ongoing compliance with emerging trends and legislation. Conversion of these private, one-to-one documents using highly secure processing ensures the highest quality production and timely delivery of these statements and bills on behalf of our customers.

Accessible Document Production

Our transcription service provides the expert conversion of one-to-many documents into our wide range of alternate formats. Choose this service for important customer facing documents such as marketing brochures, information guides and service schedules, user manuals, and more, whether you are a government organization, financial institution, healthcare, or telecommunications provider. Another important aspect of this service is the timely and precise conversion of educational materials, such as textbooks, tests, reports and other learning materials into alternate formats. We specialize in the most advanced and complex

documents, with market-leadership in Nemeth, tactile graphics, and music braille to ensure support for the most advanced student needs.

Accessibility Online Consulting and Training

As your full service accessible communications partner, you'll receive expert advice on the accessibility of your online properties through web site audits, remediation advice, and website accessibility training. T-Base also offers mobile accessibility testing in our state of the art testing lab. We'll make sure your customers can access a rich, accessible online experience on Android, iOS, and Windows Phone platforms for both mobile and tablet devices.