Flippin' Our Brains: Disability Benefits Everyone
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Disability is often thought of as an object in need of change. Accordingly, products designed for disabled populations aim to improve function and help individuals adapt to their environments. Curiously and often unrecognized, products designed for the atypical and extreme human often find their way into mainstream use, improving the world for everyone. This presentation analyzes the process of disability product to commercial success. We illustrate the “disability” genesis of products such as Doc Marten footwear, speech-to-text and text-to-speech software and applications, automated doors, and closed captioning.

Benefits for disabled populations
• Stigma reduction
• Seamlessness
• Aesthetic appeal
• Sales outlet
• Cool factor

The influential factors and change process
• Population parameters shift (aging boomers)
• Commercial potential-money speaks (e.g., OXO)
• Distribution moves mainstream (e.g., rehab catalog to T. J. Maxx)
• The product has contemporary relevance (e.g., for multi-tasking)
• Seamlessness (anyone can buy and use it)
• Technology and science make it possible (exoskeletons)
• Aesthetic appeal (OXO kitchen tools)