ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY OF DIGITAL SERVICES, two critical issues for Europe to lead the way in Digital Services deployment.

Karl Henry Haglund, a former Head of Unit, DG Information Society, European Commission\(^1\) and member of CECUA, explores those issues and makes recommendations how to manage them.

The role of digital information services is rapidly growing. Abilities to access those services base is becoming a necessity to every organization as well as every citizen. This challenge is not only to be accepted by individuals but also by every organization, public or private, to ensure their visibility in the arena of digital services. This is especially important in case of public service delivery which should treat every citizen on equal basis without any exception.

Innovations that promote these principles in practice should be encouraged and respective requirements for service construction and delivery should be required. Recommendations and best practices should be distributed and accessibility and the role of usability requirements should be strengthened within the digital services arena.

At present, such requirements as well as respective guidelines for service production are neither yet an industrial overall practice of production nor a well-respected discipline in developing specific services and service platforms. However, in a broader view there are substantial advantages and benefits in including accessibility and usability requirements as self-evident features in the information and communications service development and usage scene.

Within the European development scene, during the past few years, there have been a number of activities to intervene and promote the role of accessibility and usability of digital services. Issues like business and financing models related to ICT for ageing well and economic assessment for improving accessibility services and products are examples of such orientation. Such efforts are welcome initiatives to capture value, create value and deliver value via well-structured cross-border initiatives. There is space for new innovative forward-looking models with significant national economy impact.
There is a need for a justification scheme that could serve as a straightforward guiding framework for service development and delivery. This framework could be threefold:

1. **The equal rights of every citizen** in respect of information and communication service usage, thus referring to basic equal treatment in planning service content coverage and alternative service delivery channels
2. **The overall national economy level benefits** of service accessibility and usability, especially in respect of the specific needs of the elderly and the many disadvantaged groups of citizens
3. **The new business opportunities in analysis of the accessibility and usability demand and delivery scene, covering both product and service levels** – thus providing new information and communication based services and technical innovations for a wide customer coverage.

The framework is general enough to include a wide variety of more targeted activities, but underlines the width of various impacts that activities may generate together in a cooperative approach.

The justification scheme should be applied both within public and commercial services and their delivery channels. It could as well open new ideas and development opportunities and also provide overall basis for constructing a solid set of justifications for developing new services and respective platforms with a strong social and societal driving force.

The playground for new products and services is wide. There is much potential in serving better and with more quality the elderly as well as the many groups of the disabled and people with minor disadvantages still having an impact in their everyday life. New information and communication technologies and respective products and services will offer a growing base for new ICT-based services. Within this field accessibility and usability are major quality factors and respectively also issues of product and service quality competition.

The above justification scheme may provide some ideas as well as starting points for further elaboration of the accessibility and usability issues and ideas for further development and promotion within the area.

Please send comments to henry.haglund@haglundnetworks.fi All comments are welcome.

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¹ For details see CV Karl Henry Haglund
Unit Information:
Haglund Networks Ltd
Henry Haglund CEO

Telephone: +358 40 5744732
email: info@haglundnetworks.fi

Address:
Hopeatie 1 A
FI-02750 ESPOO
FINLAND

CURRICULUM VITAE

Henry Haglund
M.Sc, MBA

Henry Haglund has acted in Finland as systems specialist in administrative and business systems field from 1969 covering areas like hardware, systems software and a variety of business applications. During the period 1982-1987 he acted as Executive Director of national professional ICT development and information services organisations like ITDC (Information Technology Development Center of Finland) and FDCA (The Finnish Data Communications Association). In addition, he has been active in education as lecturer of the Finnish EDP Institute, Helsinki School of Economics and as member of the Finnish Information Processing Association Educational Board.

In 1992-1997 he acted as Executive Director of The Finnish Association for Interactive Network Services TELMO ry establishing working relations with France (AFTEL), USA (ISA), UK (CCTA) and EIIA (European Information Industry Association), and EU cooperation through the Telematics Application Programme TAP.

In 1997-2000 he acted as EU Head of Unit DGXIII / Information Society Promotion Office ISPO managing as example the ESIS (European Survey of Information Society) programme and a number of PROMISE Programme activities promoting European IS development and awareness raising. In 2000-2002 he acted as Head of Unit DG Information Society (INFSO) managing the IST Programme / Applications and Services for People with Special Needs, including Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly.

From 2002 he has acted in Finland as Managing Director of Haglund Networks Ltd as CEO and Chairman of the Board. The work has included a number of IS observatory functions covering relations to EU, OECD, ITU, UN, WEF, IMD etc. The priority activity areas have been systems and applications for citizens, especially to promote welfare, security and independent living and to raise awareness of eInclusion, eAccessibility and Design-for-All related issues.