

BEST PRACTICE JOB AD TIPS: HOW TO ATTRACT EMPLOYEES WITH A DISABILITY TO THE WORKPLACE

Why aim for diversity in the workplace?

Building a diverse workforce makes both financial and social sense. As McKinsey & Company's January 2018 report "Delivering through Diversity" concludes, "Many successful companies regard I&D [Inclusivity and Diversity] as a source of competitive advantage. It makes sense that a diverse and inclusive employee base – with a range of approaches and perspectives – would be more competitive in a globalised economy." A 2019 report commissioned by the SBS and authored by John O'Mahony from Deloitte Access Economics found that improving social inclusion could amount to a \$12.7 billion annual boost to the Australian economy, lifting the GDP growth, improving health and employment outcomes, increasing workplace productivity and reducing the cost of social services. "Almost one third of Australians have come from overseas. There's over 270 different ancestries, LGBTIQ Australians, older Australians and Australians with a disability – all of that diversity can be an asset if we can be socially inclusive: which means more than being tolerant," says O'Mahony.

Businesses who employ people with disability benefit from the diverse range of skills, talents and qualifications that people with disability have to offer. In fact, various research projects show that workers with a disability have higher rates of retention, better attendance and fewer occupational health and safety incidents than those without a disability. Targeting people with a disability for job roles also gives you access to a bigger pool of talent – in 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found that more than 4 million Australians experience a disability. That's one in 5 people – a compelling argument for improving your talent acquisition strategy to become more diverse.

Keen to embrace diversity and help your business thrive? A basic starting point is to make your job advertisement more appealing for diverse audiences, including people with a disability.

How a position is advertised is crucial to attracting the right people for the job. A good advertisement will focus exclusively on the essential skills and abilities needed to do the job. Only refer to personal characteristics, such as age, gender, race, marital status, physical or mental ability if they are part of the genuine requirements of the job. This is especially important when it comes to targeting potential employees with a disability: there are way too many job advertisements out there that subtly discriminates against people with a disability by including "must have" characteristics that are completely irrelevant to the actual job. For example, requiring "good manual dexterity", "good driving skills" and "the ability to walk, sit and stand for long periods of time" for a typical data-entry desk job might seem strange but irrelevant to applicants without a disability, but it creates a whole new potential barrier to entry for applicants with a disability.



Here are a few tips to help you target people with a disability in your job advertisements:

- Use simple and clear language. Think “help” instead of “assist”, and “follow” instead of “comply with”, for example. This list of common words and simple alternatives can help: <https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/words/use-simple-words-phrases/>
- Use gender-neutral language as far as possible, or balance masculine- and feminine-coded words. Overly masculine words imply an overly masculine culture, which can be off-putting to women, culturally diverse and disabled applicants. For example, avoid words such as “rockstar”, “driven”, “expert”, “kicking/crushing it”, “elite”, “top level”, “ambitious”, “dominant” etc. and focus on words such as “collaborative”, “growth mindset”, “creative”, “supportive”, “adaptable” “team player”, “community”, “loves learning” etc. A job description that’s written in a balanced way shows that you have an open, inclusive culture that supports learning and encourages collaboration. Use this tool to check how your job descriptions are coded: <http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>
- Minimise the essential requirements on your job ads. Make sure that you only list the aspects most relevant and important to the role, and steer clear of any physical requirements or practical requirements such as own transport.
- Think about your choice of words: do not use words that would marginalise groups of people based on their culture, race, language, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.
- If your business does not have one yet, make sure to develop a practical Accessibility Action Plan or Access & Inclusion Plan that focuses on what is being done, both practically and ideologically, to make your workplace inclusive and accessible. Make it clear in the job description that you have such a plan, and link to it if possible.
- Emphasise all the elements of the role that makes it more accessible for a range of applicants, from practicalities in the office such as wheelchair ramps to mentorship and training programs focused on helping people with a disability thrive in the workplace.
- Do not expect applicants to know every aspect of your business or company’s culture before they’ve had the chance to experience it.
- Consider adding testimonials (written or visual) from employees similar to your target applicant to your job descriptions, showing the reality of what it’s like working for your business.
- Consider adding links to or information about any internal business policies that support or may be of interest to the target applicant.
- Make it clear that becoming part of your business will provide structured, supported opportunities for mentorship, skills training, learning and career growth.
- Emphasise the family friendly benefits and policies your business offers and supports.
- Emphasise pay equity, and the wages/ salary package you offer.
- Emphasise that your workplace embraces a diverse workforce, and practically demonstrate how you do so. (For example: installing ramps, making workstations adjustable etc.)
- Make it clear that your business embraces diversity and supports their team in ways that meet their needs and help them grow.
- The Australian Network on Disability offers a comprehensive range of resources focused on helping businesses add people with disability to their talent mix – find out more here. <https://www.and.org.au/pages/inclusive-language.html>
- Make sure that you use inclusive language. **Do this by:**
 1. Focusing on the person, not the impairment by using “person first” language: Person/people with a disability, person who is deaf, person who has low vision, etc. Put the person first, and the disability second.
 2. Take note of the preferred expressions in Australia. Do say: person/people with a disability, person/people without disability. Don’t say: differently abled/disabled person/people, non-disabled person/people, able-bodied.
 3. Avoid language and expressions that suggest that applicants with a disability are either “inspirational” or “superheroes”, or, vice versa, “objects to be pitied/felt sorry for” or “victims”. They are simply people going about their lives like any other person would do.
 4. Avoid words such as “bound by” or “confined to” a wheelchair – these are negative expressions, when in fact persons who use a wheelchair are enabled and liberated by it.
 5. Change the focus from disability to accessibility – for example, handicapped bathrooms vs. accessible bathrooms.