

IMPROVING YOUR BUSINESS MODEL WITH WEB ACCESSIBILITY

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Abstract

To increase the chances of succeeding with your business model you need to consider what problem your customer really needs help with. One way for this is to study barriers leading to the need of assistance from you. In this whitepaper we use a model based upon the customer's lack of accessibility, skill, time, or monetary funds.

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Introduction

The Internet has grown to become a central part of almost everyone's life. The majority of the citizens in Sweden have mobile access or access at home to Internet. But not everyone have the same possibilities to use Internet, reports (Statistics Sweden, 2014) say that 22 per cent of the Swedish population experience that they have a disability, with 16 per cent of them having some or large difficulties to use the Internet due to their disability. The idea behind web accessibility is to aid all those who experience difficulties using the web so that they also can partake of the benefits it provides (Word Wide Web Consortium, 2012). Just as no one ever should be neglected the entrance into a store or

restaurant because of a disability, no one should be excluded from using the Internet.

“Web accessibility is the tool to fulfil the demand that every individual should have the same conditions to use the World Wide Web, as it has long been one of the pillars of the web.”

*Founder of the World Wide Web – Tim Berners-Lee
(Word Wide Web Consortium, 2012)*

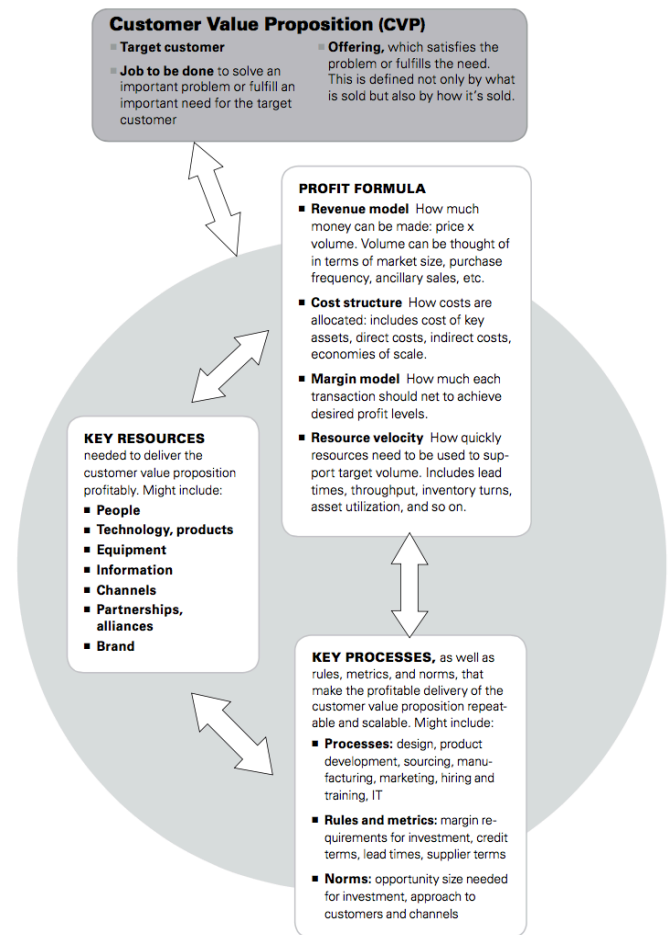
Today more web sites are getting more accessible and the awareness about it gaining ground. But there is still a long way to go, even if efforts (Dewire Portals Team, 2015; Dewire UX Team, 2014; Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2014) have been made towards that goal. Far from all businesses see the value and financial gain of making their web sites

and applications accessible. But there are good ways to fit it into business models, as long as correct measures and the right attitude are there.

Business models and the barriers

According to Johnson et al. (2008) one sure way for your company to succeed in the corporate world is to have a business model that has been thoroughly thought through. In their report Johnson et al. presents their view of business models and further discusses important factors for creating a successful business model and how companies can reinvent and improve their current one. They also firmly state that it is far from often needed to revolutionise the company's business model in order to be more profitable, oftentimes the old model is sufficient with only minor changes needed. From their point of view a business model is based upon the interaction of four interlocking elements, which consist of smaller sub-elements that together create and deliver value, see picture 1:

- Customer Value Proposition (CVP) – According to Johnson et. al. the most important to get right. All successful companies have found a way to offer value to their customers by fulfilling a specific job that the customer needs done. By understanding the problem in all its dimensions, including how to get it done it is possible to design an offer to present to your potential customers.
- Profit Formula - The blueprint that defines how your company creates value for itself and at the same time doing so for your customer. As seen in picture 1 it consists of four parts, Revenue model, Cost structure, Margin model, and Resource velocity. The terms profit formula and business model are not interchangeable even if people at times seems to think so, profit formula only being a part in the larger model.
- Key Resources – Your assets required to deliver the value proposition to your customer. The focus being on the work and key elements that create value and offer competitive differentiation.
- Key Processes – Successful companies have operational and managerial processes that allow them to deliver value in a manner they can repeat and increase in scale. The processes also consist of the company's metrics, norms, and rules.



Picture 1: Customer Value Proposition (CVP) – A visualisation of the key parts of a business model, according to (Johnson, Christensen, & Kagerman, 2008).

Johnson et. al. discusses that using four common barriers when considering a business model is one of the more precise ways to use when generating your new and improved model. They describe the metaphorical barriers as:

- Access barrier – Your customer or end-user have none or only partial access leading to them being unable to use solve the problem due to its lack of accessibility, thus creating an access barrier preventing the gain or realisation of the expected or sought value. This is the core for web accessibility, where the user is unable to gather information or interact with the web due to it being inaccessible. This can easily be solved by technical aids or by developing a more accessible web altogether (World Wide Web Consortium, 2008).
- Skill barrier – represents the lack of skill and knowledge that your customer has to solve their specific problem on their own. An example from Johnson et. al. (2008) presented was the software developer, QuickBooks that complemented their customers lack of

knowledge in the subject of accounting by simplifying it and giving an easier way by offering easy-to-use software, thus enabling the user to solve the problem and gain the desired value.

- Time barrier – Your customer lacks the time for solving the problem and therefore needs help in doing so. Johnson et. al. (2008) mentions MinuteClinic as a good example of trying to overcome the time barrier, the company is based on the idea of a drugstore-based basic health provider. Letting customers get attention for minor health issues from nurses without making an appointment at a hospital or doctor's office, by not having to make an appointment the customer are more free to use his or her time as he or she see fit.
- Money barrier – The wealth barrier becomes an issue when your customers don't have the money needed to solve the problem on their own. It can also be an incitement for your company to offer a cheap alternative to a solution as to let more potential customers benefit from it. Johnson et. al. (2008) uses the example of Ratan Tata, whom offered cars for less than the usual cost, and by doing so broke the wealth barrier letting families in India get their own car instead of using scooters.

Web accessibility as a business model

With the initiatives for making the web more accessible (Dewire Portals Team, 2015) (Dewire UX Team, 2014) (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen , 2014) many companies are required to make sure their web sites are accessible, both due to legislations as well as Google's initiative to change their search algorithm for mobile devices, and so it is fair to wonder how web accessibility fits into your business model.

Based on the results from interviews and literature conclusion can be drawn, it is fully possible to have your business model with an extra focus on web accessibility, and that it may benefit not only your company and your clients, but also it may benefit the end-users the most.

Taking the four barriers into account and combining them with web accessibility the following conclusions can be drawn for each separate barrier.

- Accessibility barrier – according to most interviewees it is quite clear that web accessibility will help potential clients and customers with their accessibility barrier, as the name implies. Some of them have already noticed advantages in their work thanks to accessibility being given more space and

getting more focus. One company had noticed that their clients' need for support had been reduced significantly after they relaunched their web site with more focus on accessibility. Another customer points out a small flaw with the focus on web accessibility, the flaw being that it is not always enough to offer the service and possibility for the customers to use it. As some thing in their behavioural patten has to change for them to do things in a different way and as humans seldom are prone to change, an incitement of some sort may be needed for the customers to start using the new improved solution.

- Skill barrier – By simplifying a service or a web page it is possible for more people to use your web without having certain knowledge, resulting in the potential of more customers. But at times oversimplifying information can also have the reversed effect; sometimes the extra information could be required. For example if a lawyer needs to sign a contract he or she may want to know exactly where is the law book certain quotes are to be found, other times it can be someone that are uninterested in the specifics and just want to sign and be done with it. Both possibilities exist and should be accounted for when considering improvements in an accessible manner. Not oversimplifying but still keep it at a level so to be acceptable by a professional.
- Time barrier – Many of the interviewees meant that the time aspect and potential gains of web accessibility could be seen as an important part, and be something that really could benefit companies and users alike. Having an accessible service or web page and making it easy to use could help users performing actions in a faster pace and therefore save them time or enabling them to do what they couldn't before due to time-constraints. If the customer is able to do actions more efficiently they can then do more, and so add value to both themselves and in turn their customers. By having an accessible web page and enabling users to do as much as possible on their own through the web or other applications, there are less need for employees so be held up by supporting customers and clients.
- Money barrier – The general view among the interviewees were that accessibility can help companies and their clients to either make or save money, or even enabling the web for people with disabilities with limited funds. Many spoke of that customers didn't have to contact support, saving time and money both

for themselves and company. Sufficient accessibility could lead to customers and administrators doing fewer faults when interacting with applications or web solutions, in turn resulting in less work and man-hours to correct those errors.

In conclusion extra focus web accessibility can very well fit into your business model, and can be rewarding for most, if not all of the involved

parties. Beneficial not only in money, but it can also save time thanks to more efficient web pages and applications. If your company wants to focus on web pages with web accessibility you need to consider your customer base and decide on a target customer group. Using the customer value proposition the chances of succeeding improve and may lead to greater gains and returns for everyone involved.

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