

THE Accessibility Advocates

There have always been beauty lovers with disabilities—and more products are finally, intentionally being designed for them. Three innovators have been there through it all.

BY KARA McGRATH



A DAY IN THE LIFE WITH Sam Latif

IN HER 21 YEARS AT PROCTER & GAMBLE, Latif has worked on some of the most impactful examples of accessible beauty product design: Olay's new Easy Open Lids and, for blind and low-vision consumers, Herbal Essences's raised dots and strips (known as tactile markers) and Clearblue's Be My Eyes app (through which pregnancy results are read to you). Latif, who is blind, is currently the company's accessibility leader (a position that was created for her) and she walked us through a typical Wednesday spent changing the world.

Chatting over coffee covers more than "How about that weather?"
"We've been hiring more people

in the company with disabilities, and my typical day usually involves talking to one or more of them to understand how they're getting on, to help them remove any barriers or issues they might be experiencing, and about how they can get involved in some of the work that I'm doing. They've got unique skills to bring. Most successful people in companies never had a disability themselves or a [disabled] family member. Why are [other] companies not making accessible products today? It's because they never thought about it. What I'm trying to do in life is to reverse that."

Scheduling more meetings—with strangers too: "When we've interviewed consumers like me, we've found that they felt the beauty industry didn't really reach out to them. So, one version of a day is just talking to consumers with disabilities: 'What are some of the frustrations that you've got?' That way I can understand how to bring those to P&G to meet their needs."

Finding creative ways to help coworkers understand: "I love taking the brand teams through the journey. 'Put on this arthritic glove and try to open that product. Did you know that there's an opportunity to make it easier to open?' Or, 'Wear these glasses that simulate sight loss. And now can you see the writing on your pack?' I'm teaching them to think differently, more inclusively. For example, with Herbal Essences, I showed [the team] a prototype of bottles where they could tell which was shampoo and which was conditioner simply through touch, even when they wore the glasses that simulate sight loss. They realized, 'Ah, that's a problem people face.' And when they found

the tactile markings, they realized, 'Ah, that's how we can solve it.'

"One day in a meeting, we were playing some P&G ads. People [in the meeting] were laughing, but I wasn't because I didn't know what the ad was all about. It was just music [to me]. I thought, Why don't we put audio descriptions in? [In 2017, P&G did indeed start adding these to many ads.] Bringing in my own unique insights gives me ideas that I go after. I know it's not only going to help me, it's going to help the 300 million or more people with low or no vision in the world."

Tipping off the competition: "The bigger vision that I have is that those [tactile] stripes and circles will be on all competitor shampoos and conditioners as well. When you've got soap in your eyes in the shower or you're not wearing your contact lenses or glasses, you will be able to find those four stripes. It will become a universal language. Yes, it's good for P&G to do and, yes, we're doing it, but we can't—and shouldn't—do it on our own. Everyone, we need to work together. It's a big culture change that needs to happen."

Keeping everyone in mind: "If we want the world to be inclusive, we need to create things that everyone can use, not just special things for the disabled people here in one corner. When we design inclusively, we're designing so that everyone is delighted with the same product. I often think, How can I make this so that it's successful for blind people first and then the broader world second? Because I know if I can make it work for blind people, it's actually going to be quite cool for everyone else."



THE IMPACT OF

Molly Burke

THROUGHOUT HER SEVEN

years as an influencer, Burke—a YouTuber with nearly two million subscribers who also happens to be blind—has brought perpetual positivity (with plenty of constructive criticism) to her channel, which covers every aspect of Burke's life, from buying a house to working with guide dogs to, of course, reviewing beauty products. Here, she reflects on her undeniable impact on the industry and what she hopes a more accessible future looks like:

"Even within the disabled community, blindness is a very small group of people. Most people never meet a blind person in their entire life. I really wanted to figure out how I could make people care about disability as a whole and then specifically about blindness and the issues that affect me. [So I] became somebody they could see being their friend or girlfriend, their daughter or sister, or their mentor. I set out to just be a relatable, authentic, genuine person. When I started seven years ago, there were just a handful of disabled content creators. Now, I see thousands.

"Too Faced has been one of my favorite brands for years because they [have] incorporated universal design without actually trying to. [More recently] they reached out to

me to work on the launch of their Hangover Pillow Balm [tinted lip balm]. I would smell each one and guess the color. I guessed all four correctly. The scents they chose exactly correlated with the colors. When I'm trying to pick which one I want to use, I literally just smell them.

"My ultimate dream is to see universal, tactile symbols being used across the board that are the same, despite the brand. [By adding] a tactile symbol [like a raised shape that indicates what the product is], not only could somebody who does read Braille benefit from it, but blind people who don't read Braille could benefit. (Only 10 percent of the blind community actually read Braille.) [English language learners] who can't read what's on the packaging can benefit. People who have language processing disorders like dyslexia can benefit. People who are autistic and communicate through symbols can benefit. I would love to see a combination of Braille and tactile symbols being used because I do ultimately also believe Braille is so, so important. It's such a beautiful piece of the culture and the history of the blind community.

"I think what's going to happen with accessible design or universal design is the exact thing that happened a few years ago with shade ranges. The brands who recognized where they were lacking and put in the effort ahead of time were the ones that ended up getting praised. The brands who did it last minute seemed like they were doing it because they had to and it wasn't something they actually cared about. People remember that."



Care Packages

"It's very hard to convince big brands to spend money on a small minority group," says Burke. These products are some of the best options available right now.



L'Occitane, which has had Braille on its packaging since the '90s, and now on roughly 70 percent of its products (including the popular **Almond Shower Oil**, left), is working on ways to expand this across the line.



Olay Easy Open Lids are free, have wings on either side, a grippy top, higher-contrast labels, and Braille text. The design is open-source, so other brands can use it.



Cleanlogic exfoliators are identifiable by touch and the Braille on the packaging is high-quality—the equivalent of "crisp, freshly printed, dark-black lettering," says Burke.



Guide Beauty Eyeliner Duo was created by makeup artist Terri Bryant, who has Parkinson's, to make eye makeup easier to apply, even if you have limited mobility or shaky hands.



Herbal Essences shampoos and conditioners feature raised tactile markers—stripes for shampoo, circles for conditioner. Latif and Burke hope these will become universal.



In honor of her son, who is partially blind, **Victroland Beauty's** Victoria Watts created the CyR.U.S. System of Raised Universal Symbols (like a moon for night cream) that can be licensed by others.



ME, MY SHELF, AND I WITH

Gabe Adams-Wheatley

TO ENCOUNTER ONE OF GABE

Adams-Wheatley's videos on your TikTok For You page is to be served pure joy on a phone-size platter: He puts his own spin on the platform's trends, pairing viral sounds with beauty tutorials, fit checks (TikTok for showing off an outfit), and declarations of love for his husband. "It wasn't until I did a full-body shot of myself, where people could see I have no arms and no legs and what I was actually doing, that [my videos] took off," Adams-Wheatley, who was born with Hanhart syndrome, previously told *Allure*. Now, the influencer boasts over two million followers on TikTok, where he's helping to change the perception of who makeup is for in terms of gender and ability. As a person without limbs, Adams-Wheatley has had to get creative about how he uses products that are typically designed with two-handed people in mind. These are some of his favorites:



PROP STYLIST: NICOLE LOUIE. ADA/MSW-WHEATLEY: TIBRINA HOBSON/GETTY IMAGES AND CADENCE TALENT.