



**Community Research
for Assistive Technology**



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Wal★Mart: Low-cost Leader in *Assistive Technology*

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Prepared by

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Introduction

There is a relatively overlooked and rapidly growing market in the United States today. Assistive Technology (AT) devices, as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA), are “any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether obtained commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities” (20 U.S.C. § 1401[1]). AT devices enable people with disabilities to engage in a wide range of home and community activities, greatly increasing their participation in society and lessening their sense of isolation (Doe, 2004). For example, large print or talking appliances, such as a talking food thermometer, could be beneficial for a person with low vision.

With an aging U.S. population and an already established need for AT devices in a large population of people with disabilities, we feel that there is an untapped market, particularly for low-cost AT devices. We also feel Wal-Mart is in a unique position as a leader in retail to provide these devices at a cost far lower than traditional AT retailers. Wal-Mart faces a tremendous opportunity in the coming years to expand on its already established position as a retailer of low-cost assistive technology devices and capitalize on the needs of the aging baby-boomer cohort as well as other people with disabilities.

- The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 18% of Americans or 51.2 million people reported having some level of disability.
- Approximately 1 in 5 persons in California have a disability, roughly 5,000,000 people (2002, US Census; “Assistive Technology,” 2005).
- At least 13.3 million adults nationwide rely on assistive technology to improve quality of life (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, 2005).
- In 2002, people with disabilities had a discretionary spending power of over \$220 billion (National Organization on Disability, 2006).

- According to AARP, people 50 years of age and older spent nearly \$400 billion in 2003. Take into consideration, 4 million Americans turn 50 each year (2004).
- The population of older consumers (65+) is anticipated to increase to over 69 million, that's 75%, by 2030 (Administration on Aging, 1996).

Who We Are

The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC) is a statewide, non-profit trade organization that helps Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in California provide services to people with disabilities through advocating for systems change and promoting access and integration. CFILC is in the fifth year of its five-year Community Research for Assistive Technology (CR4AT) project. The project was funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (#H133A010702). The goal of the project is to increase the capacity of the independent living community to work with its members and stakeholders to collect research data on access to and use of assistive technology to improve the lives of people with disabilities. As a part of this project, four action teams were formed. These teams were composed of Assistive Technology Advocates working in ILCs across the state of California.

Purpose

The purpose of this particular team was to design and implement a qualitative research project to gather information about the types of AT Wal-Mart has in stores across California. Data collected prior to the survey suggested 59% of respondents purchase at least one assistive technology device on their own. Initial research conducted by Team Business suggests that many Assistive Technology items are available at Wal-Mart at a far lower price than traditional AT retailers. Of the 49% of respondents that report an unmet need for AT, 64% report the reason for the unmet need is the prohibitive cost of AT devices (Doe, 2004).

The action team was interested in identifying low-cost AT items available at Wal-Mart as well as items respondents felt Wal-Mart could carry, but currently does not and finally, to provide Wal-Mart with the results of their work with the hope of developing the range and quantity of AT goods offered by Wal-Mart. The impact of the work, we hope, will be mutually beneficial: Providing people with disabilities with affordable AT as well as providing Wal-Mart with specific recommendations on what people are looking for, but cannot currently find in their stores.

Method

Questionnaires were developed by the team and, after eight revisions, distributed to 20 ILCs across the state. Sixteen respondents completed and returned the 21-question survey. The survey was conducted during the fall of 2005 and took respondents two to four hours to complete.

Findings and Recommendations

A qualitative survey of randomly selected Wal-Marts throughout California reveals a wide array of AT already available at many stores. The data collected in this survey offers a snapshot of each of the departments found in Wal-Mart and the AT that can currently be found in each. These results indicate items generally found, but more importantly items participants would like to see more of in your stores. Keep in mind, AT assists people with a wide variety of abilities and needs.

TOOLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Hardware – Bathroom/Toilet:

In store:

Speaking smoke alarm with carbon monoxide warning; lever door handle; hand-held shower; outdoor tread tape; cordless power scissors; touch sensitive light; bathroom scale with 2" display; bathtub tread strips.

Would like to see:

Fire alarm/carbon monoxide detector with strobe light; talking tape measurer; door knob helpers/grips; portable ramp; threshold ramp; offset expandable door hinge (to widen doorway for mobility devices); motion sensitive light; hands free garage door opener; pull out shelves; door/knock sensors (i.e. flashing light); raised toilet seats (not just in pharmacy section); bathroom scale with voice output.

Automotive:

In store:

Massage cushion with climate control; wrist coil with key ring; key caps/color identifiers; key I.D. tags with color coding; key retriever with belt clip; seatbelt shoulder pad.

Would like to see:

Swiveling car seat attachment; key turner/easy to grasp key holder/key lever; car mobility support strap (e.g. Car Caddie); car mobility support bar (e.g. Handybar car aid); talking digital tire gauge.

Apparel:

In store:

Elastic shoe laces; pants with elastic waistbands; slip-on shoes.

Would like to see:

Clothing with front opening closures that use Velcro or zippers with large pull tabs; compression and support hosiery.

Electronics:

In store:

Picture icons (on appliances); auto shut off appliances; cell phones with vibration indicators; hand held cassette recorder; alarm clock with large display and high contrast numbers (e.g. bright green on black); hearing aid batteries.

Would like to see:

Assistive listening devices (e.g. T.V. ears); vibrating watches; vibrating alarm clock (i.e. “shake and wake”); alarm clock with voice output; phone amplifier and/or phone with built-in amplifier; phone with visual ring indicator (i.e. flashing light); large button phone; large button/oversized universal remote control; key locator/finder; vibrating watches.

Pharmacy:

In store:

Hearing aid batteries; blood glucose monitor; tablet crusher; pill box; blood pressure monitor; gel shoe insert; walker; cane; joint support (wrist/knee/ankle, etc); back support.

Would like to see:

Braille pill box; talking medical monitors and gauges; hand support brace (for carpal tunnel); bidet attachment; commode; urinals (male and female); raised toilet seat; toilet safety rails/frame; dual language blood monitor (with voice output); talking prescription bottle; shower chairs; bath rail; grab bars; crutches; “Canadian” (wrist brace) crutches; scooter; seat lift chair; lightweight wheelchair; bed rail; table top fingernail clipper; inflatable shampoo basin.

Housewares - Kitchen Appliances:

In store:

Color-coded measuring cups and spoons; measuring cups and spoons with measurements in large print, high contrasting colors; cooking utensils with built-up handles; pizza wheel (one-handed cutting).

Would like to see:

Pot and pan guard rings; one-handed can opener; more color-coded measuring cups and spoons; devices for use with one hand (e.g., rocker knife for eating, cutting board with suction cups); talking food thermometer; kitchen appliances and electronics with large print or voice output; large print kitchen timer, talking kitchen scale; eating utensils with built-up handles; spoon and fork holder (built-up handle that slips on eating utensils).

Daily Living Aids:

In store:

Long handled and telescoping handled devices; easy grip handles; "easy touch" controls.

Would like to see:

Reachers; more long handled devices; button hook with zipper-pull for dressing; auto open/close umbrella; magnifiers (e.g. illuminated, hands-free, hand-held); universal turner for turning various knobs (e.g. stove, faucets, gas tank caps, etc.); squeeze scissors; utensil grippers (i.e. build up handles).

Recreation and Games:

In store:

Large color-coded dominoes; large piece puzzles.

Would like to see:

Games that are in large print (e.g. UNO, playing cards, checkers, Monopoly; Scrabble); Connect Four with tactile markers; playing card holder; adult tricycle; adult handcycle; automatic card shuffler.

Fishing and Hunting:

In store:

Fishing pole holder (in-ground).

Would like to see:

Lap rod holder; pole holster; electric fishing reels; trigger activator.

Sewing and Crafts:

In store:

All purpose magnifier (hands-free); line magnifier (for cross-stitching); Velcro fasteners; rotary cutter (one-handed); squeeze scissors without thumb isolation.

Would like to see:

Automatic needle threader; squeeze scissors; crochet aid; embroidery hoop holder (mount); Velcro fasteners with buttons.

Store Access and Advertising:

In store:

Automatic doors; wide aisles; photos paired with store aisle markers; signs and prices in high contrasting colors; photos on in-store signs of young to middle-aged models.

Would like to see:

Store information in alternative formats; price scanners throughout stores with voice output; photos on in-store signs using models of varying ages and abilities; advertising that promotes independent living.

Conclusion

These few examples represent a fraction of the potential items Wal-Mart could offer in their stores and at Walmart.com. Many of these items employ the concept of universal design and do not represent shelves being taken up with items designated for a limited market. Others do, but demand for these types of items is already high and increasing as our population ages.

CR4AT recommends that Wal-Mart commit itself to increasing consumer choice and access to low-cost assistive technology devices to promote independent living for people with disabilities and seniors. Many older consumers often do not identify themselves as having disabilities, but tend to respond to and seek out stores which offer devices that increase and maintain their independence. We would encourage Wal-Mart to consider carrying products such as large-button electronics, devices that have readouts in multiple formats (digital and audio), as well as the many other items listed that we

would like to see. Again, many of these types of devices are already available at specialized retailers, but also come with the associated cost. Some popular AT vendors, whom you may want to consider viewing for potential product line concepts, include Maxi-Aids, Independent Living, Inc., LS&S, Dynamic-Living and Access to Recreation.

Another facet that Wal-Mart may want to consider publicizing is their interest in creating an independent shopping experience for all of their consumers. Advertising through commercials and print (e.g. in store posters) that store information is offered in alternative formats (e.g. pictures are paired with words for the various departments), motorized shopping carts are available, along with any other accessibility features could potentially increase desirability to a wide range of shoppers.

With Wal-Mart's purchasing power and distribution capabilities, ubiquitous access to inexpensive AT could become a reality, impacting the lives of millions world-wide. Wal-Mart is already recognized as a one-stop retailer for practically everything one needs. Consideration and implementation of these recommendations would only further that recognition.

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