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Inclusive Marketing and Communication Guide

1. Prologue

We are living in complex times of uncertainty and change, making diversity management an undeniable necessity within our organisations.

Every organisation needs diverse individuals who can contribute their best knowledge, experience, and ideas.

Understanding the richness of diversity is essential to foster the innovation that organisations require. It was with this inclusive mindset that the Innodiversity Index was launched in 2019, as a diagnostic tool to help organisations understand and manage diversity, and to harness it in service of innovation, while simultaneously building a more inclusive world.

After three editions and participation from 789 companies — 427 of them large enterprises — the authors have drawn three key lessons from managing innodiversity, with significant implications for inclusive marketing and communication.

To manage diversity, we must first understand its complexity.

The first type of diversity in organisations is demographic diversity. This refers to differences we are born with or that arise from circumstances beyond our control, such as gender, ethnicity, physical traits, or disability.

This kind of diversity receives the most attention in Spanish companies. Among those participating in the Innodiversity Index, 89% manage gender diversity, 72.4% focus on talent with disabilities, 67% on senior talent, and 51% on LGTBI+ talent.

But beyond demographic diversity, companies also focus on their employees' experiences — this is experiential diversity, which includes factors like education (62.8%), experience within the company (66.8%), sector experience (68.7%), or multicultural experience (49.4%).

Finally, cognitive diversity represents the latest frontier in diversity management. It encompasses important traits such as personality (42.6%),

leadership style (46.8%), diversity in problem-solving approaches (37.7%), and thought patterns.

Research results suggest that inclusion policies are effective in managing demographic diversity, provided that their impact is measured. A sense of belonging is key to managing experiential and cognitive diversity. This means incorporating these criteria into teams and measuring their results, including impact on outcomes and staff turnover.

Diversity management has the greatest impact when linked to innovation management. Successful innovation requires a focus on different types of innovation: product/service, processes, and business models.

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Among the 70% of companies that manage innovation, the main challenges are giving innovation a consistent organisational structure and, secondly, creating incentives through recognition mechanisms or economic rewards (40%).

Collaboration is key to innodiversity.

Our research highlights the importance of collaboration between diversity and innovation departments. This fosters new ways of incorporating diversity into innovation and vice versa. In fact, 41% of the participating companies acknowledge such collaboration.

After four years of studying innodiversity in Spanish companies, the results are encouraging. Not only is there interest in diversity — it is being managed and measured. Spanish companies are innovation leaders, and they are increasingly able to measure innovation. Lastly, although progress is slow, it is steady and directed towards using diversity to drive innovation.

We can conclude, then, that Spanish companies have the tools to navigate the turbulent times ahead. But to truly benefit from diversity, as this guide underscores, the first step is to remove the barriers that prevent individuals from contributing their unique perspectives.

We believe the tools provided in this Inclusive Marketing and Communication Guide are essential to embracing diversity in all its richness — and thus contributing to the innovation so vital in these uncertain times.

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2. Presentation of the Guide

Based on the model of triple diversity (de Anca, Aragón, 2018), it is clear that diversity brings richness and growth.

Who wouldn't want to live in a society made up of diverse individuals who contribute their unique selves, knowledge, learning, and values to help us grow and improve every day?

Or to work in a company where we are valued for our diversity and our unique ability to contribute?

However, there are many barriers deeply rooted in our society — and in companies too. It is crucial to identify them in order to confront them. One of the most significant barriers is lack of awareness.

A lack of familiarity or interaction with certain social groups, along with misinformation or biased information, causes uncertainty and unconscious discriminatory attitudes.

Another common barrier is prejudice. Prejudices are superficial judgements that lead to preconceived negative evaluations of others, resulting in discrimination and exclusion.

A third invisible barrier is overprotection. This means treating vulnerable people with condescension or excessive care. These behaviours can also act as obstacles to learning and personal or professional development.

At ILUNION, we believe in equal opportunities for all people.

Although this may sound basic, it must be respected and actively promoted — and there is no better way to do that than by setting an example, creating opportunities for everyone regardless of their circumstances. In doing so, we remove barriers and help combat them.

From ILUNION's purpose, "Building a better world with everyone included", the idea for this guide was born. The aim is to take this purpose into the fields of Marketing and Communication — creating content that respects and connects with a diverse audience while breaking the three barriers outlined above.

Esther Morell
Director of Marketing and Communication
ILUNION

3. Expert Contributors

ILUNION Accessibility

According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), the word “inclusive” means “that includes, or has the ability or capacity to include.” When applied to language and communication, in recent years this adjective has been mainly used to refer to the equal inclusion of men and women.

This is a limited interpretation that excludes other groups who face significant discrimination in their daily lives.

At ILUNION Accessibility, we have spent years working to include people who need higher accessibility standards than what is typically considered. These are mainly people with permanent disabilities, but also older people or those who, due to temporary circumstances, may have limited mobility, vision, hearing, etc.

We have found that, just as inclusive language and communication are often viewed narrowly, focusing mainly on gender issues, the approach to inclusion for people with disabilities and older people has also been historically limited — mainly addressing physical accessibility in buildings and urban environments.

Talking about accessible digital ecosystems for everyone is still a relatively unfamiliar concept for most people. Inclusion in communication for people with disabilities is often reduced to using images of wheelchair users or blind individuals, easily falling into stereotypes.

It’s important to highlight that a truly inclusive society in terms of communication goes far beyond visual stereotypes. It means ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities or circumstances, can access and understand information.

Inclusion in these cases involves, among other things, applying accessibility standards to all environments, products, processes, and services. This results in actions that are more valuable, richer, different, and often more effective — but not necessarily more complex.

Marketing and communication professionals must understand why their work and projects should be inclusive for everyone. They must internalise the technical features that help achieve this goal and put them into practice in their daily work.

All these steps are essential, but what truly makes a difference is understanding the need — once that happens, everything else follows more easily.

For ILUNION Accessibility, it has been deeply rewarding to contribute to the creation of this Inclusive Marketing and Communication Guide and to share our knowledge and experience with all communication and marketing professionals. We are confident it will be valuable for all of you as well.

Pilar Soret - Business Development Director
ILUNION Accessibility

4. Addressing Diversity in Communication

Addressing diversity is a crucial topic that deserves special attention, as it can significantly impact public perception, potentially leading to a lack of understanding and social support.

Therefore, it is essential that we adopt a respectful and empathetic approach in our communication and content, treating population diversity as completely normal.

We must define people by their talents, skills, and contributions to society — which may include sharing inspiring stories of individuals or groups who have overcome obstacles and achieved great goals. These stories are often aspirational and exemplify resilience, effort, perseverance, and positivity — values that are deeply appreciated in our culture and sought by brands.

We must avoid stereotypes and extreme portrayals. It is common to depict certain groups as either pitiful or heroic simply for managing day-to-day challenges. Instead, we should strive to present people as complex and diverse individuals, with a variety of experiences and perspectives that reflect their everyday reality.

As brands and professionals, we must understand that our communication has an impact on society and leaves a mark on our audiences. Brand communication and advertising can help normalise behaviours and set examples. We therefore have a moral and ethical responsibility to generate responsible, honest communication that aligns with the company's purpose — beyond trends or short-term financial goals — and truly listens and responds to people's needs.

At ILUNION and Grupo Social ONCE, we have always worked to ensure that women and men with disabilities can lead independent, equal lives. We have contributed to building an inclusive society model in which disability is no longer seen as “a problem,” but rather as an asset within the broader diversity of the human experience.

Other vulnerable groups also represent valuable diversity — for instance, people who experience ageism, immigrants, or members of the LGTBI community. Therefore, it is essential to consider language as a tool for inclusion.

Language is one of the most powerful instruments we have to shape the world. Through language, we build meaning, give identity and visibility, or conversely, make things disappear. What is not expressed, does not exist.

That is why this guide offers recommendations and guidance on inclusive language use to support your communication efforts.

5. Accessible Content

1. What Is Accessible Content and Why Is It Necessary?

When discussing diversity and inclusion in advertising or marketing, the conversation often focuses on stereotypes.

Of course, it is essential that the images we present reflect visible diversity in order to normalise it and, more importantly, to create a more honest connection with the lived experiences of diverse individuals.

Moreover, the World Federation of Advertisers launched a guide at the Cannes Lions International Festival, advocating for diversity and inclusion across companies in the advertising industry. It was a global call to build diverse teams and implement policies that promote inclusion within the sector.

This guide goes beyond simply promoting internal team diversity. It introduces a third essential axis — the diversity of the audiences we address.

As marketing and communication professionals, we want our messages to succeed and reach as many people as possible.

We are deeply committed to listening and research. We want to understand our potential customers — what they want, need, and care about — so we can create products, services, and offers that meet their expectations, aiming to connect, stay relevant, and build closeness.

We create content, communications, and campaigns that aim to be accessible to everyone — leaving no one behind.

But if, after eliminating stereotypes, using inclusive language, crafting the right tone, and ensuring diverse teams... our message still fails to reach certain groups, then we're missing something important.

A company may design a visually appealing e-commerce website that is easy to navigate in order to increase sales. But if the site isn't accessible, how many people will never be able to use it?

Likewise, a beautifully produced TV commercial with unforgettable music might not mention the brand name, product, or message audibly. In such cases, that advert will be "invisible" to many.

We must understand that some individuals encounter more barriers in their everyday lives and may face limitations. They just need us to think about them — how they will access our content — and take steps to ensure our content reaches them effectively.

Besides people with disabilities, our society is ageing rapidly. According to Spain's National Statistics Institute, by 2050, Spain is expected to be the world's second-most aged country after Japan. This demographic shift reinforces the importance of applying the principles of universal design to create accessible, easy-to-understand content.

Our content should be designed to be clear, user-friendly, and accessible to everyone, regardless of abilities, backgrounds, environments, or preferences.

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By creating inclusive and accessible content, we not only act responsibly — we actively contribute to building a more just and equal society.

2. Adapting Accessible Content by Format

Video

Today, video is the leading content format, but it is important to consider that not all viewers will be able to access the content unless additional factors are taken into account.

For example, individuals with hearing disabilities may struggle to follow the audio without appropriate transcription.

Subtitles are an effective solution for making video content accessible to all. They are useful not only for people with hearing disabilities but also for those watching videos in noisy environments or without headphones, such as at gyms, bars, or other public places.

When creating subtitles, keep the following in mind:

- Don't rely solely on automatically generated subtitles.
- Choose between open and closed captions depending on the platform.
- Ensure text is legible and placed prominently on screen.

Audio description assists people with visual impairments in understanding the narrative. These narrations describe everything happening on screen, enabling anyone to follow the story visually.

Subtitles and audio descriptions should be part of the creative process from the beginning — not added afterwards as an afterthought. Creative techniques can also enhance accessibility, using visual representations of sounds to enrich storytelling.

It is helpful to comply with UNE 153.020 standards (for audio description), UNE 153.010 (for subtitling), and the YouTube Subtitle Insertion Guide.

Spanish Sign Language (LSE) should be considered, particularly for complex or specialised video content, to ensure better understanding for native sign language users.

Also, consider using Easy Reading techniques — a set of guidelines and validation steps designed to make information accessible for people with reading comprehension difficulties.

Images

Alongside video, images are key components in social media content.

However, images alone are visual elements — when we rely solely on visuals to communicate, the message becomes inaccessible for people who are blind or have low vision.

This doesn't mean avoiding images. For some users, images can enhance understanding of text-based content. To make visual information accessible, we simply need to add explanatory text descriptions.

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Most social media platforms now provide specific fields for these descriptions when uploading images.

We'll explore platform-specific methods and examples later in the guide.

Colour

Colour must not be the sole method used to convey information.

The most important consideration is that, if you use colour to communicate something, you should also include an additional visual cue that does not rely on colour alone.

Below are two examples using pie charts to illustrate this:

- In the first chart, information is conveyed using only colour. As a result, individuals who cannot distinguish colours or those with low vision will not perceive the information effectively.
- In the second chart, while still using colour, each component is visually distinguished by separating sections, labelling them with text, and, in some cases, reinforcing the colour through the use of textures.

Other common examples of this barrier include:

- Hyperlinks: If a change in colour is the only way to indicate a link, it should be supported with another visual cue such as underlining.
- Selected elements: If selection is indicated solely by colour, it should be reinforced visually by other means.

In a good practice example, links are not only shown in blue but also underlined, providing multiple cues for users.

Contrast Level

One of the most frequent accessibility issues in digital content is the use of insufficient colour contrast in elements that convey information.

This affects:

- People with low vision who cannot distinguish colours when contrast is poor.
- People without disabilities who view content in bright environments.
- Older adults with age-related vision loss.

Text content must have a minimum contrast ratio of 4.5:1 with its background, except in these cases:

- Large text (at least 18pt regular or 14pt bold): a minimum contrast of 3:1.
- Decorative text or images of text: no contrast requirement.
- Logos: exempt from contrast requirements.

In non-textual content (e.g., UI elements), components must have a minimum contrast of 3:1 with adjacent colours.

Examples:

- Icons (e.g., delete/bin or favourite/heart).
- Colour-coded feedback (e.g., red for error, green for success).
- Instructional or feedback text.
- Essential graphics.

Tools to check contrast:

- Adobe Color's Contrast Analyzer
- Colour Contrast Analyser (The Paciello Group)
- WebAIM Contrast Checker
- Accessible Colour Generator
- Leonardo – contrast-based generator

Image Carousels

Moving content (such as image carousels) can impact readability and must meet specific accessibility criteria.

Content that moves, flashes, scrolls or updates automatically should:

- Include controls to pause, stop or hide the motion.
- Avoid starting automatically, especially if it lasts more than five seconds or runs in parallel with other content.

Unless the motion is essential, users must have the option to control it.

Requirements:

- If the content starts automatically, lasts more than five seconds, or runs in parallel with other content, users must be able to pause, stop or hide it.
- Automatically updating content must also include a mechanism for the user to pause, stop or control the update frequency – unless such updating is essential to the function.

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GIFs

GIFs are very popular because they convey emotions or reactions in just a few seconds. But from an **accessibility standpoint**, they pose some challenges:

- **Cognitive accessibility:** It's not always easy to understand what a GIF means, especially for people with intellectual or neurodiverse conditions. Different users may interpret them differently.
- **Screen readers:** GIFs don't typically include readable descriptions unless provided in accompanying text.
- **Movement:** Looping GIFs can distract users and pose a risk to people with photosensitive epilepsy.

Recommendations:

- Use sparingly.
- Provide a **clear textual description** either as alt text or in the post.
- Avoid flashing or rapidly looping GIFs.
- Provide alternatives where possible.

Emojis

Emojis have become a key part of our communication, especially on social media. From an accessibility perspective, it's important to know that all emojis usually come with a text description, making them accessible to screen reader users.

However, caution is needed:

- The **actual meaning of an emoji** may not match its textual description. For example, you may use an emoji intending to convey sarcasm or humour, but the screen reader might announce it as "face with rolling eyes", which may not reflect your intended message.

Recommendation: If you're unsure how a blind user will interpret an emoji, test it with a screen reader to hear the exact description.

Also, using **too many emojis in a single post** can be problematic.

Imagine a tweet composed only of multiple clapping hand emojis:

- For sighted users, this can be visually scanned and skipped quickly.
- For screen reader users, each emoji will be read aloud individually ("clapping hands sign"), which may lead to frustration if there's no other content.

3. Adapting Accessible Content to Media

Social media

When writing content for social media posts, there are a series of recommendations to make the content more readable for users:

- **Use simple language:** Texts should be written with the intended audience in mind. Avoid jargon and use short and concise phrases. Place the main information at the beginning.
- **Fonts:** Avoid excessive use of capital letters or italics as they make reading difficult. Do not use special characters, as they can become a barrier for screen readers, altering the message and reducing legibility.
- **Hashtags:** Write hashtags with the first letter of each word capitalised (e.g., #ExampleHashtag). Where possible, place hashtags and mentions at the end of posts. This reduces interruptions for screen reader users who hear "hashtag" or "at" before each element.

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Content Formats and Platform Considerations

Different social media platforms require different formats and tones. However, uploading content generally follows similar procedures. Regardless of platform, we must follow accessibility guidelines to reach more people.

Recommendations in this guide are based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, aiming for compliance level AA, as required by Spanish digital content legislation.

If in doubt, refer to WCAG for solutions and justifications on accessible content types.

Informative Images

These are images that convey information that can be described in a short sentence or represent concepts graphically (e.g., logos, icons, emotion-conveying images).

Alt text must communicate the essential information. If the image functions as a link, include the function and destination in the description.

Complex Informative Images

These images (e.g., infographics, charts, maps) carry large amounts of information. Use a short alt description and indicate where the full description can be accessed (e.g., in a document, thread, or website). Consider adding a summary in the post text for low-vision users not using screen readers.

Images with Text

These should be avoided where possible. Text in images may be unreadable when enlarged or in high contrast mode. When necessary, add the image text to both the alt description and the post body.

Decorative Images

Determining if an image is decorative depends on whether it adds information beyond what's already in the text. On social media, decorative images can't be hidden from screen readers, so provide a brief non-intrusive alt description.

Videos

Videos with audio should include subtitles. Though automatic captioning has improved, it still contains errors. Edit captions before publishing or use professional services for live events. For visual-only videos, provide transcripts and audio descriptions. For audio-only content (e.g., podcasts), offer full transcripts.

Web Accessibility

Design websites so everyone can use them, regardless of ability. Include labelled navigation, clear content structure, good contrast, and captions/transcripts for multimedia. Accessible sites reach wider audiences and comply with legal standards like WCAG 2.1.

Email Marketing

Use single-column layouts, maintain a 60/40 text-to-image ratio, limit links, use descriptive link text, and minimise emoji use. Use a minimum 14px font size and avoid centring long paragraphs. Don't use title attributes in links — instead, clearly describe the CTA button's purpose. Refer to Fundación ONCE's guide for more details.

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Out of Home (OOH) Advertising

OOH formats (billboards, transport ads, digital displays) should be visible, high-contrast, large-text, and include subtitles or audio descriptions when applicable. Place ads where they can be intuitively understood and offer accessible alternatives (e.g., QR codes). Physically, ensure ad structures don't create barriers (e.g., ensure passage width, provide seating/support in shelters).

Radio

Radio advertising is typically a short-format medium that can convey a lot of information in a brief time.

The first consideration is ensuring a clear and well-articulated voice so that everyone can understand the content. People with hearing impairments, such as deafness or partial hearing loss, may use assistive devices to listen to the radio, but these aids cannot compensate for poor articulation. Speak clearly, slowly, and avoid jargon or technical terms.

The tone of voice also plays an important role. A natural and appropriate tone helps people follow the content easily. Avoid tones that are too high or low, and sudden shifts in tone, which can be confusing.

Inclusive language is essential: avoid sexist or discriminatory language. A clear and concise communication style improves comprehension and avoids alienating any group.

Diverse representation is also key. Include voices and testimonies from people of different ethnicities, genders, ages, and abilities. This reflects audience diversity and reinforces your commitment to inclusion.

Select appropriate background music and sound effects for your diverse audience. Avoid anything offensive or exclusive.

When sharing contact information, ensure it's clear and understandable. Include alternatives such as email or social media.

Events

When planning events, accessibility must be considered from the beginning. Do not assume attendees will inform you of their needs—always communicate the available adaptations and designate a key contact person.

Tips for accessible events:

- Include accessibility icons (e.g., subtitles, sign language) in event promotions.
- Assign an accessibility coordinator to oversee planning.
- Distribute accessible communications before the event. Share materials in advance so attendees can prepare.
- Ensure presenters' faces and lips are visible. Use good lighting and simple backgrounds. Presenters should wear solid colours that contrast with the background.
- Provide microphones and functioning audio systems for speakers and audience interactions.
- Use subtitles and ensure visibility of sign language interpreters.
- Employ culturally competent sign language interpreters and professional transcription services for better quality.

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Virtual Events

For virtual events, include accessibility features in all communications—before and after the event.

- Speak slowly, especially when naming people or companies.
- Clearly explain how to access subtitles, interpreters, and support.
- Use platforms with accessibility features.
- Pin accessibility instructions visibly for all participants.

Stands

When showcasing your product or service at a fair, ensure your stand is fully accessible:

- Avoid physical barriers such as steps or narrow passages.
- Ensure wheelchair access to meeting areas: under-table clearance of 80 cm width, 70 cm height, and 50 cm depth.
- Counters should have dual height levels (80 cm and 110 cm).
- Brochures should be placed between 80 and 120 cm from the floor and ideally on slanted shelves.

Staff must be trained in disability awareness. Audiovisuals and printed materials should be accessible. Provide sign language options and hearing loops.

Packaging

Packaging must allow everyone to access products safely and easily.

- Use large, clear text (at least 12 pt) with high contrast.
- Include Braille labels in key areas.
- Use plain language and avoid technical jargon.
- Employ inclusive, non-sexist language.

Examples:

- Product labels with 12 pt font and 4.5:1 contrast ratio.
- Instructions using symbols or images.
- Clear nutritional information.
- Inclusive descriptions for toys.

Point of Sale

Technology such as QR codes, NFC, Wheris, or Beacons enhances accessibility at the point of sale.

Beacons help with navigation and can notify customers of offers or guide them to specific areas.

This tech-based approach improves in-store accessibility and inclusivity.

Printed Documents

To create fully accessible brochures or catalogues:

- Combine Braille with technology (e.g., raised QR codes, NFC, AR).
- Ensure visually impaired people can find QR codes.
- Use widespread technologies for better compatibility (e.g., QR over Wheris).

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Presentations

Effective presentations should be inclusive:

- Use clear, uncluttered slides and avoid excessive animation.
- Keep critical info visible and avoid repetitive motion.
- Include alt text for images and diagrams.
- Provide captions for audio/video content and correct auto-generated ones.
- Share slides beforehand or offer a bullet-point summary.
- Add a glossary for acronyms or technical terms.

PDFs

Accessible PDFs require:

- Use of suitable software (e.g., Adobe Acrobat Pro).
- Logical content structure with headings and subtitles.
- Alt text for images.
- Proper tagging of elements like lists, tables, and forms.
- Readable fonts (12 pt or more).
- Clear and simple layout.
- Verification with accessibility tools (e.g., WebAIM, Adobe tools).

Accessibility must be a core element of any published digital document.

Closing

We hope this Inclusive Marketing and Communication Guide has helped you understand the importance of fostering inclusion in every aspect of marketing and advertising.

Inclusion is a long-term journey, and every effort contributes to a more equitable world. Thank you for leading the way.

For guidance or support, contact:

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