Accessible Communications: Calibrating the User Experience

At T-Base Communications, we specialize in producing accessible documents and statements on behalf of North America's largest corporations. During the first phase of *Ask T-Base*, our customers asked us questions about accessible communications through our social media channels, and we shared the answers on our blog. Based on the results, it's clear our customers are keenly interested in this topic and want to know how to improve the user experience. So, we've decided to turn the tables and go directly to the source: the end users themselves.

During the latter half of 2015, and our third phase of *Ask T-Base*, we reached out to consumers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted to get feedback on the accessibility of communications. We developed a few questionnaires, asking customers about the accessibility of information from service providers when trying to obtain accessible statements and documents from all touch points: via call centers, in-person and online.

The goal of this initiative was to give customers an opportunity to provide input into how accessible communications are delivered. After collecting data, we compiled it into a final report titled *Accessible Communications: Calibrating the User Experience*. In an effort to calibrate the user experience, we are sharing this report with our both our customers and respondents who requested a copy.

T-Base conducted the questionnaire by way of crowdsourcing feedback between **September and December 2015**, and there were 123 responses in total.

A few disclaimers and notices:

- Summary totals were rounded for ease of reporting.
- The total number of responses per question may exceed the number of respondents, as respondents were able to choose more than one option for several questions. (The total percentage per question may exceed 100% then.) Example: 100 respondents report X format as available and 50 report Z format; however, it is possible one respondent chose both X and Z (counting then as two responses).
- Markers on the map represent the number of respondents, not the number of responses. Though there were 123 entries, there were 82 respondents, as some respondents completed multiple questionnaires.

We hope to conduct additional questionnaires of this nature again in the future. If you have recommendations or questions you would like us to ask, [please contact us](#).

Overview

We measured organizations in the financial services, telecommunications, and healthcare industries. The questionnaire results were compiled in two phases: **Phase I: Requests**, in which the respondents we asked to report on their level of satisfaction when requesting documents and/or statements through three different access points and **Phase II: Delivery**, in which respondents were asked to report on their level of satisfaction with the delivery of requested accessible documents and the quality of the documents received.

Phase I: Requests

Call Center (42% of total responses)

In-Person Experience (16%)

Online or Mobile App (20%)

As an aggregate of all points of contact above, the following statistics demonstrate that although mandated by accessibility legislation, the blind and low vision market is highly underserved.

Availability of Accessible Brochures

Of the respondents who inquired about the availability of a company's brochures in an accessible format, **60%** indicated that no accessible formats were available.

Availability of Accessible Statements

Of the respondents who reported on the availability of accessible statements, **56%** reported having had difficulty obtaining them, **22%** reported that no accessible formats for bills/statements were offered and **34%** indicated they were either unsure or they didn't find out about the availability of accessible statements.

Knowledgeability

Of the respondents who inquired through a call center or in person, **51%** rated the agent's knowledgeability (once asked about the availability of accessible communications) as poor and **30%** rated it fair.

Online Access

Of the respondents who were accessing information online, **42%** used the company's mobile app and **58%** accessed the company website through a laptop or home computer. Over **50%** of online users had difficulty finding a dedicated page on the company's website for products and services available in accessible formats, with some reporting never having found it. **57%** rated the ease of navigation poor for the websites they visited.

Phase II: Delivery

As a follow-up to the requests made through call centers, in person or online via a computer or mobile app, respondents were asked to report on the level of satisfaction with the delivery of requested accessible documents and the quality of the documents received.

While the delivery of the accessible information took longer than the delivery standard for regular print statements or

Phases I & II

documents*, respondents felt that the turnaround time was acceptable and they were generally satisfied with the usability of the information they received.

Timing

Of the respondents reporting on the delivery of documents requested, **71%** reported that the documents or statements they requested took 2 weeks or more and **14%** reported never having received the statements or documents they requested.

Speed of Delivery

Of the respondents who received the information requested, the speed of delivery largely met expectations, with over **70%** citing they were generally happy with the speed of delivery. These statistics may indicate respondents are used to waiting more than two weeks to receive documents and perhaps consider it normal, since **43%** of respondents reported that it took more than 2 weeks to receive documents in alternate formats.

Quality and Accessibility

Overall, the level of satisfaction of the information received of those who requested statements or documents was high, over **70%.**

*Standard delivery for regular print was based on T-Base's SLA for automated statement delivery.

Phases I & II

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Executive Summary

Based on the feedback we received, and our analysis of it, there is room for improvement in the accessibility sphere in the financial services, healthcare and telecommunications industries in North America. Here we delve deeper into the areas that could be improved.

Legislation Compliance. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), if a customer requests an accessible document, the company must provide it in the preferred alternate format and in the same timely fashion as a standard print document. A public accommodation must ensure equal access for customers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted, which is to say *any* communication that is non-verbal or is in standard print must also be available in an alternate format (e.g. braille, e-Text, audio, etc.).

Accessibility Awareness. It is important that the customer service representatives (CSRs) understand callers' needs so that they can respond appropriately to meet those needs. Accessibility Awareness Training can better inform CSRs about your organization's commitment to accessibility and how to best meet the needs of callers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted.

Web Accessibility. In terms of online access, the majority of respondents could not find what they were looking for and many found it difficult to navigate online. Accessible web properties will ensure that you are compliant with W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, among other standards and guidelines and, in turn, that your customers with disabilities are able to access the information they're searching for.
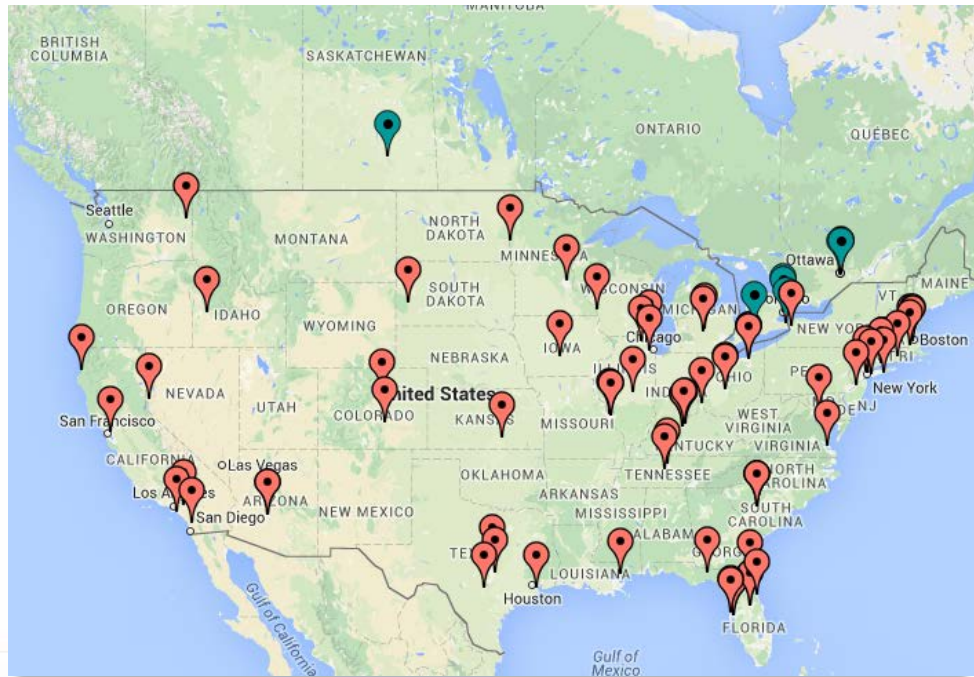
Improvement Insights

Demographics

Nine (9) people in Canada and 73 people in the United States completed the questionnaire.
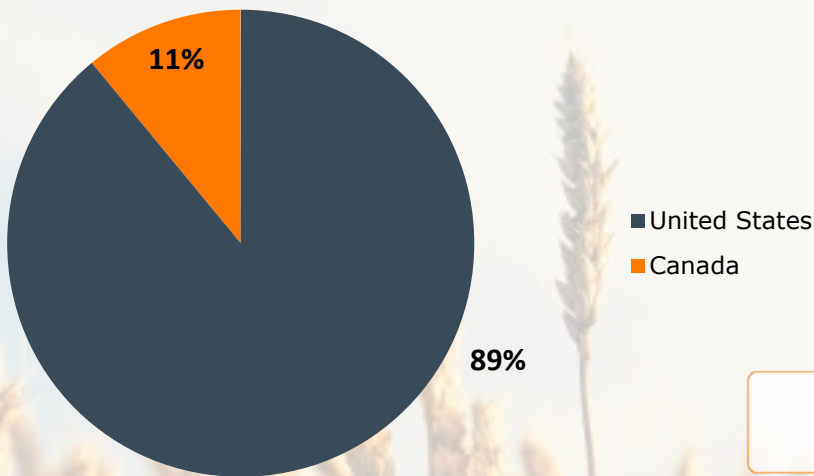
Respondents in Canada

Of the respondents in Canada, **88.9%** were in Ontario.

Respondents in the United States

In the United States, the majority of respondents were from the following states: Florida, California, New York, Texas and Illinois. These states made up **35%** of respondents, whereas other states combined made up **65%**.

Respondents in North America

11%
89%

■ United States
■ Canada

Demographics

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Experience Type

Call Center	In-Person	Online or Mobile	Delivery	Satisfaction
42%	16%	20%	12%	9%

There were five separate experiences respondents could report on: call center experience, in-person experience, online or mobile app experience, delivery of requested accessible documents and satisfaction with accessible documents. All experiences combined, there were **123** responses. **42%** of the responses, the majority, focused on a call center experience, **20%** on an online or mobile app, **16%** on in-person, **12%** on the delivery of the accessible documents and **9%** on the satisfaction with accessible documents.

Company Type

Financial Institution	Mobile Phone Company	Home Phone Company	Healthcare Plan Provider
46%	21%	14%	20%

Respondents could report on any one of the following at a single time: a financial institution, a mobile phone company, a home phone company or a healthcare plan provider (applicable for only respondents in the United States). In total there were **123** responses. **46%** of the responses, the majority, focused on a financial institution, **21%** and **14%** on a mobile or home phone company, respectively, and **20%** on a healthcare plan provider.

When was the call made?

In an effort to obtain *recent* data, respondents could report on an experience occurring as far back as one year. In total, there were **122** responses: **10%** of respondents reported today, **34%** last month, **32%** 2-6 months ago and **24%** 6-12 months ago.

Demographics

Call Center Experience

Were you given the option to be connected to a department that accommodates people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted?
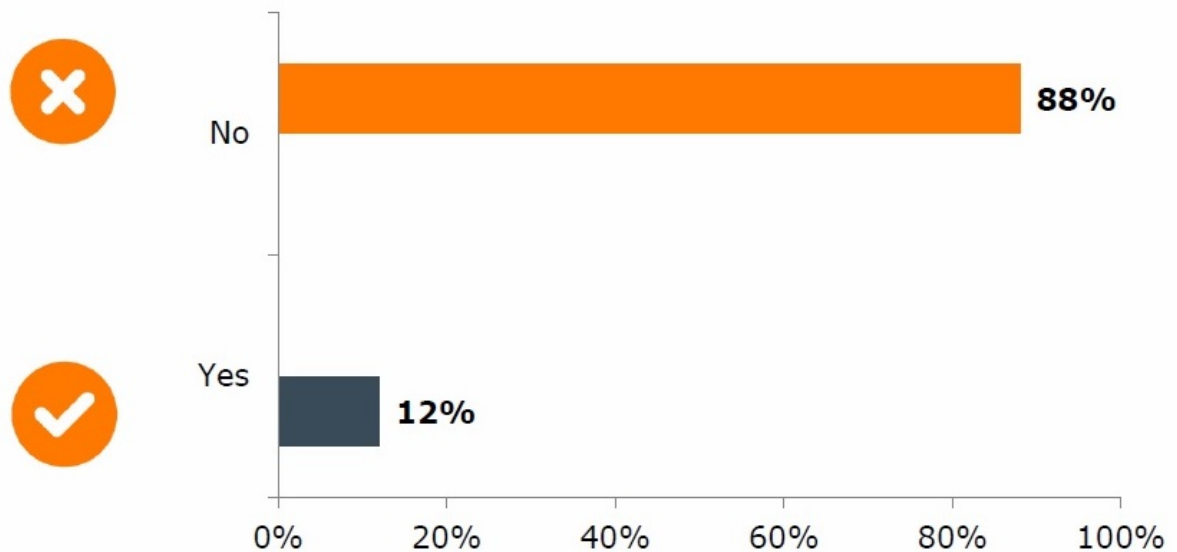
Of the 51 respondents, **88%** reported they were not given the option to be connected to a department that accommodates people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted, and **12%** reported that yes, they were.

When you asked, what accessible formats of brochures about their products and services were available? Please choose as many as apply.
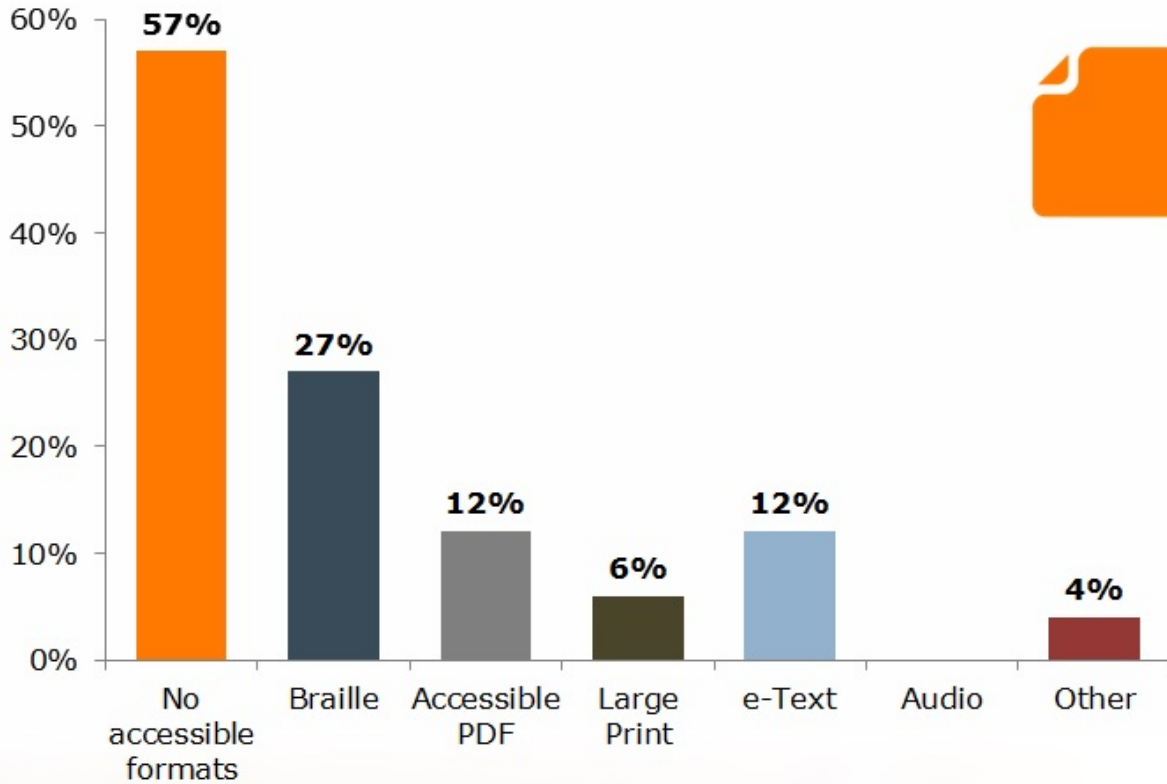
In total, there were 60 responses, and **57%**—the majority—of those stated that no accessible formats of brochures were available. The balance of responses is as follows: **27%** stated braille brochures as available, **6%** large print, **12%** accessible PDF, **12%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **4%** "other" accessible formats.
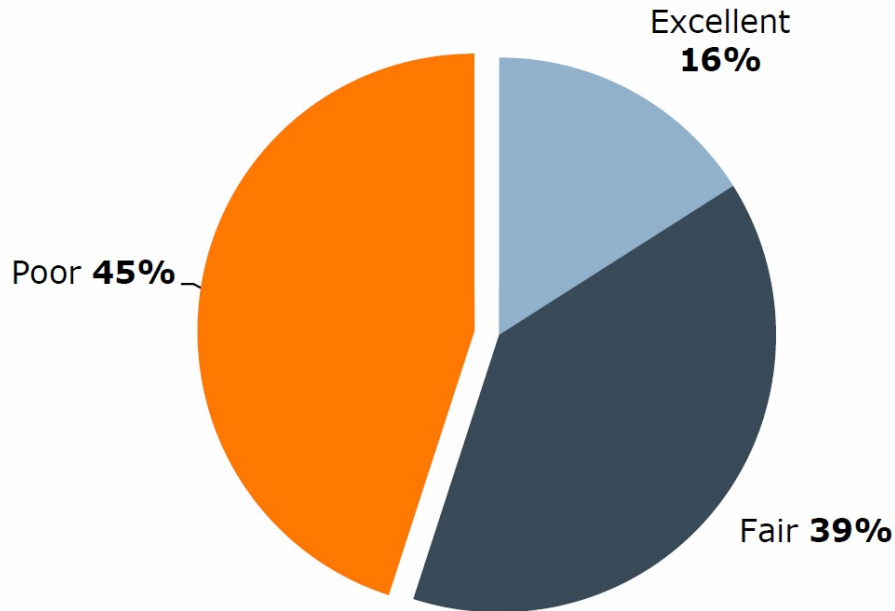
Call Center Experience

In what accessible formats are bills/statements offered by this company? Please choose as many as apply.
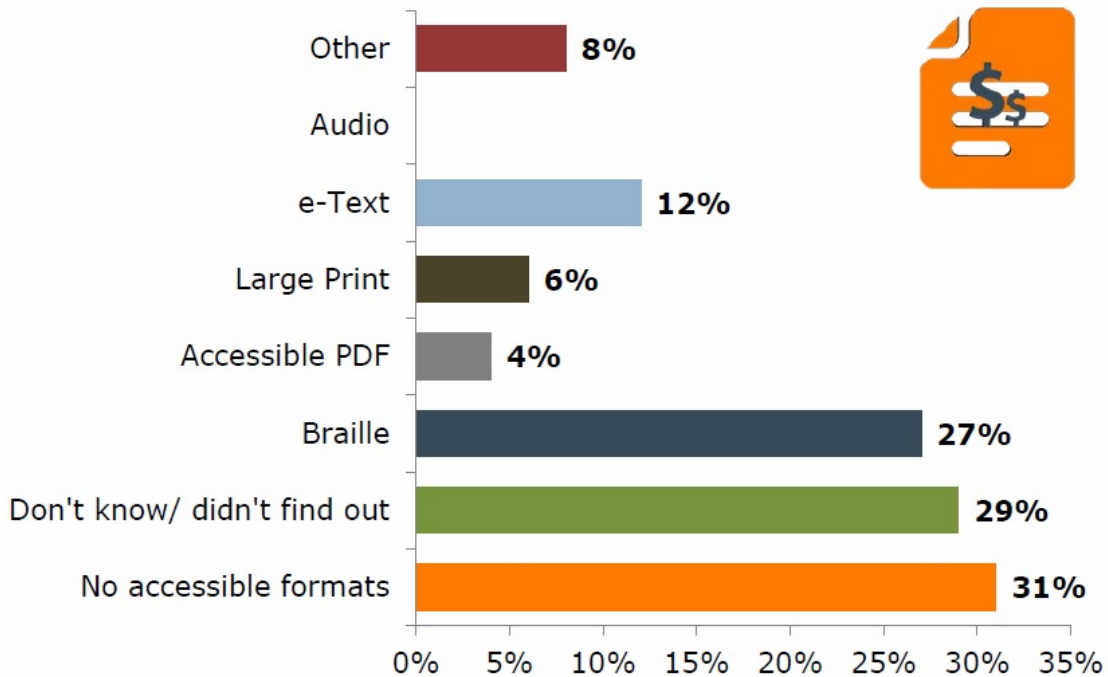
In total, there were 60 responses. Of the 60 responses, **31%**—the majority—stated no accessible formats were available and **29%** stated "don't know or didn't find out". The balance of responses is as follows: **27%** stated braille as an available format, **4%** accessible PDF, **6%** large print, **12%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **8%** "other" accessible formats.
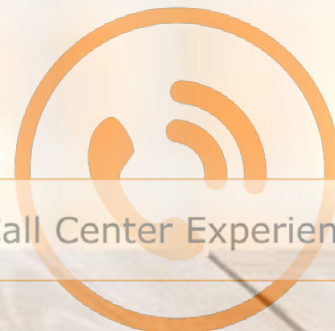
Call Center Experience

How would you rate the agent's knowledgeability when asked about accessible products available from this company?

Excellent **16%**

Poor **45%**

Fair **39%**

Of the 49 respondents who rated the agent's knowledgeability, **45%**—the majority—rated it poor, whereas **16%** rated it excellent and **39%**, fair.

Overall, how would you rate the service you received?
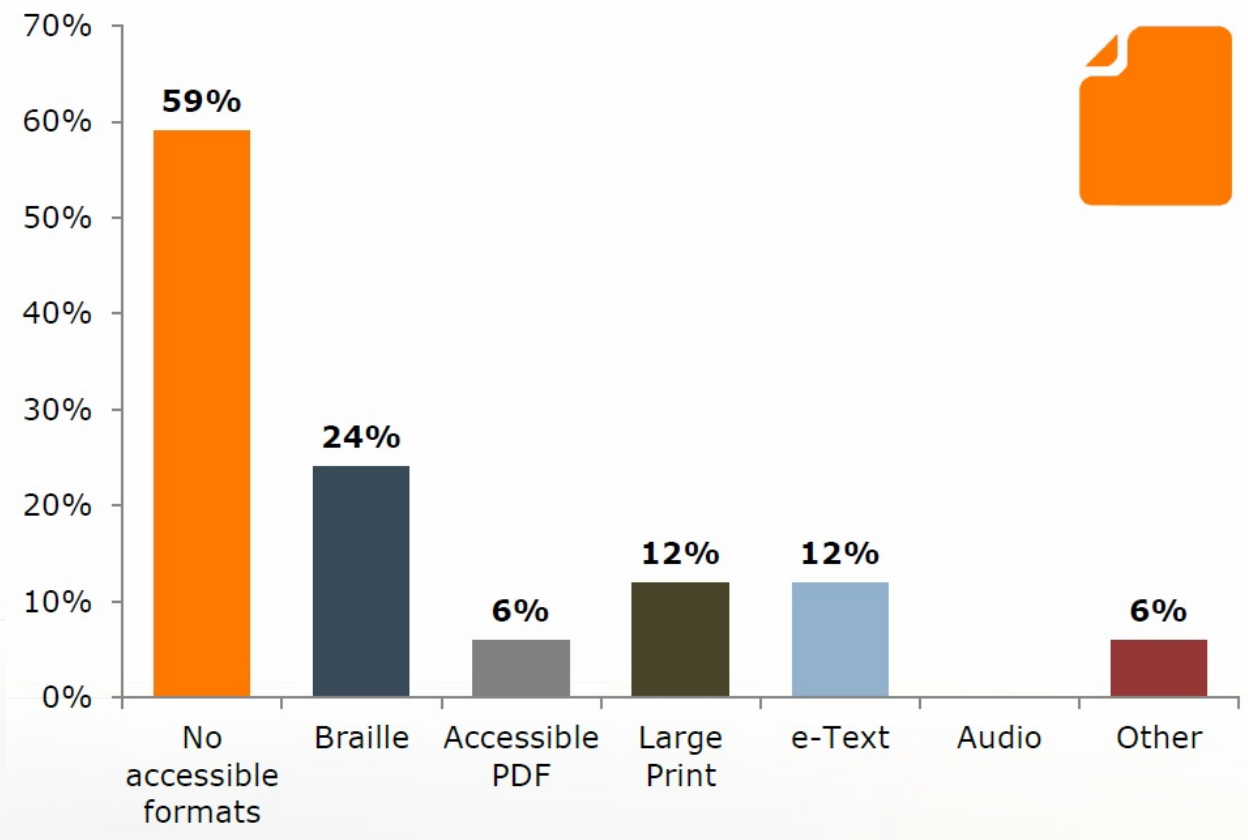
Of the 47 respondents who rated the service received, **38%**—the majority—rated it poor, whereas **34%** rated it excellent and **28%**, fair.

Call Center Experience

In-Person Experience

When you asked, what accessible formats of brochures about their products and services were available? Please choose as many as apply.
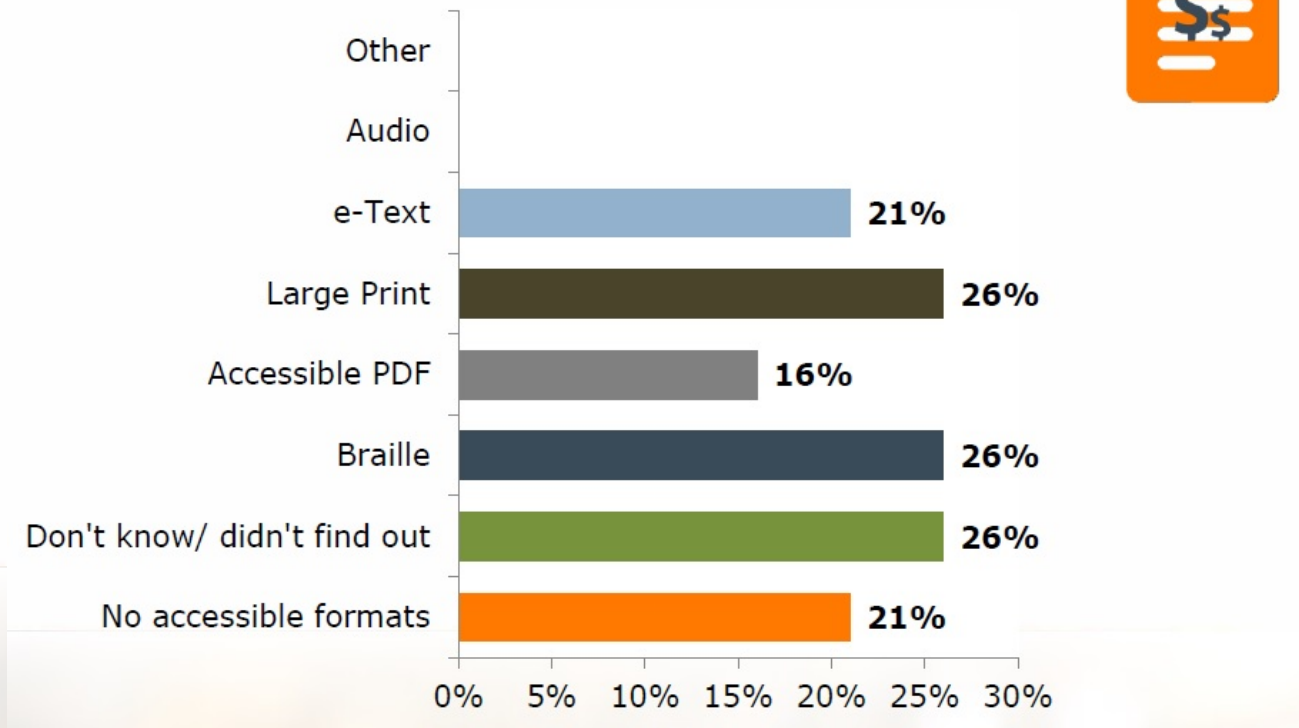

In total, there were 20 responses. Of those, **59%**—the majority—stated no accessible formats were available. The balance of responses is as follows: **24%** stated braille brochures as available, **12%** large print, **6%** accessible PDF, **12%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **6%** "other" accessible formats.

In-Person Experience

In what accessible formats are bills/statements offered by this company? Please choose as many as apply.
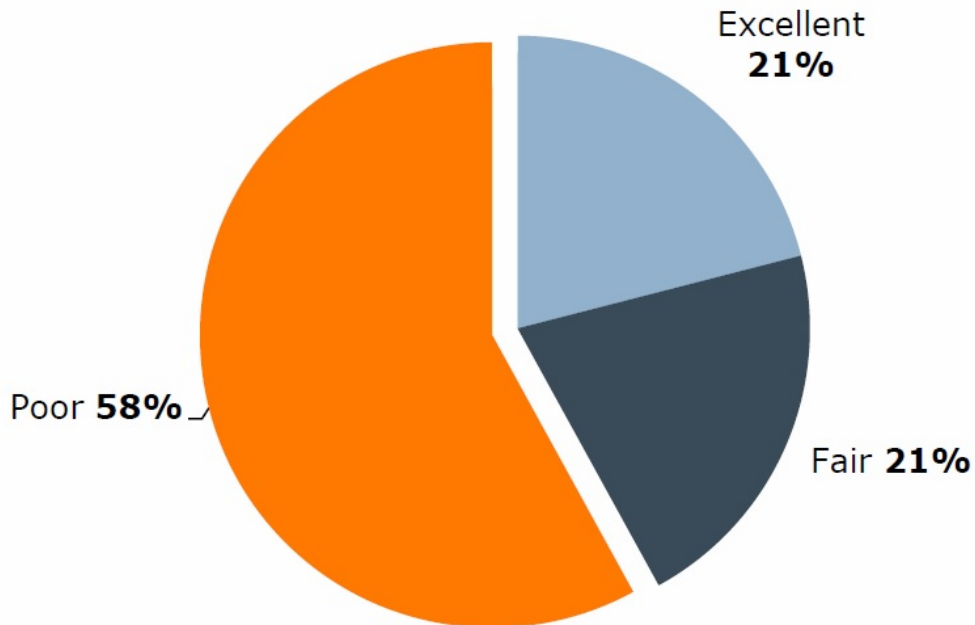

In total, there were 26 responses. Of those, **26%** stated "don't know or didn't find out" what accessible formats of bills/statements are available and **21%** stated no accessible formats were available. The balance of responses is as follows: **26%** stated braille bills/statements as available, **26%** large print, **16%** accessible PDF, **21%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **0%** "other" accessible formats.

How would you rate the agent's knowledgeability when asked about accessible products available from this company?

Excellent
21%

Fair **21%**

Poor **58%**

Of the 19 respondents who rated the agent's knowledgeability, **58%**—the majority—rated it poor, whereas **21%** reported it excellent and **21%**, fair.

Overall, how would you rate the service you received?

Of the 19 respondents who rated the quality of service, **21%** rated it poor, whereas **32%** rated it excellent and **47%**, fair.

In-Person Experience

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Online or Mobile App Experience

What tool did you use during visit?

Mobile App

42%

Laptop or Computer

58%

Of the 24 respondents, **58%** of respondents reported that they used a laptop or computer to inquire about the availability of accessible documents, whereas **42%** reported that they used a mobile app.

Online or Mobile App Experience

How easy was it to find a specific phone number dedicated to people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted to call?
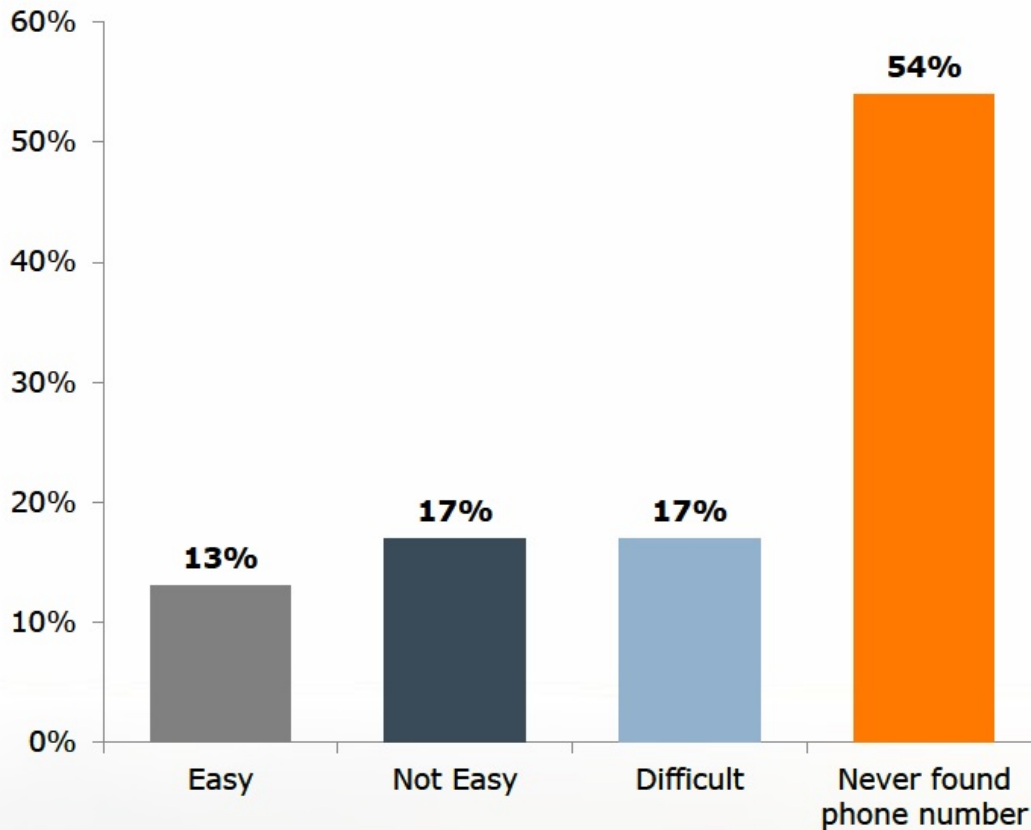
Of the 24 respondents, **54%**—the majority—reported that they never found a phone number, whereas **17%** reported that it was difficult, **17%** that it was not easy and **13%** that it was easy.
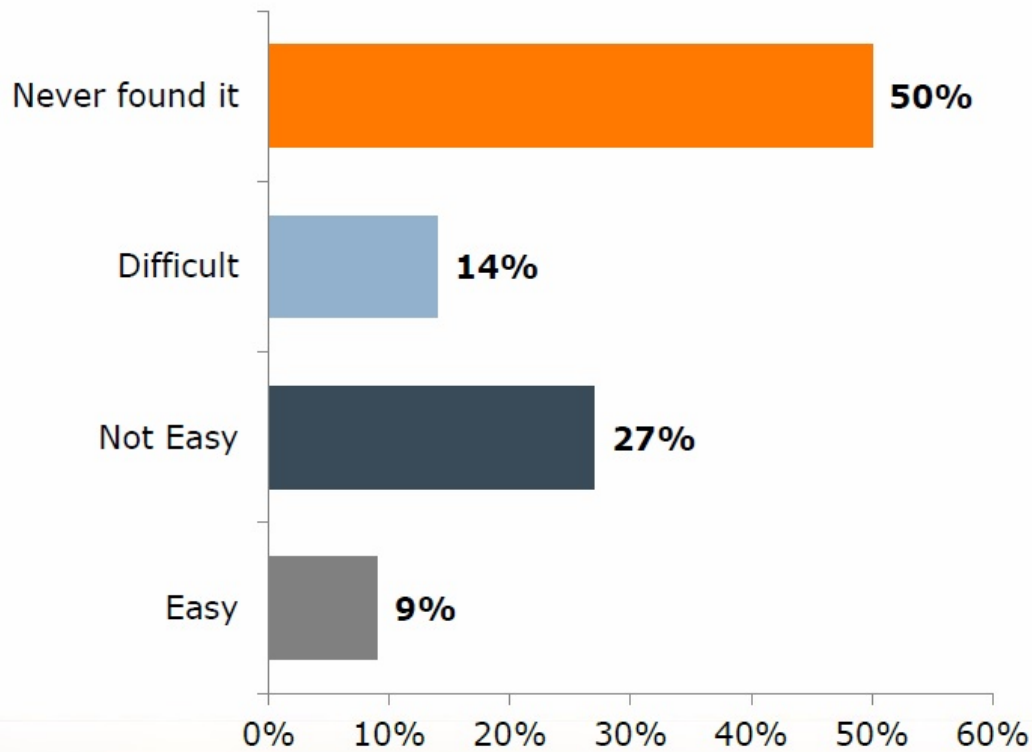
Were the online videos accessible?

Of the 23 respondents, **70%**—the majority—reported there were no videos. Among the respondents who did encounter videos, **0%** reported that yes, they were accessible, **4%** somewhat accessible and **26%** reported that no, they were not accessible.

Online or Mobile App Experience

How easy was it to find a section for accessibility help?
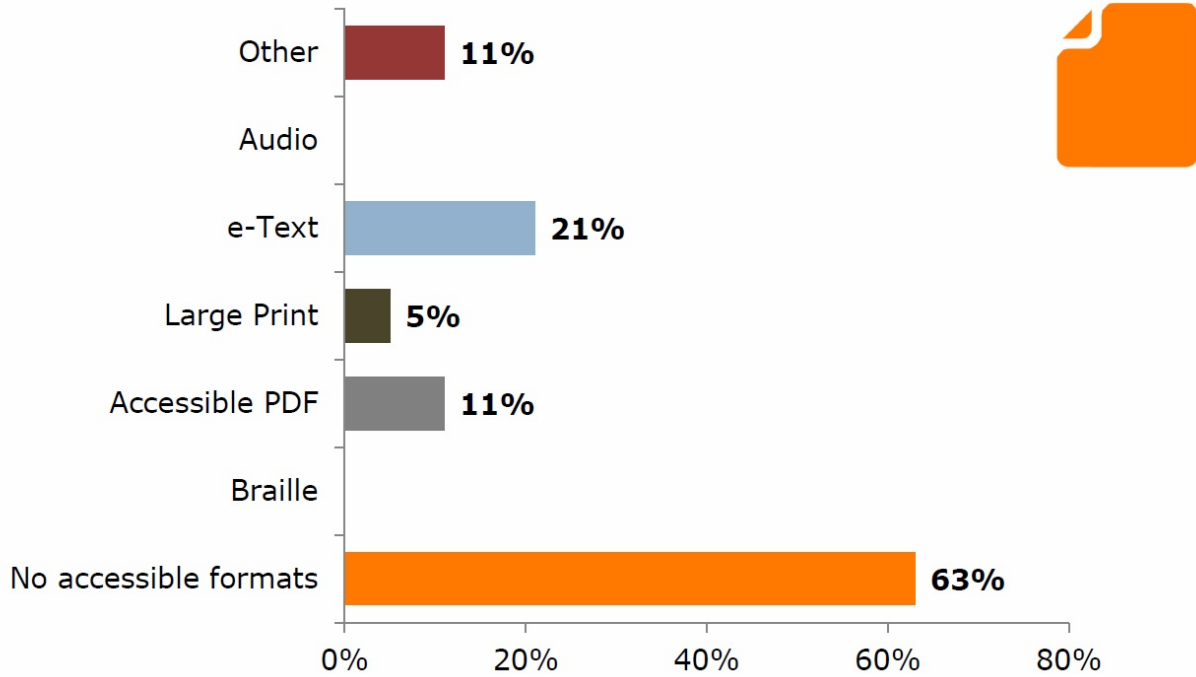

In total, there were 22 respondents. Of those, **50%**—the majority—never found a section for accessibility help, **27%** reported that it was not easy, **14%** that it was difficult and **9%** that it was easy.

Online or Mobile App
Experience

What accessible formats of brochures about their products and services were available? Please choose as many as apply.

| Format	Percentage
Other	11%
Audio	
e-Text	21%
Large Print	5%
Accessible PDF	11%
Braille	
No accessible formats	63%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Of the 21 responses, **63%**—the majority—reported no accessible formats of brochures as available. The balance of responses is as follows: **0%** braille, **5%** large print, **11%** accessible PDF, **21%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **11%** "other".

Online or Mobile App Experience

In what accessible formats are bills/statements offered by this company? Please choose as many as apply.
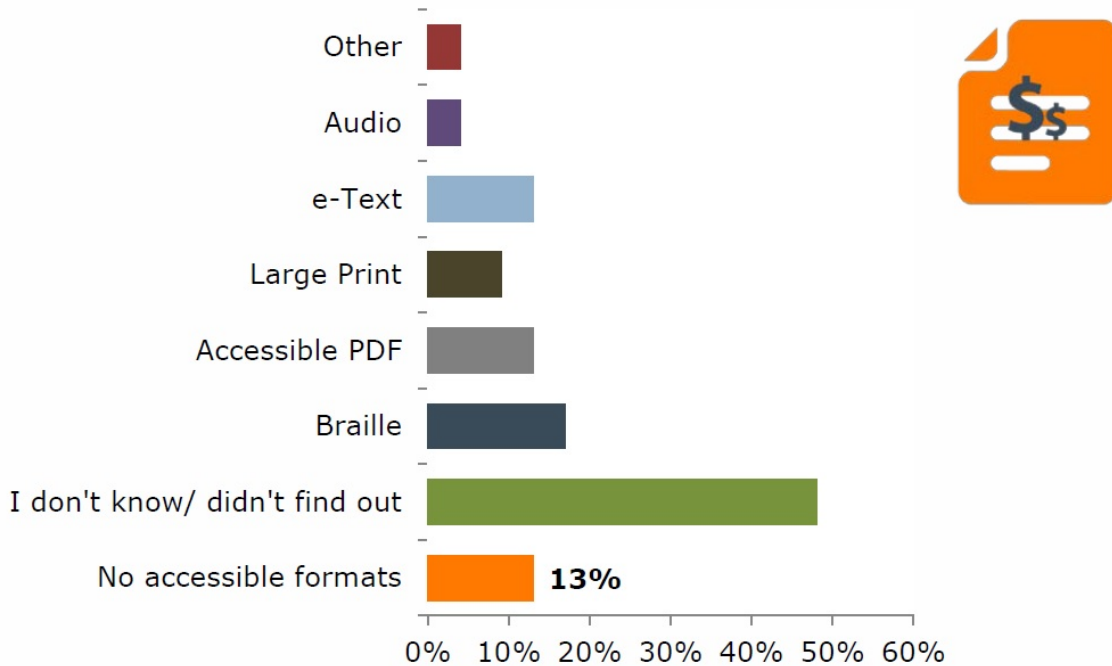
In total, there were 28 responses. Of those, **48%**—the majority—stated "did not know or didn't find out" and **13%** stated that no accessible formats were available. The balance of responses is as follows: **17%** stated braille bills/statements as available, **9%** large print, **13%** accessible PDF, **13%** e-Text, **4%** audio and **4%** "other" accessible formats.

Online or Mobile App Experience

Overall, how would you rate the ease of navigating this online experience?

Fair **43%**

Poor **57%**
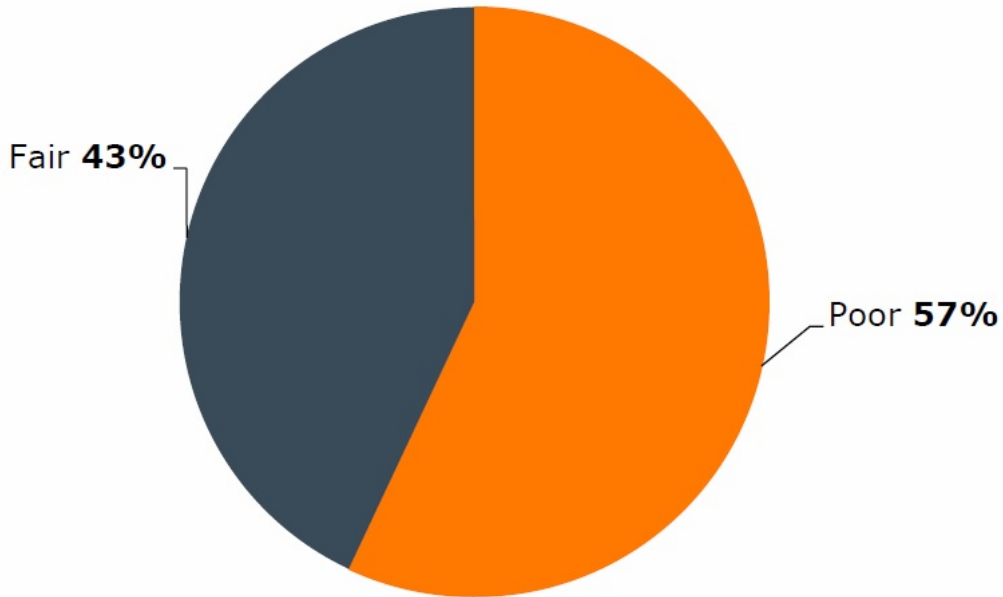
Of the 21 respondents who rated the ease of navigating the online experience, **57%**—the majority—rated it as poor, whereas **43%** rated it fair and **0%**, excellent.

How would you rate the ease of ordering your documentation?

Of the 18 respondents who rated the ease of ordering documentation online, **17%** rated the ease of ordering documentation as poor, whereas **11%** rated it fair, **6%** excellent and **67%** of respondents did not order documents.
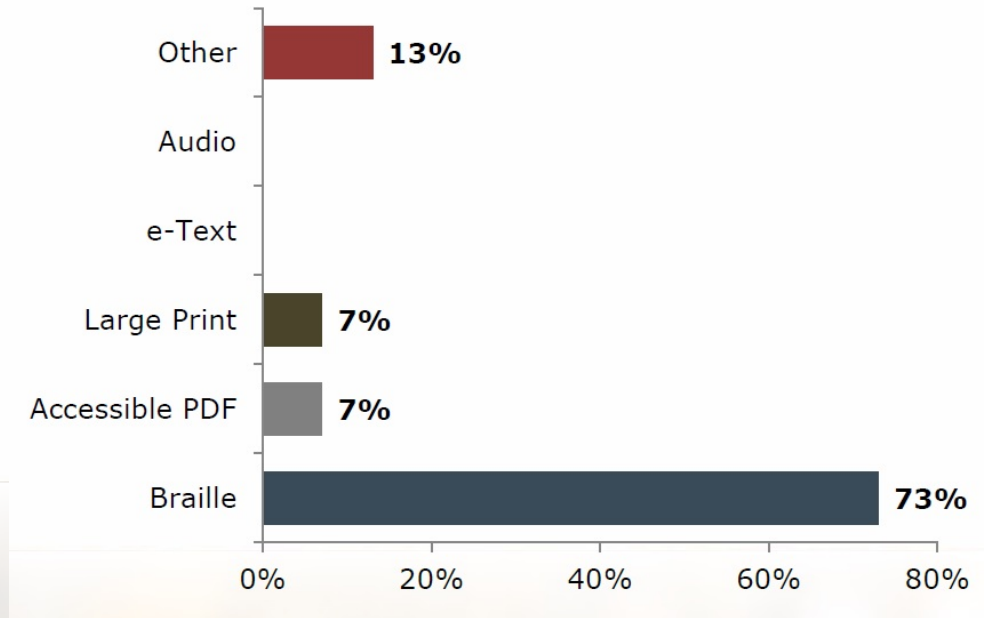
Online or Mobile App Experience

Delivery of Requested Documents

How did you request the document?

Of the 15 respondents, **73%** requested the document via a phone call, **20%** in person, **7%** online and **0%** using a mobile app.

What accessible format did you request?

Of the 15 respondents who requested accessible documents from their service providers and reported on the delivery, **73%**—the majority—reported having requested braille, **7%** large print, **7%** accessible PDF, **0%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **13%** "other".

Delivery of Documents

Did you receive the document in the format you requested?

No **7%**

Yes **93%**
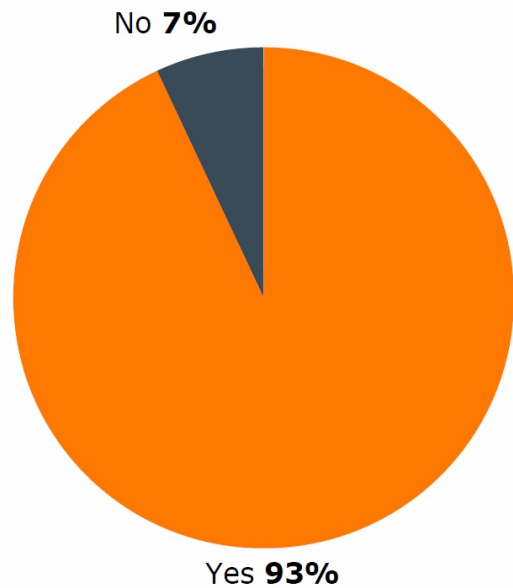
Out of the 15 respondents who requested their documents in alternate formats and reported on the delivery, **93%** reported that they did receive their document in the alternate format they asked for, whereas **7%** reported that they did not.

Delivery of Documents

How long did it take to receive your requested document?

Less than 2 days	Less than 4 days	Less than 7 days
7%	0%	7%

Less than 2 weeks	More than 2 weeks	Never received
29%	43%	14%

In total, there were 14 respondents. Of those, **43%**—the majority—reported that it took **more than 2 weeks** to receive their requested documentation and **14%** reported *never* having received their requested documents. The balance of responses is as follows: **29%** reported it as having taken less than 2 weeks, **7%** less than 7 days, **0%** less than 4 days, **7%** less than 2 days and **0%** instantly.

How would you rate the speed of delivery?

Of the 12 respondents who rated the speed of delivery, **42%** —the majority—rated the speed of delivery as fair, whereas **33%** rated it excellent and **25%**, poor.

Delivery of Documents

![T·BASE COMMUNICATIONS logo]

Satisfaction with Accessible Documents

What type of document are you reporting?

Statement/Bill

91%

Brochure

9%

Of the 11 respondents who reported on their satisfaction with the accessible documents they received from a given financial institution, telecommunications provider or healthcare insurance provider, **91%** reported on an experience obtaining *bills/statements* and **9%** reported on obtaining *brochures*.

What accessible format is the document in?

Of the respondents who reported on their satisfaction with an accessible document they received, **55%** received their documentation in braille, **9%** large print, **0%** accessible PDF, **27%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **9%** "other".

Ideally, what other accessible format would you prefer?

Of the 11 respondents who reported on whether there was an accessible format they would have preferred to receive over the one they requested, **45%** were satisfied with the format they received. The balance of responses is as follows: **18%** would have preferred braille, **9%** large print, **9%** accessible PDF**, 9%** e-Text, **0%** audio and **9%** "other".

Regardless of format, how would you rate the quality of the document received?

Of the 11 respondents who rated the quality of the documents received, **73%** rated the quality excellent, where as **27%** rated it fair and 0%, poor.

Overall, how would you rate the accessibility of the documentation provided by this company?

Of the 11 respondents who rated the accessibility of the documentation, **73%** rated it excellent, **27%** rated it fair and **0%**, poor.

Satisfaction with Documents

![T·BASE COMMUNICATIONS logo]

Have you ever contacted this company to give them feedback about your satisfaction with the accessibility of their document?

Of the 11 respondents who reported on the accessibility of the documentation, **82%** reported that they had not previously contacted the service provider from which they had received it to give feedback, whereas **18%** of respondents reported that they had done so.

Satisfaction with Documents

Conclusion

Based on the feedback, there is room for improvement across all industries in which companies were measured—healthcare, financial services and telecommunications. It is clear the customer experience could be enhanced for those people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted requesting alternate formats, regardless of the method of access.

Two of the first and *most important* questions companies may ask upon reviewing this report are *"What does it mean exactly to communicate effectively?"* and *"How can we do so?"*

We have compiled five best practices to help organizations either begin or continue to provide customers with choice—brochures, statements or bills in a wide range of alternate formats. Implementing these practices will help ensure that you **comply with accessibility legislation**, **save money** and **reduce corporate risk**.

Five Best Practices for Communicating Accessibly

1.   Think about accessibility from the get go

Whenever you create documents—say, in Microsoft Word—or publish fresh content to your website, make sure it's accessible. For online communications, this means ensuring it is compliant with W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA so that customers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted can find the information they are looking for quickly and without trouble. Your mobile app also must be accessible. (Of the respondents reporting on an online or mobile app experience, **42% used a mobile app** & 58% used a laptop or computer, suggesting the prevalence of mobile app use today.)

2.   Review your current customer information and communications

Like fresh content you create, consider the accessibility of existing customer-facing brochures, statements or bills. Customers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted need access to their monthly statements/bills in alternate formats in order to fully understand charges applied to their accounts, allowing them to make informed financial decisions.

3.   Make it accessible upon request

When respondents were asked about the availability of *brochures* in accessible formats, "no accessible formats" was the most popular response across every experience—call center, in-person and online. This suggests accessible documents are not always available upon request.

No two requests for alternate formats will be exactly the same; there's no one-size-fits-all solution. A customer who reads braille, and receives a monthly braille bank statement, may prefer accessing the contents of his or her statement via an *online* accessible PDF using assistive technology (e.g. a screen

reader) from time to time. If a customer requests a brochure, statement/document in an alternate format, the service provider must be prepared to promptly provide it upon request.

4.   Provide accessible formats quickly

For the majority of people who reported on the delivery of an accessible document, it took much longer than *three to five business days to receive their requested document. In fact, **43%**—the majority—of respondents reported it took longer than two weeks to receive the document requested, and **14%** reported *never* having received it.

Providing accessible communications for customers with disabilities as promptly as you would provide standard print communications is mandated under accessibility legislation in the United States and Canada, and it's just good customer service. Of course, how quickly you provide it may depend on the amount of information being transcribed, the type of document, its complexity and the format requested.

5.   Let the public know

When asked "How easy was it to find a section for accessibility help?" **50%** of respondents reported that they never found a section for accessibility help.

Let the public know your company provides accessible communications. It's good practice to include a note on the homepage of your website, on all standard print information and on any in-store materials & signage.

Notably, **88%** of respondents reported that they were **not** given the option to be connected to a department that accommodates people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted when inquiring via a call center.

These statistics suggest CSRs could be better informed to handle the requests of callers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted, thereby meeting the needs of more callers, reducing call times and improving the customer experience overall.

It is good practice to educate customer service representatives (CSRs) on accessibility, namely your organization's commitments and offerings, so they can respond appropriately should a customer request one.

*At T-Base, we typically turn a simple and short document into an accessible format within 3-5 business days.

About T-Base

T-Base is North America's industry thought leader. We simplify accessible communications by providing secure design, production and delivery of accessible statements, documents and educational material in braille, large print, e-Text and audio. We also offer PDF/UA remediation, website audits and accessibility training to provide a holistic approach to legislative compliance.