

Accessible Technology: *New Directions, New Possibilities*

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Using a “head-pointer” to skillfully navigate keys on her computer, Rosemary Musachio types with confidence. Musachio, who has cerebral palsy and cannot speak or use her hands, finishes her sentence, which reads simply:

“TecAccess gave me my respect back; they gave me my life back.”

Musachio proudly works for the award-winning company, TecAccess, an international consultancy with a team of more than 60 associates, most of whom are people with disabilities. TecAccess is a success story that was once but a dream for President and CEO, Debra Ruh.

As her daughter, Sara, who has Down syndrome, approached her teen years, Debra Ruh grew deeply discouraged and dismayed by the lack of employment options for Sara and others with disabilities in the United States, and around the world. Ruh quickly decided to become part of the solution. Leaving a lucrative job to create TecAccess, her company is now known globally for its mission to hire people with disabilities and prove to the world that persons with disabilities can and should be an integral and vital part of the workforce. Today, TecAccess provides electronic and information technology (E & IT) accessibility solutions to clients in government, industry, and education.

Why accessibility?

In the ever changing landscape of today’s technology – with improvements in biometrics, broadband access, and WiFi-enabled PDAs – we all need to work together towards making technology accessible to individuals with disabilities. This fact is never more evident than in developing countries, where accessibility is critical for people with disabilities, as well as the aging population, to participate in all aspects of a meaningful life.

But what does it truly mean for technology to be “accessible”?

There are of course physical accommodations such as Brail, TTY systems, ramps, and elevators that should be addressed. However, we rarely think to build “ramps” to the technology we use on a daily basis. This must change.

As the world begins to explore the issue of improving the accessibility of everything from websites and IT equipment to cell phones and copy machines -- A clear solution is emerging: what better group of people to lead this change than people with disabilities.

By placing people with disabilities into the role of improving the accessibility movement for all, we effectively allow this group of talented, yet underutilized, individuals to use their first hand knowledge of accessibility to change the world. Such a scenario allows people with disabilities the opportunity to join the workforce, and to shape the accessibility movement as it unfolds over the years ahead.

With new technology there are new possibilities – and appropriately people with disabilities are leading this change.