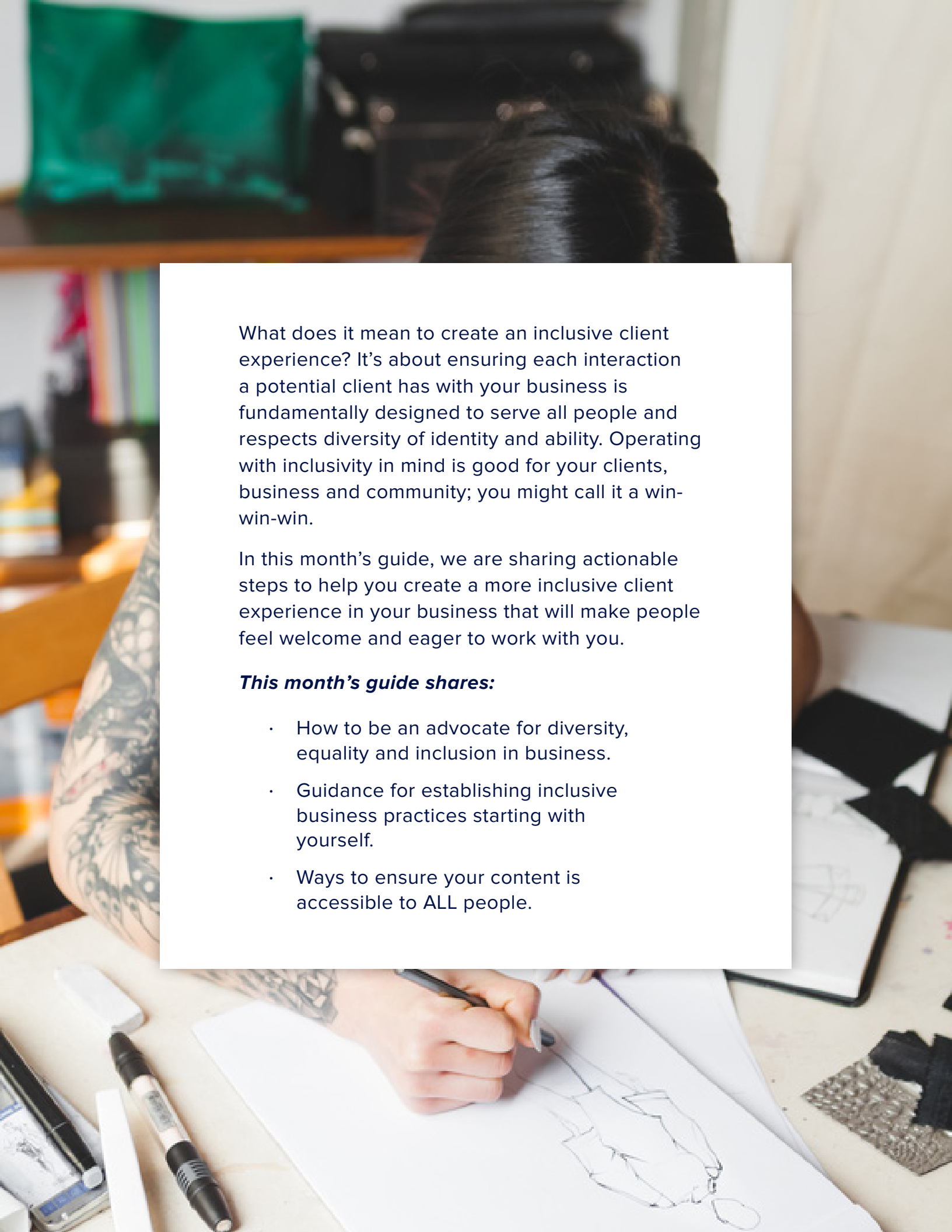


A woman with a tattooed arm is sitting at a desk, focused on drawing in a sketchbook. She is wearing a white shirt. The background is a blurred office or studio setting with various items on the wall and desk. The overall tone is professional and creative.

How to Create an
**Inclusive Client
Experience**

HoneyBook

RISING TIDE



What does it mean to create an inclusive client experience? It's about ensuring each interaction a potential client has with your business is fundamentally designed to serve all people and respects diversity of identity and ability. Operating with inclusivity in mind is good for your clients, business and community; you might call it a win-win-win.

In this month's guide, we are sharing actionable steps to help you create a more inclusive client experience in your business that will make people feel welcome and eager to work with you.

This month's guide shares:

- How to be an advocate for diversity, equality and inclusion in business.
- Guidance for establishing inclusive business practices starting with yourself.
- Ways to ensure your content is accessible to ALL people.

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WHO WE ARE

STREAMLINE YOUR INCLUSIVE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Being more inclusive creates a better experience for everyone who interacts with your business. In return, prioritizing business inclusivity will help you grow as more people choose to work with you.

Implementing a client experience platform, like HoneyBook, will help you streamline your processes so you can raise the bar in your business, set the standard in your industry and have a positive impact on your community. Rising Tide members get 20% off for their first year, so start your free trial today.

[TRY HONEYBOOK](#)

HOW TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

1

IT STARTS WITH YOU: Crystal Whiteaker reminds us that before we can build an inclusive business, we need to do our own inner work, which means examining our biases. She shares tips to help you get started so you can create truly inclusive content that lives up to your core values on [pg. 7](#). Once you've done the work, make it known to your clients by reflecting inclusivity on your website. On [pg. 14](#) Taylor de la Fuente walks us through important considerations to keep in mind when trying to build a more welcoming and inclusive website.

2

FOCUS ON YOUR TEAM: Your employees are extensions of your brand and if you're intending to lead with inclusivity you must first commit to authentically creating an inclusive environment for your team. Aleya Harris shares essential tips for how to jumpstart this process on [pg. 2](#) and Lisette Cervano takes it one step further on [pg. 5](#).

3

DON'T OVERLOOK THE DETAILS: On [pg. 17](#) Claire Bough outlines the importance of bringing inclusivity into your entire booking process. She breaks down how to lead with inclusivity at every stage in your workflow from first inquiry to final payment so you can be sure you're offering equal opportunity and treatment to everyone. And when we say everyone, we mean it. Inclusivity is incomplete without accessible content; make sure yours works for all people by following Jennifer Siomacco's inclusive marketing tips on [pg. 10](#).

PRO TIP: By taking steps towards inclusivity in our businesses, we can make space for our clients, colleagues and peers to show up as their authentic selves.

GET FEATURED

We believe in elevating the voices of our community, and we'd love to elevate yours! Submit content for an opportunity to be featured in next month's Rising Tide Society TuesdaysTogether PDF guide. therisingtidesociety.submittable.com/submit.

INCLUSIVITY DONE THE RIGHT WAY: CREATING A MESSAGING STRATEGY THAT REFLECTS YOUR VALUES

Aleya Harris



What values do you want to be associated with your company and your employees?

Many companies are having conversations about inclusivity and its importance in the workplace, and how to serve people of all backgrounds better. Yet, there is no question that the work required to become wholly inclusive is an internal undertaking.

Suppose your content does not include BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color), LGBTQ+ or disabled persons. In that case, you are missing out on a sweeping majority of the market and, worse, you risk offending your audience and damaging your brand. In 2021, make it a goal to create messaging that is not just engaging but promotes diversity and inclusivity.

You may be wondering where to start for such an essential aspect of your business. It can seem overwhelming to learn and unlearn what has worked and what has not. But, rest assured, your employees and clients will be thankful for your efforts in creating content that is diverse and welcoming to all.

Getting your messaging right begins with you and your business before it ever reaches your audience. You must first commit to authentically creating an inclusive environment for your team and those you want to welcome into your brand experience.

THREE WAYS TO GET STARTED WITH INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY:

1. **Education:** Educate yourself and your team by addressing any biases you may hold. Doing this will help you to avoid the unintentional use of offensive or exclusive language in your copy on your website, social media and contracts. Consider looking into [LGBTQ+ certification courses](#), which provide training materials to teach you and your team how to be truly inclusive, both in intention and action.
2. **Intentionality:** In striving to create a messaging strategy that reflects your values, knowing the intention behind what and why you create will serve you well. **To serve as**

an ally within the BIPOC, LGBTQ and other underserved communities, you must first understand the **basics of allyship** and what it looks like to show up for marginalized groups in a way that is not performative.

Pro Tip: A critical part of allyship is understanding that how you choose to educate yourself and your team about social issues isn't up to anyone but you. Do not rely on members within the BIPOC, LGBTQ+ or disability communities within your company to educate you.

3. **Integration:** Another strategy for developing effective messaging is to embrace the fundamentals of diversity and inclusivity in your business practices. In essence, put your money where your mouth is. A major downfall for many companies in the immediate action taken at the height of an important issue or problem plaguing marginalized groups. For example, in the summer of 2020, many companies claimed to be allies to the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet, companies quickly came under fire due to the lack of representation and inclusivity of their boards, teams and more. **The work must start from within.**

Your brand messaging must communicate the beliefs and actions your business takes to align with your allyship and it must be authentic.

As a business owner, integrating diversity and inclusion into your everyday practices is a must. Taking action can mean revisiting your hiring process to eliminate prejudice, partnering with vendors in the BIPOC community and creating an environment that does not hold inherent and damaging biases. When you are ready to make your diversity and inclusion values known, it starts with tailoring your copy to express your stance on social issues clearly.

HOW TO MAKE DIVERSITY IN YOUR BUSINESS MESSAGING MORE WELCOMING:

Graphics: Every business owner knows the hard work that goes into graphic design. We live in a world driven by visuals, which serve as avenues to promote events, products and more. A picture is worth a thousand words, which is why your marketing imagery must do the talking for you. Suppose you are a wedding planner with a beautifully designed website that displays weddings that feature BIPOC and LGBTQ+ couples to demonstrate your inclusive values. Showcasing a variety of clients will highlight to potential clients that you work with all sorts of couples. **Graphic designers should always create content that is reflective of the world as a whole.**

Demographics: As a company, you have an ideal customer or client that you like to work with most. You must always ask whether your business is geared toward a specific community. If it is, are you unintentionally excluding anyone else? There isn't anything wrong with selling to a particular audience. However, if your



messaging is exclusionary based on race, gender, sexual orientation or able-bodiedness, it is worth reconsidering how you can better foster diversity.

Communication: Messaging helps businesses connect and build relationships with their customers. But when it feels inauthentic it severs that relationship. When matters arise, whether social or political, it is essential that your company already has a voice for inclusion rather than being one that rises to the occasion only when a problem presents itself.

In the beginning, it may be challenging to create and maintain an environment that is actively welcoming to all. It takes time to learn and unlearn behaviors that have historically affected employers and employees negatively in the workplace. Fortunately, diverse and inclusive culture is attainable and will fuel an environment driven by respect, trust and commitment.

We are all in need of a celebration of diversity and inclusion. As a small business owner, you can set yourself and your company up for success. Take a step further in your learning of inclusion and diversity with this video, [Coffee Chat With a Race & Ethnicity Expert](#), in which Brandon Harris, M.A. breaks down the sociological concepts of race to give you and your company clear steps to becoming anti-racist in today's modern society.

Commit today to create an environment conducive to growth, respect, diversity and inclusion towards your employees and your audience.



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CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SPACE WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS FOR CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUCCESS

Lisette Cervano

Imagine a space where anyone regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, age, ability and more can exist as their full authentic self. A diverse space fostered by a culture of inclusion where everyone belongs.

Now imagine that you've created this space where your business flourishes, your employee(s), contractors and network of business contacts bring their best most authentic selves to work and your clients feel seen, understood and satisfied with the services and product you've provided.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS IS NECESSARY FOR CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUCCESS.

With over 20 years of experience as a multi-hyphenate woman of color working as an executive assistant and administrator in tech, I have experienced first-hand the power of fostering a culture of equity and belonging. In addition to my role as the executive assistant to the co-founders of [HoneyBook](#), I also co-lead our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion employee resource group (ERG).

Over the years, I have seen how employees and businesses can fail or flourish based on whether

or not inclusion is valued. As an executive assistant, everyone I interact with from the CEO of [HoneyBook](#) to our newest member is a client. I see myself as a service provider and being able to create an inclusive experience with incredibly diverse clientele is what I do every day.

FIVE WAYS YOU CAN CREATE AN INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CLIENTS AND EMPLOYEES:

- 1. Educate yourself and your team.** If you're reading this, you're already taking this step. This is a journey of learning that is constantly evolving. There are many different resources available to you from free blog posts, online courses, workshops, podcasts, panel discussions, Q&A sessions and so much more. Set up a cadence of continued education for you, current employees and future ones (e.g. onboarding training).
- 2. Make the commitment.** Creating inclusive experiences takes a lot of work and commitment. It may seem challenging at first, it may even feel disruptive. It's hard work and sometimes the wins are small, but they add up. The impact it has on your business, your employees and the community you serve will be immense. Committing may look like:

a public road map and accountability to the clients you serve as well as a financial commitment to ongoing education.

- 3. Define what inclusivity means to you and your business.** Set policies and guidelines and a plan for how to enforce them. Then, publish your guidelines publicly and actively share them so everyone from your contractors to your clients is on the same page.

Pro Tip: While diversity and inclusion go hand in hand they are two very different things. Without inclusion, there is no diversity. You can have a diverse customer base, but it doesn't mean that every one of those customers has had an inclusive experience with you and your business.

- 4. Deep dive into your business** to ensure that what you've defined is practiced in every part of your business. This includes the systems and platforms you use to do business. Review your marketing materials, the language used on your websites and in your copy. Would anyone regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, age, ability feel they have access to your services and feel comfortable working with you?

Here are some areas to consider:

- Do you openly share and use pronouns on your website or published content?
- Do you ask for your client's pronouns in your contact form?
- Do you offer other means of communication other than tech-driven conversations?
- Does your website reflect diversity?
- Do you caption your social media videos, reels and other content?

- 5. Be accountable.** If through this process you make a mistake, own it, apologize for it and take action to make sure it never happens again. Let me be clear though so you don't feel like giving up if you make a mistake: you will likely make a mistake. You might not make the same one twice, but there will be mistakes along the way. Communities are dynamic and evolve (*sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly*). This means we should be open to continued opportunities to learn and grow to better serve the spaces we facilitate and occupy.

Taking these steps to create inclusive experiences is fearless, empowering and necessary. When we shift the way we do business and take chances we impact the industries we work in and create tangible change. By empowering ourselves to make these changes, we encourage others to show up as their full authentic selves. This is your opportunity to make a difference and help create a more diverse and inclusive world. If you ever have questions or need support, reach out. There's a whole community waiting to support you.



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THE TRUTH ABOUT CREATING INCLUSIVE CONTENT FOR YOUR BRAND

Crystal Whiteaker

If you're white, cis-gendered, neurotypical, non-disabled, a heterosexual leader in any community, whether you have a platform with a small following or you lead a large group with hundreds of creatives — this is for you.

While you're trying to incorporate diversity through messaging and visuals, you could be doing more harm than good. Genuine inclusion isn't something that you buy in a package with a checklist or implement with a gallery of stock photos showing people from diverse backgrounds. Change isn't made simply through posting graphics.

Genuine inclusion takes work. Deep, uncomfortable, disruptive work and here's the truth: A lot of people in positions of privilege aren't yet ready to let go of their comfort to do the real work that's required of them. To examine their participation in the oppressive, capitalist, white supremacist system that still rules every aspect of our lives — yes, even our creative businesses. This is a system that many of our fellow creatives and business owners have learned how to operate in *just to live*.



Photo by Crystal Whiteaker

As a photographer and brand consultant specializing in inclusive branding rooted in core values, I spend a lot of time guiding people through the challenging process of identifying and disrupting their own bias, before they can create and share content that's welcoming and inclusive. We work to disrupt everything that feels familiar and comfortable to identify that bias on a personal, professional and community level. The process starts with an examination of their behaviors and beliefs, as well as those of the people and environments they're connected to.

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN CREATE LASTING CHANGE THROUGH YOUR OWN INNER WORK:

First, clarify the importance of inclusion, as well as examples of key terms and behaviors, before getting to the roots of your existing brand (where you're-visit and re-define core values, beliefs and commitments). After you go through the process of doing this deep, often uncomfortable work, then and only then can you

get into creating content that speaks to inclusion in a way that's rooted in core values.

Pro Tip: It's vital to first do the deep, inner work that brings awareness to the ways we all participate in systems that create harm within marginalized communities. **Examples of harm include:**

- Not speaking up when you see harm being done.
- Excluding people, because they're "different" in some way.
- Spiritual, emotional or experiential bypassing.
- Using or excusing racial slurs, sexist or homophobic language.
- Talking negatively about someone else's weight, appearance or disability; or using and excusing microaggressions.

Even in the form of a "joke," these things can all cause harm, whether someone points it out or not (and often out of fear of retribution, they won't).

It's tempting to jump right into using inclusive messaging and visuals, yes. But, if you avoid addressing and engaging in the inner work first,

without holding yourself and your community accountable, then you run the risk of causing even more harm. **That harm takes the can look like:**

- **Action Bias:** The need to develop and act on solutions just to feel good about "taking action" before a problem is even defined or understood,—especially when it doesn't solve the problem.
- **Performative Allyship:** Outwardly showing support for a community or group without doing any real work behind the scenes to understand the challenges or needs of the communities you're attempting to connect with.

CREATE INCLUSIVE MESSAGING TO MAKE A GENUINE IMPACT

- When you do the deep inner work and you're ready to create inclusive content, then it's time to consider your message and who you're inviting into your brand and community.
- You have to create from a place of understanding and consider that everyone has their own unique lived experiences in



addition to their identities, which influences the way they connect with brands and the content that gets shared.

Pro Tip: Something important to understand is that diversity brings people in, representation gives them a voice and inclusion makes them feel welcome, heard and understood.

When you're incorporating genuine inclusion into your life and business, your goal should be to provide people with a sense of belonging.

With that in mind, here are a few questions for you to consider:

- What is your motivation for bringing inclusion into your brand and community?
- How is inclusion connected to your core values?
- How do you account for unique/individual lived experiences?

If you want all people to feel welcome within your brand, you'll need to make sure they can find themselves represented in the content you share, in a non-tokenizing way. It's also important to be consistent. For example, you shouldn't only share images or messaging in support of the Black community during Black History Month and only show support of the LGBTQ+ community during Pride Month.

In addition, your brand should include an ethical representation of the people you're inviting in. Avoid stereotyping, engaging in cultural appropriation and using people in brand photos who do not identify with the audiences you are looking to connect to.

For example: do not use models who aren't part of the LGBTQ+ community to represent the LGBTQ+ community. It's important to be consistently inclusive in practice while being mindful of the language and imagery you share in public and in private. This also includes the relationships you keep and the organizations you support.

The truth about creating inclusive content for your brand is that every action you take toward building a genuinely welcoming community requires awareness that can only be achieved through identifying and disrupting bias. It requires continuous work, recognition and mindfulness that people need to be able to see practiced throughout your brand.

To start digging into this work, grab your copy of the [FREE GUIDE](#) created to help you revisit your core values and beliefs to draft an inclusive, empowered brand statement that lets your community know where you stand.



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Photo by Jenny Rolapp Photography



SIX WAYS TO MAKE YOUR MARKETING MORE ACCESSIBLE

Jennifer Siomacco

Encountering a truly inclusive customer experience can be rare if you're a person living with disabilities. In addition to being a customer experience designer and running a marketing agency, I am also disabled and live with many chronic illnesses. I've spent a lot of time looking at the marketing strategies of creatives and small business owners and I'm here to tell you we could all be doing more to make our marketing more accessible - myself included.

Now, before you claim that "disabled people aren't part of their target audience" (and yes, I have heard that one before), let me remind you that disabled people are everywhere!

According to the CDC, about 61 million adults in the U.S. are living with a disability. That number almost certainly falls short, as there are millions of more people who don't have access to healthcare or proper diagnosis.

Disabilities can be visible or invisible, temporary (like a broken arm), permanent or chronic. And because our bodies change with age, the chances are very high that we all will experience some form of disability in our lifetimes.

In recent years, we have slowly started to see an increase in images and depictions of disabled people in marketing, some done with care (like [Aerie](#)'s recent efforts to show disabled folks in

their product and marketing images) and some less so. While this shift is greatly appreciated by disabled folks, it's not enough just to showcase disabled people in our marketing materials, we also have to ensure that our customer experiences are **accessible** from start to finish.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

Accessibility is the practice of designing and creating content and services that can be used by all people regardless of their abilities. Creating accessible services can look like ramps at crosswalks for people who use wheelchairs or clear error messages when trying to submit a form on a website for people with anxiety.

When it comes to marketing your business online, it's important to know what things to do to make your content and customer experience more accessible. If you're asking yourself, "where do I start?" then you're in luck! There is already an [internationally recognized set of guidelines](#) for making content accessible and most platforms you already use (like Squarespace or Instagram) are aware of these guidelines and have taken over the technical side of things for you. Now all you have to do is focus on making your content and services as accessible as possible.

While there is always more that we could be doing to make our digital marketing accessible, **here are six things you should be aware of in your marketing to get you started on the path to accessibility:**

1. Understand Color Contrast in Your Branding

One of the most common places that I encounter a lack of accessibility is with branding and color. Color contrast is a major concern when it comes to accessibility because many people have vision impairments, including things such as cataracts, color blindness or low contrast vision. This can make it hard to read or understand your logo or your text if there is not enough contrast between it and the background color it's on top of.

Thankfully, we have guidelines we can follow to know if there is enough contrast for our logos and text colors. Use a [color contrast checker](#) to confirm your brand color combinations have enough contrast so that they can be truly legible to everyone. This will likely lead to more brand awareness because your audience will be able to recognize your logo and content more easily.

2. Choose Brand Fonts Wisely

In addition to color, fonts can also be a common area where accessibility and readability get overlooked. Script fonts and fonts that are all uppercase or all lowercase can be difficult to read and scan, especially for people with dyslexia. Fonts that have similar designs for commonly confused letters such as a capital “I” or a lowercase “L” can also slow down and confuse your audience. When selecting your brand fonts, be careful to limit such fonts to your logo and use simpler fonts for most of your text.

Whether they're browsing your website or paying an invoice on [HoneyBook](#), your logo is

usually one of the first things your customers will notice and remember about your brand. Make sure that the first impression is legible!

3. Avoid Ableist Language

Ableist language is any language that misuses terms that could be used to describe people with disabilities (like the term “tone deaf”) or that makes assumptions about someone's abilities or physical body and appearance (like the phrase “Raise your hand if...”).

Ableist language can be hard to recognize because it is so ingrained in how we communicate. That's why whenever we work with clients to create guidelines for their marketing we always include a [list of ableist terms to avoid](#).

By cutting these terms out of your marketing language, you will be demonstrating inclusivity and awareness and you'll likely attract more clients and customers in the process!



4. Structure Your Web Content

If you've ever written an outline for a paper in school, then you've got experience writing structured content. When it comes to marketing your business, providing structured content on your website is so important, not only for accessibility but also for search engine optimization (SEO).

Each page of your website and each blog post should be focused on a specific topic. For example, if you're a photographer, you might want a heading that says "Photo Album Options" above all of your pricing information for your photo album services. **Here are a few reasons why using headings is helpful:**

- Your headings should describe the content that follows clearly. This makes it easier for all users to understand and scan the content.
- Headers and other HTML elements are understood by screen readers and other assistive technology that folks with disabilities might be using to consume your content.
- Most assistive technology (AT) allows users to jump from heading to heading to find the information they are looking for more easily.

The great news is that Google and other search engines love to see structured content, so getting in the habit of writing clear and concise headings that are keyword-focused for your website content is great for your SEO.

5. Include Alternative Text and Image Descriptions

Alternative Text or alt-text is a text that describes the content of the image and that displays if an image cannot be loaded. Alt-text can also be read by screen readers and search engines, so using descriptive alt-text for images on your website also has the added benefit of helping with SEO.

Beyond your website, alt-text is also important to consider for images you post on social media. Platforms like Instagram now allow you to edit the alt-text for your feed images, but you can also always add an image description to the caption of your post. This ensures that everyone can consume the information in your images and graphics.

6. Include Captions for Your Video and Audio Content

Video and audio content is growing in popularity with TikTok and Instagram reels taking over much of social media. Video content and audio



content, like podcasts, can be so engaging and that's why people are so drawn to these mediums, but unless this content includes captions or transcripts, your content may not be accessible to all people.

Thankfully, most social media platforms are starting to implement auto-generated captions for video content, making it easier than ever to produce engaging and accessible marketing content.

Use Instagram's new Caption sticker to auto-generate captions for your video content in these three easy steps:

1. Head to your Instagram Stories or Reels camera and either record or upload a video from your camera roll.
2. Once uploaded or recorded, tap the sticker icon and select the "Captions" sticker.
3. You can choose from different text formats, move the text around the screen and change color.

Pro Tip: Don't forget to double-check your captions before posting as Instagram may not accurately transcribe your audio. Don't have access to the Instagram Caption sticker yet? Tools like [Rev.com](#) also offer transcription services at a reasonable price.

FOCUSING ON ACCESSIBILITY BENEFITS EVERYONE

These small efforts to help people with disabilities also benefit everyone else because what we're doing by focusing on accessibility is making services easier to use.

Finally, as we've mentioned throughout this article, when following accessibility guidelines you're likely to see an improvement in your SEO, as many of the things that make your content easier to understand for people with disabilities also help Google and other search engines better understand your content. Accessibility truly is a win-win!

Want to know more about SEO and Accessibility? [Download our free SEO Guide.](#)



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HOW TO USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE ON YOUR WEBSITE

Taylor de la Fuente



Our creative industry is still stuck in a universal, inauthentic, exclusive rut. People of color, LGBTQ+, plus-size people, disabled people and others deserve an inclusive client experience and it's time to make a change. The best place to make that change? Your website. It's the digital home of your service-based business, your number one sales tool and the last stop a customer makes before hiring you.

To make your website more inclusive, **you'll need to follow these three, crucial steps:**

STEP 1: KICK TOKENISM TO THE CURB

Making your website more inclusive begins with an authentic intent. You should be doing this work because you genuinely love people and want to create an inclusive client experience so everyone of all stripes feels seen and heard in the world. There is no room for tokenism (*the practice of only making a symbolic effort toward equality*) in the services industry.

STEP 2: UPDATE YOUR WORDS & IMAGES

I define inclusive language as written, spoken and visual communication that acknowledges and respects human diversity. That means, to make your website more inclusive, you'll need to address both words and images.

The words and images you should change will likely involve on one or several of these categories:

- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Race and ethnicity
- Religion
- Disability
- Size
- Age
- Parental status
- Socioeconomic status
- Military status

There are many identities beyond this list, but these are the most applicable universal (for example, geography is another category but I couldn't advise you on what to say without knowing the specific market you serve).

By changing the words and images you use, I recommend going category by category, rather than website page by website page, to make these changes. **Here are some examples from the perspective of a wedding photographer, though every business owner should be able to apply many of these changes on their own website even if they don't fall into that industry:**

Gender

- Replace terms like lady, babe, dude, bride and groom with a person, friend, couple, fiancé or partner.
- Ask yourself, “What gender roles or stereotypes am I reinforcing?” as you read your copy.
- Update your images to portray a variety of genders.

Sexual Orientation

- Replace phrases like bride and groom or Mr. and Mrs. with a couple, spouses or partners — especially in places where a person might input their name, like on your [HoneyBook](#) intake form.
- Ask yourself, “What past experience do I have serving LGBTQ+ people and how can I tell those stories?” when you evaluate your website copy.
- Update your images so they portray more than just straight relationships.

Race & Ethnicity

- Replace terms like African American, Spanish, Mexican or Asian American with Black, Hispanic, Latinx, Asian or people of color.

- Ask yourself, “What ethnicities are common in my area and how can I include their unique traditions in my marketing?” as you re-read your website copy.
- Update your images to show a variety of ethnicities and don't forget to include interracial couples.

Religion

- Replace church with a place of worship. Replace priest or preacher with a religious leader, officiant or celebrant. Replace religious ceremony with civil ceremony or ritual.
- Ask yourself, “How can my writing include Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and other non-Christian traditions? How can I include those who don't identify with any religion?”
- Update your images to include iconic traditions of different religions, such as people wearing the Jewish yarmulke or the application of henna during Hindu weddings.

Disability

- Replace handicapped and disability-first language like the deaf woman with disabled and person-first language like the woman who is deaf.
- Ask yourself, “What experience do I have serving the disabled community and how can I portray that on my website?” as you review your copy.
- Update your images to include those with disabilities.

Size

- Replace terms like fat with plus-size, full-figured, curvy, husky or big and tall.
- Consider also adding phrases like size-inclusive and body positive.

- Ask yourself, “How can I make people with larger bodies, smaller bodies, taller bodies, shorter bodies, etc. feel accommodated in my business?” as you re-read your website copy.
- Update your images to show people beyond a size 2.

Age

- Ask yourself, “Am I making assumptions about how old my clients are?” as you rework your website copy.
- Update your images to include more than just 20-year-olds.

Parental Status

- Replace references to mom and dad with parents, guardians or family.
- Ask yourself, “How do I make my clients’ children involved in my work?” as you work through the copy.
- Update your images to include families.

Socioeconomic Status

- Replace poor, frugal, low-budget or backyard with practical, budget-conscious, economical or thrifty.
- Ask yourself, “Which of my offers has the most value?”
- How can I direct budget-conscious customers toward my services?” as you read your website copy.

Military Status

- Replace terms like ARMY brat with a military family, active duty military or members of the armed forces.
- Ask yourself, “What experience do I have serving military personnel and how can I tell these stories on my website?” as you read your copy.
- Update your images to include photos of service members.

STEP 3: ACCEPT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE

The number one quality you need to be an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion is bravery. Which, as an entrepreneur, I know you have because it takes a heck of a lot of guts to go out on your own and start a business.

Privilege is power and each of us has some privilege. It’s your responsibility to use your power for good and that means making an effort to be an agent of change and transform the creative industry into a kinder, more welcoming, more inclusive place. Be the change.



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HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR CLIENT EXPERIENCE WITH INCLUSIVITY

Claire Bough



From your leads to your long-term partnerships, providing an inclusive experience for your clients will help you meet and exceed their expectations. It's easier than you think and it doesn't have to mean adding more resources or offerings. Instead, it's as simple as ensuring you're providing the same access, information and interactions to each client, every time. A process that offers equal opportunities can set your business apart and become a well-known part of your brand.

Ensuring everyone is treated equitably will create a joyful and stress-free experience that the community will come to know you by. Building a client experience with inclusivity in mind will also attract a bigger pool of potential clients. Without alienating anyone, you can ensure a steady flow of new and returning clients who know they'll be well taken care of.

But what goes into the client experience? It's beyond simply how you communicate and includes meeting different needs and providing the best value for your services. To start, ask yourself the following questions:

What is your current process for vetting clients?

Evaluating a good client fit should be based on factors like budget, timeline and whether your capabilities match what they're looking for in a provider. Be sure to treat everyone respectfully without assumptions and treat the leads you turn down with the same respect you'd offer to new clients.

Do you have an established process for each client?

Though specific details may change, an ideal experience includes standards for everyone. For instance, if you've given free consultation calls to some clients, every new lead should be able to expect the same experience.

Do clients often ask you for the next steps or do they understand what to expect throughout the project timeline?

Even if things change, your clients should be aware of each step in the process. Diligent communication will ensure your client knows what to expect and is assured their needs are met throughout.

Do you offer accessible options to all of your clients?

Ensuring all people can engage with your business increases your chances of landing more clients. At the start of each project, capture your client's communication preferences to help meet their needs and offer a variety of options like email, phone and video calls. Some may prefer email if their work hours differ from yours, while others may prefer video calls where they can see you while communicating. For your primary communication methods, offer live transcriptions or closed captioning whenever possible, such as on Zoom. You can also send a call agenda to each client along with their confirmation email.

These questions are just a start. No matter how you answered, there's likely room to improve your client experience with inclusivity in mind. As businesses grow and change, it's always beneficial to reevaluate your processes. Use some of our tips below to address opportunities to create an inclusive client experience from start to finish - we promise both you and your clients will notice a difference!

MAKE THE FIRST IMPRESSION MATTER

Your clients' first impression begins before you even have the chance to communicate with them. Regardless of your industry, potential clients will likely be researching your social media profiles, website, review pages and more. Make sure visitors have all the information they need to reach out to you, such as project examples and services offered. Beyond your business information, let your audience get to know your brand through your tone of voice on social media and the type of content you share. Let your personality shine!

Once someone knows they're interested enough to reach out, it should be easy for them to get that ball rolling. Create a simple contact form that you can embed on your website, share via email or link across social media. Don't scare off your potential leads by asking them to do too much work too soon - just get the basic information you'll need to follow up, such as name, project type, budget, timeline and contact information. You can also ask for optional communication preferences at this step, including their pronouns and method of communication.

Once that first inquiry comes through, an automated email is a great way to treat every lead the same and let them know you've received their request promptly. To more quickly move this potential client along in your process, include a link to [schedule an initial call](#) or consultation in that first email. If you want more information before meeting with them, you can also include a [project questionnaire](#) to help vet if there's a good client fit. Whatever you choose, automating that first touchpoint is a crucial time-saving step that will help you hold on to leads who are speaking with many different vendors. Importantly, it also ensures everyone has the same initial interaction with your business.

The [HoneyBook Workflows](#) feature makes it easy to streamline this early stage in your booking process. With the contact form on your



website, new inquiries will drop right into your [HoneyBook](#) Pipeline and when they do, your customized workflow will trigger the first email. Try building out a workflow for each project type, including [unique contact forms](#). By linking your contact forms with each project type, you can send a more personalized email to each potential client while maintaining an automated process.

OFFER THE SAME INFORMATION TO ALL YOUR LEADS

Though it sounds intuitive, it's easy to forget to send information when you don't have a process in place. Especially if your business offers a variety of services or project types, you may unconsciously spend more time cultivating the leads that are interested in bigger projects vs. those asking for lower-cost services. This is where spending time up-front on your client experience will pay off in the long run.

Instead of waiting until you're asked about your services, spend the time putting together a variety of [business brochures](#) tailored to each type of project or package that you offer. Your brochures might include project examples, case studies, testimonials and pricing breakdowns. Within your brochure design, take the opportunity to lead with inclusion as well. Showcase project examples, case studies and testimonials that represent your clients' diversity. Also, be sure to use inclusive language that applies to all clients.

Make sure your brochure is a great reference for clients to take the next step toward working with you. If some clients need to conduct additional research on their own, it isn't an equal process to those who have everything they need in one place. It's a win-win for all when your leads feel informed about what you have to offer and they may even decide to choose more services than previously planned.

Pro Tip: Even if you're endlessly busy, don't let your leads find out! Set up automated emails to send out a few days after they've received your brochure and haven't responded. This will show everyone that you care about their project - whether it's big or small - and they'll appreciate the personal touch after receiving all the information from your brochure.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR EACH PROJECT

Congratulations, you're about to book a new client! If they've chosen a project from your brochure and are ready to move forward, it's time to send out a proposal. When you send out your [service proposal](#), use it as a way for your clients to get to know you better. Take advantage of customization options like adding a unique header image to your invoice and including your brand colors throughout. The proposal also ensures your clients are aligned with the upcoming scope of work through your contract as well as the payment expectations outlined in your invoice. The [HoneyBook](#) proposal combines the contract and invoice to help expedite your onboarding process and set a high level of professionalism that all clients will appreciate.

Though you'll want to include the necessary legal jargon surrounding your business and services, you can also include the full scope of work inside your contract. Include everything they've selected from your brochure or anything you've agreed on via email or phone. If your project includes a set date or timeline, be sure to include those as well. If the project timeline is more fluid, assign your scope of work to set milestones so your clients can see what the project pipeline will look like.

Incorporate price transparency within this step by laying out your scope of work and corresponding costs with more detail inside your

invoice. Make sure your clients understand what they're paying for and what they can expect at each milestone as well as at completion. When you send your proposal, allow the opportunity for questions so your clients know they can double-check the scope of work or cost with you before they sign and pay.



Even though we're talking about client experience, don't forget that expectations go both ways. Discover what you can expect from your client through informational questionnaires. A standard onboarding questionnaire should give you everything you need to move forward with the project, while also removing unconscious bias about what you think your client will want or need.

OPEN THE DOOR TO ONGOING COMMUNICATION

From the start of the project, establish the best way to communicate at each step. To make

communication more inclusive, offer alternatives to everyone along with your primary methods. You can prepare an outline of each option that's easy to send right off the bat. For example, some clients may require written communication along with any video meetings or calls. Many video conferencing tools offer automatic captioning and you can also send your meeting notes as a summary afterward.

When it comes to meetings, make it easy for everyone to schedule time with you. Using the [HoneyBook scheduling feature](#), you can provide an accurate view of your calendar to make sure you're not prioritizing any one client's time over another. Within the scheduler, let your clients choose the communication method that works best for them and offer as many options as possible. You'll still be able to maintain control over your schedule by customizing events by day and time. For example, you can set all initial calls so they're only on Mondays or Fridays and last 30 minutes, which frees up your calendar for ongoing client meetings. For questions and new requests, establish a set turnaround time so they know when they can expect a response - unanswered emails can be a source of friction in your client experience.

If you use Gmail, [HoneyBook](#) makes it easy for you to view all your client activity in one place. With seamless Gmail integration, you can keep track of your project while also maintaining your flow of communication. Through the [HoneyBook app](#), it's always easy to stay in touch even when you're on the go.

Pro Tip: Add your business hours to a [custom email signature](#) so clients know when to expect a response. Doing so can help maintain your personal and professional boundaries while still maintaining open communication with all clients.

CREATE A SET PROCESS FOR ALL

As you're working through each project, maintain as much of a standardized experience as possible. Though project details may vary,

your overall pipeline should align with the scope of work outlined in your contract and maintain the same milestones for each client. With more automation, it can also free up your time to better accommodate clients who have additional needs. Without a standardized baseline, you won't have as much opportunity to scale and grow your business since it can be too difficult to juggle each different client and project.

We mentioned using automation to create an excellent first interaction with clients, but you can also use them to maintain your internal workflow. For example, if you're a graphic designer, you might have a proofing stage in your pipeline where each client will receive proof of their design along with a contract for sign-off. Using the [HoneyBook Workflow feature](#), you can add a task to remind yourself that this process milestone is approaching. Keeping yourself organized in this way will ensure all clients receive their proof on time.

You can also set up [email automation](#) to remind your clients about the terms in your contract at relevant stages in your working relationship. Doing this can help protect your business from liability while also holding you accountable to create an inclusive experience.

For the example of a graphic designer delivering proof, this is a great time to include an automated email reminder about the revision policy. Not only does this help set client expectations, but it also ensures everyone receives the same project experience.

ALWAYS ASK FOR CLIENT FEEDBACK

The client experience doesn't end when the final payment goes through or when you send the final deliverables. Instead, you'll want to include a project wrap-up as one of your final touchpoints. Treat your past and present clients as the best source of truth for understanding what does and doesn't work in your process.



Prepare a project wrap-up questionnaire to go out promptly while their experience of working with you is still fresh in their minds.

Within your questionnaire, you can ask specific questions to understand their level of satisfaction as well as what should be improved. Include a variety of answer options as well as open-ended questions so that clients have plenty of opportunities to provide feedback. Also, be sure to ask for a testimonial quote that you can use within your marketing efforts. Treat this step as an important part of your workflow and don't close out the project until you've sent out the email with your questionnaire.

Pro Tip: Include a call to action inside your questionnaire to have your clients copy and paste their responses in an online review site such as Google, Facebook or Yelp. Reviews can help improve your SEO and credibility within your industry.

BE REMEMBERED FOR BUSINESS INCLUSIVITY

Being more inclusive offers a better experience for everyone who interacts with your business.

In return, business inclusivity will help you grow as more and more people choose to work with you. Keep in mind that word-of-mouth referrals are always a powerful way to gain new clients and the experience is a huge part of what clients will consider when deciding to refer or not.

Think about what would happen if your clients were all in the same room together. Would they be able to all talk about the same experience or would there be differences? Ideally, your clients will want to refer you to others because they know everyone will be treated to the same level of care and expertise.

As you build your processes, reflect on your core values and ensure you're leading your business with diversity, equity and inclusion. Include your core values throughout your website, brochure and other business materials to ensure your efforts become a recognizable part of your brand. Building inclusivity into your core values can mean starting with small

and simple changes that end up making a huge difference. For your marketing materials and website, consider making them more accessible with readable fonts and contrasting colors. It can be as easy as making sure you're asking everyone the same questions from the start within your process.

Updating your processes can also have a great impact on your business community by helping to raise the bar in your industry. Your improvements can help set a standard and show that an inclusive experience doesn't necessarily require more resources. With some planning and strategic decision-making, everyone can build more equity into their business.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** What does inclusivity mean to you and your business?
- 2** Do you caption your social media videos, reels and other content?
- 3** How is inclusion connected to your core values?
- 4** Is your business geared towards a specific community? If so, are you unintentionally excluding anyone else and is it worth reconsidering how you can better foster diversity?
- 5** Where can you start creating more inclusive client experiences and accessible content in your business. How will you enforce them in your policies, guidelines, and plan?

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WHO WE ARE

The [HoneyBook | Rising Tide](#) team believes an empowered creative economy will change the world. By elevating the voices of creatives, sharing their stories, and building a thriving online and offline community, we support creatives in their pursuit of a sustainable livelihood.

Empowerment begins with saving creatives time and money. [HoneyBook](#) helps creative entrepreneurs manage their businesses more efficiently so they can do more of what they love. With [HoneyBook](#), creatives can send brochures, proposals and invoices; create the ideal customer experience; and track payments – all in one place. Equally as important are sharing knowledge and providing support. That's why [Rising Tide](#) is a community and living library of educational resources, including blog content from thought leaders, monthly guides, online summits, and over 400 monthly meet-ups across the world to help creatives succeed in business.

We're also passionate about supporting the communities around us. To date, we've given over \$130,000 to nonprofits including Pencils of Promise, The School Sessions, U.S. Dream Academy, The Birthday Party Project, Thirst Relief and more. We've also partnered with Pencils of Promise to build a school in 2018 funded entirely by community donations through our 2017 RISE Summit.

We believe that magic happens when creatives gather, support one another and are empowered to pursue their passions. We believe in community over competition. We believe in empowering the creative economy to rise together.

Photo by Oliva Reed

