

A young woman with long, straight blonde hair and blue eyes is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a black, short-sleeved, scoop-neck top. She is seated in a blue metal wheelchair with black armrests. The background is a blurred office or public space with other people in the distance.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES –

A WORLDWIDE UNDERUTILIZED RESOURCE

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People with disabilities constitute the world's largest and fastest growing minority yet they are overlooked in most countries around the globe, especially as employees and consumers. Even among diversity professionals, we tend not to include individuals with disabilities when we refer to the majority minority.

This is puzzling when you consider that this segment represents more than one billion people – 15 percent of the world's population. People with disabilities are an untapped source of talent, revenue generation and innovation.

From a global talent acquisition perspective, many countries – including Brazil, Japan, China, France and Germany – have quotas for hiring people with disabilities. In addition to such quotas, these individuals regularly experience barriers to employment, from inaccessible company websites to physical barriers to discriminatory policies and/or practices. The biggest barrier of all is a lack of awareness and understanding of the immense value these individuals bring to an organization.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted by the United Nations in 2006 was the first document to elaborate in detail the rights of people with disabilities, setting a code of implementation that aims to ensure that these individuals enjoy the same human rights and opportunities as everyone else, including equality of opportunity and accessibility. Efforts to ensure implementation of the CRPD include the European Commission launching the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, defining eight priority areas – for example, accessibility of goods and services and employment.

The results of such a strategy can be seen in part by the five global corporations that are based in the European Union and have just been named Springboard Consulting's 2015 Disability Matters EU Honorees: Orange Romania (workplace), Orange Poland (workplace), Sodexo Poland (workforce), SAP (workforce) and L'Oreal (marketplace). In addition, three American-based global corporations have also been selected as honorees for their work in the EU: Dell (workplace), Dow Chemical (workplace) and Corning International (workplace).

Their award-winning programs include comprehensive training for managers on awareness and protocols for hiring and employing people with disabilities, mandatory workplace assessments, ensuring accessibility of public and intranet sites, strong employee engagement programs that include successful disability employee resource groups, centralized accommodations processes, disability mentor programs, expansive assistive technology offerings, emergency preparedness programs and, best of all, employment initiatives that ensure these best-in-class companies not only meet but exceed mandated quotas. One company has even initiated an internal global competition for promoting their commitment to people with disabilities to every part of their workforce and workplace.

In spite of cultural differences – and, in some cases, widespread attitudinal barriers to people with disabilities – these award-winning companies recognize that being inclusive means creating environments for candidates, employees and customers in

which differences are not only accepted but valued as well. Some of the practices that are being used around the globe include:

- The number one best practice, and often the first employed, is the delivery of disability etiquette and awareness training to ensure that there is a readiness among employees to properly communicate with, engage and work side by side with people with disabilities.
- The number one reason employees with disabilities cite for not disclosing their disability is a lack of understanding of how to do so in a manner and time that will not cause inappropriate or unfair treatment that will ultimately harm future career opportunities. The use of a disability disclosure guidance tool is gaining momentum to aid in this process.
- In many countries, a best practice for sourcing university-educated individuals who have disabilities is creating meaningful relationships with the on-campus disability services offices.
- Celebrating Dec. 3, The International Day of Persons with Disabilities, has become a best practice and an easy one in terms of sending a clear message that people with disabilities are important to an organization.
- Disability Employee Resource Groups that focus more on aligning with business goals and objectives than advocacy experience significantly more success than those that don't have that focus.
- Conducting an organizational assessment that looks at every function relative to disability is a good first step in developing and executing a long-term strategic plan.
- Having a formal process in place for requesting and making accommodations ensures that such activities are fair, equitable and efficient.

What's most important to understand is that whether a company is located in Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Singapore or Japan, there are more similarities than differences when it comes to the outreach, employment and retention of this very large, loyal segment of the population. [\[dMBA\]](#)

NOTE: Those who want to learn more about these global practices and hear directly from the companies implementing them should consider attending Springboard Consulting's 2015 Disability Matters EU Conference and Awards June 17-18 in the Hague, Netherlands, or Springboard's 2015 Disability Matters Asia Conference and Awards Aug. 17-18 in Bangkok, Thailand. For more information, contact Jill Frankel (Jill@consultspringboard.com) or visit Springboard's website (consultspringboard.com).

Nadine Vogel is the CEO of Springboard Consulting LLC. Founded in 2005, Springboard is recognized as the expert in mainstreaming disability in the global workforce, workplace and marketplace. Serving corporations and organizations throughout North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia, Springboard has become a trusted partner in relation to disability issues and initiatives across virtually every business category. Nadine is also the author of "DIVE IN, Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce."