



# Chapter

## Case Studies on Universal Design



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The decision to adopt a universal design approach is ultimately based on economics. Manufacturers are in business to generate revenue, and the increased costs associated with the integration of more usable features in products and environments, whether in materials or in the time consumed by a more complicated design process, must be justified. Cost control and final pricing are constant concerns. Just as customers are concerned about value, manufacturers need reassurance that a larger market share can be captured by products that are easier for more people to use, especially if they cost more to produce.

Case studies of companies that have experienced success practicing universal design can be illuminating for others considering the approach. The Center for Universal Design, as part of its project, “Studies to Further the Development of Universal Design,” compiled a series of case studies that describe efforts to incorporate universal design in products, spaces, and building elements (Mueller, 1998). The following case studies document the process by which designed solutions were created, from concept to execution, and the degree of success in incorporating universal design features in the final designs. In some instances, universal design was practiced in a limited way and in others it began as a small project that had a large effect on an organization. In some cases, universal design became absorbed into the corporate culture.

Subjects for the case studies were selected from among a group of candidates that included winners of design award programs, producers of design recognized for universal design qualities in print media, professional contacts among staff of The Center for Universal Design, and companies recommended by the Center’s National Advisory Council. Preliminary phone interviews were conducted to determine the availability of information about the design’s development, the influence

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of universal design concepts on the process of its design, and the company's willingness to share information.

Seven case studies are presented here, each illustrating one of The Principles of Universal Design (The Center for Universal Design, 1997). Information for the case studies was gathered through an interview process, either by phone or in person. Each case was unique and the interview structure was customized, using a general format as a model.

The cases presented here are of two types: retrospective examinations of singular successful universal design efforts, and documentations of ongoing universal design programs. These case studies identify and describe the forces which influenced the development of universal design solutions and demonstrate successful introduction of universal design in the marketplace.

## References

The Center for Universal Design. (1997). *The Principles of Universal Design* (Version 2.0). Raleigh, NC: NC State University, Author.

Mueller, J.L. (1998). *Case studies on universal design*. Raleigh, NC: NC State University, The Center for Universal Design.