

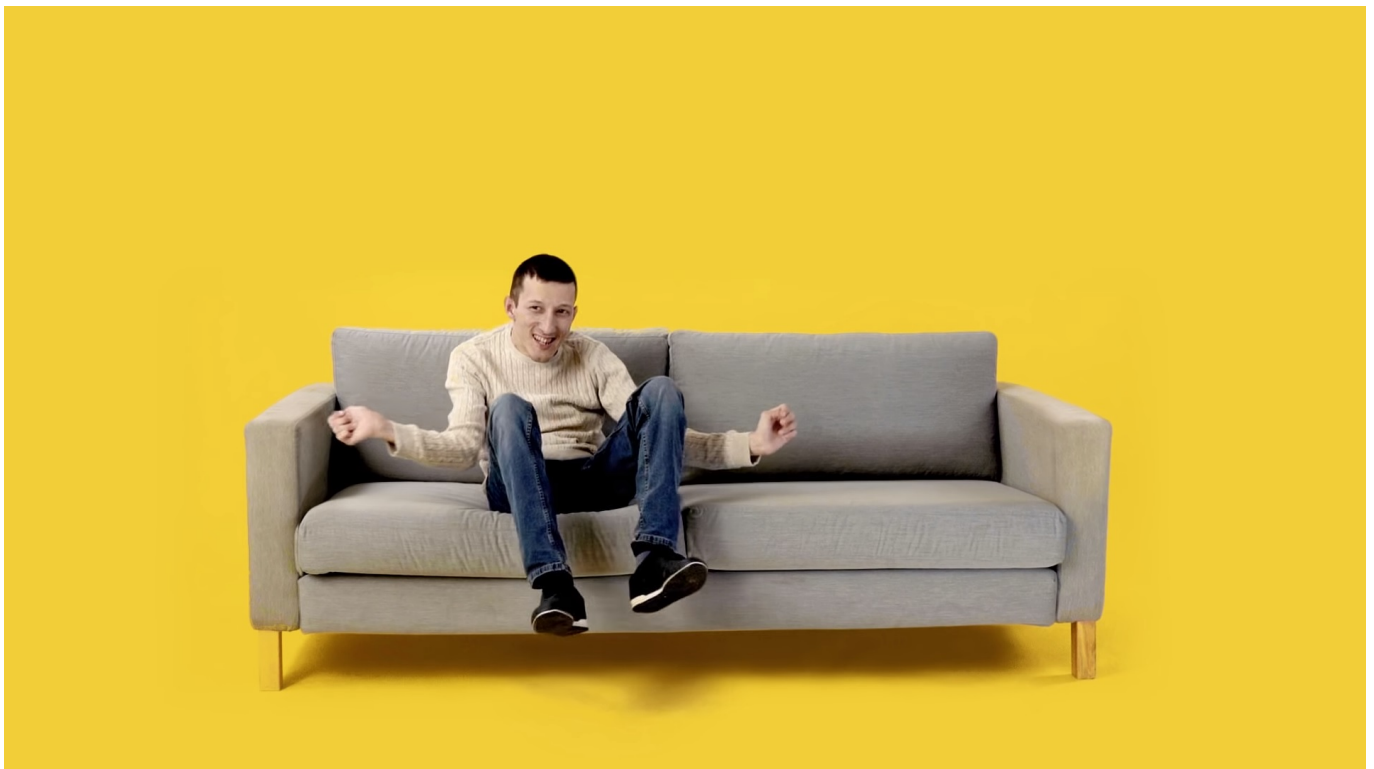
Designing for disability

Furniture retailer creates add-ons for existing products to make them more accessible

18. 3. 2019

Ikea, in Israel, has developed a range of add-ons that people with disabilities can attach to their existing Ikea furniture to make it work better for them.

Physical disabilities change the way people can interact with furniture. Someone with cerebral palsy, for example, may find it more difficult to get up if they're sat on a low sofa or have trouble opening a cupboard door.



So the Swedish flatpack furniture giant worked with **Milbat** and **Access Israel**, two NGOs that specialise in helping disabled people get a better quality of life, and **McCann Tel Aviv** to find a way to make its products more accessible.

Rather than redesigning existing products, and expecting disabled people to repurchase them, Ikea designed 13 add-ons for its most popular items, like bigger handles to attach to cupboards and elevating legs for sofas (to make them easier to get up from).

INSIDER

About the patent

3 fasteners connected to the mirror and allowing to see the content of the higher cells from a low perspective.

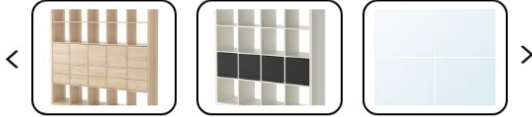
Printing material

PLA

Designed for:

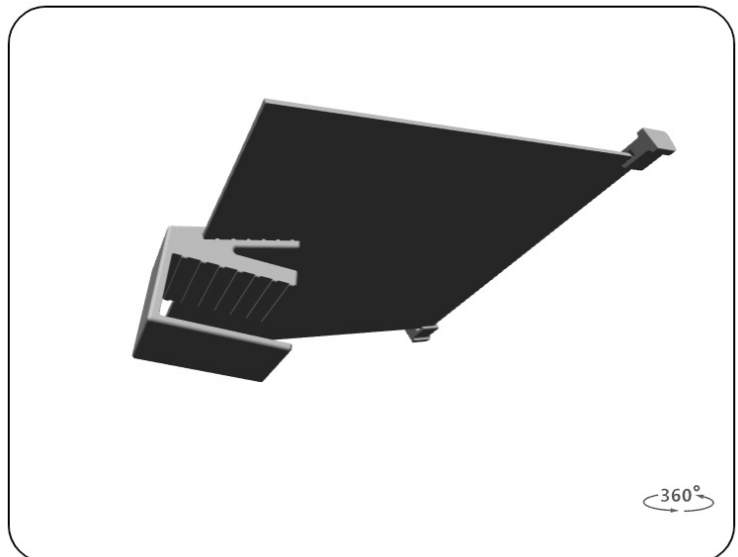


For the KALAX shelves series



[Download file for 3D printing](#)

[PDF user's guide for printing](#)



The **ThisAbles** products can be tested out in the Tel Aviv Ikea store (in a newly created 'accessible section') and the schematics can be downloaded for free from the campaign website and 3D-printed at home or anywhere that's convenient (regardless of where they are in the world).

Visitors to the website can also watch videos about individual item (how they work and what problem they solve) and suggest new add-on designs that would help make other Ikea products more accessible.

INSIGHT /

Disabled access / As well as working with two NGOs on the project, Ikea also hosted a hackathon in its Tel Aviv store. Product engineers and people with a variety of disabilities worked together to assess how different items could be adjusted to better suit their needs.

This step was essential, because those with disabilities would notice flaws in the design that an able-bodied person would probably not. Someone in a wheelchair, for example, could tell you that glass doors need extra protection at wheelchair height, to prevent any damage if the wheelchair were to collide with the door when it was being opened, something an able-bodied person wouldn't even think to notice.

In addition to bringing its disabled audience into the design process, Ikea has also considered how distribution could be made more inclusive and affordable. Often making products or buildings accessible to disabled people is considered an unnecessary expense.

As Jos Boys, author of *Doing Disability Differently*, [writes](#) on the *Design Council website*, quoting Tobin Siebers' book *Disability Theory*: "Technologies that reduce the load on the able-bodied are regarded as natural extensions of the design, but "the moment that individuals are marked as disabled or diseased...the technologies designed to make their life easier are viewed as expensive additions, unnecessary accommodations, and a burden on society."

By making these add-ons easily downloadable - and making it free to do so - Ikea is communicating that it doesn't see it as a financial burden to create these things, but a necessity. It also echoes the brand's long-standing mission to 'create a better everyday for the many people'.

As we reported in our Ikea [Brand Case Study](#):

In this campaign, the products themselves have become the marketing message, showing that product innovation can be a powerful storytelling tool.

Rethinking retail / Ikea isn't the first retailer to reconsider its product offering with disabled people in mind - there has also been a recent surge of awareness in the fashion industry, led by activists like three-and-a-half-foot tall Dubliner Sinéad Burke. 'It's not like it's a new customer,' she [told](#) the *Business of Fashion*. 'But their voices haven't been amplified. They've not been invited to the table to help make and share decisions.'

That's now shifting - with designers like Tommy Hilfiger working with Runway of Dreams, a non-

profit founded by a woman whose child has muscular dystrophy, to [create](#) an adaptive collection - and for good reason. Approximately 1.3 billion people, or 17% of the world's population, experience some form of disability, [according to](#) the Return on Disability Group. Together, they have a combined global spending power of over \$1.2tr. And that number rises to \$6.9tr when you bring families, parents and carers into the mix - so it makes sense financially (as well as morally and ethically) for businesses to adjust their offerings to be more inclusive.

The gap has by no means been totally bridged, but this Ikea campaign is another step in the right direction.