Accessible Beauty Product Design Guidelines

A collaboration between By Ninja and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

Supporting a boundless world through inclusive beauty.

By Ninja

Guide Dogs.
For a boundless world.

Purpose of these guidelines.

Beauty is for everyone, but right now, not everyone can access it.

Accessible design is a powerful business opportunity, brand differentiator, and pathway to creating a more inclusive world. By designing beauty products with accessibility in mind, you support independence, confidence, and dignity for everyone.

Brands certified as “inclusive” have grown one and a half times faster than their competitors, clearly demonstrating the commercial strength and customer loyalty that accessible design fosters.

These guidelines equip beauty brands with the foundational knowledge and practical strategies needed to make their products and packaging more accessible, especially for people who are blind or have low vision, by identifying what’s viable and meaningful for their brand. The goal is to ensure your approach is genuinely inclusive, commercially smart, and positioned for the future.

The barrier.

There’s a common misconception that appearance is unimportant to people who are blind or have low vision. But beauty is a personal, tactile, and expressive experience that many people care deeply about.

Nearly 60 percent of the Australian beauty industry's customer base will experience a chronic eye condition in their lifetime. Over half a million Australians currently live with low vision or blindness and want to access, choose, and use beauty products with the same ease and independence as everyone else.

Yet, most of these customers are routinely overlooked. They quietly adapt. They rely on workarounds, Assistive Technology, or friends and family to help them shop. While they're doing this, brands are leaving value and loyalty on the table.

People with low vision or blindness are an audience with purchasing power, brand loyalty, and an unmet need. By designing for them, you don’t just do what’s right, you gain a competitive edge.

What's getting in the way of accessible solutions?

Beauty packaging has evolved with good reason. Standardised shapes, colour coding, gloss finishes, and compact labelling all serve practical business goals, like production efficiency, shelf appeal, and regulatory compliance.

But many of these well-intentioned decisions unintentionally create barriers for people with low vision or blindness.

Here are a few common examples:

- **Identical packaging:** streamlines production and reduces costs, especially across large product ranges, but makes it hard to distinguish products by touch or sight.
- **Small and stylised fonts** are a by-product of a need to differentiate products, limited space and regulatory requirements, making it difficult to balance branding, compliance, and legibility.
- **Glossy and low contrast finishes:** enhance on-shelf presence, but can make important information difficult to read.
- **Placement of key information:** including ingredients, expiry dates, barcodes, and QR codes. Placement of these are often dictated by the shape and size of the product, leading to inconsistent layouts that can make important details hard to locate and access.
- **Multi-sensory formats and tactile features:** can increase complexity and cost, and can be technically challenging to integrate consistently at scale.
- **Integrated portion control mechanisms:** including droppers and pumps, provide precise dosing of liquid products, but are rarely included as they typically increase cost, complexity, and environmental impact.
- **Colour-only cues:** these are deeply ingrained in beauty and help many people navigate products easily, but relying on colour alone can make it difficult for people with low vision or blindness to distinguish between them.

These choices are not made with exclusion in mind, but their impact still excludes people with low vision or blindness. Inclusive design is about building on what's already working by adding options, expanding usability, and ensuring more people can access and enjoy your brand. Awareness is the first step. Action is where real change happens.

The solution.

Inclusive beauty starts by recognising that access isn't all-or-nothing, rather it's a spectrum of needs, barriers, and opportunities to do better. It doesn’t have to be overwhelming or perfect. It’s about progress, openness, and iteration. Start with one moment, one touchpoint, one friction point, and with every step you take, you’ll uncover new insights and ways to improve how people access, choose, and use your products.

The three phases of access:

1. **Identification:** can the product be located and identified independently?
    - Does the promotional or advertising material help a customer identify and understand the product?
2. **Purchase:** is it accessible online and in-store?
    - Is the product easy to locate and understand in-store or online?
3. **Use:** can the product be used safely and confidently?
    - Can the product be easily opened and closed without spilling or spoiling?
    - Can the required amount of product be easily dispensed without waste?
    - Can the product be easily stored between uses?

Understanding low vision and blindness.

Low vision exists on a spectrum, with blindness being part of that spectrum. Most people experience low vision or blindness later in life and may not be able to use Braille or assistive tools, making accessible products essential for supporting independence and everyday routines.

Designing products for people with low vision or blindness requires understanding how different conditions affect perception.

Low vision.

May include central vision loss, peripheral vision loss, night blindness, or distorted or blurry vision. Many people retain partial vision and use a combination of techniques or aids to read, navigate, and identify products.

Blindness.

Includes individuals with very limited or no sight who rely primarily on other senses such as touch, sound, or smell to navigate their environments and make decisions.

Colour blindness.

Affects how people perceive certain colours. Deuteranopia is the most common form of colour blindness, which makes it difficult to distinguish between reds and greens. People often rely on high contrast and cues beyond colour to navigate products.

The guidelines.

Bigger, bolder, brighter, balanced.

These four words offer a simple lens for creating packaging and products that are more accessible and inclusive, while still staying true to your brand. They remind us that inclusive design is about clarity, intention, and connection.

Packaging is often the first point of interaction between a user and a product, and for people with low vision or blindness, small design decisions can make a big difference. These guidelines will help you think practically about inclusive product design in ways that complement and enhance existing processes.

In the beauty industry, packaging often occurs at three levels:

- **Product packaging (primary)**: the bottle, tube, jar or compact that directly holds the product.
- **Retail or display packaging (secondary)**: often a cardboard box, cylinder or sleeve used for brand alignment, shelf standout, and protection.
- **Mailer or gift packaging (tertiary)**: includes shipping cartons, gift boxes or subscription bundles, often used in direct-to-consumer purchases.

Each level presents unique opportunities and responsibilities for improving accessibility. These guidelines focus primarily on the product and retail packaging levels, where accessible design can have the most immediate and lasting impact.

Form and distinctiveness.

These recommendations help users distinguish between products without relying on sight or assistive technology.

- Choose packaging with distinct shapes or tactile variations that support differentiation by touch.
- Use scent consistently where relevant, as an additional sensory cue.

Recommended differentiators:

- **Texture**: for example, use a matte surface for matte products, and a gloss surface for gloss products, or to differentiate different ends of a dual-end product.
- **Shape**: for example, use a bottle for shampoo and a tube for conditioner to help users distinguish frequently used or similar products.
- **Size**: for example, vary height or volume so products feel different in the hand.

Typography.

Font size:

- Use the largest practical font size for your aesthetic and product size.
- It is recommended to use 12-to-16-point font for people with low vision, but it's about balance and practicality.
- When space is tight, prioritise clarity and legibility.

Recommended font sizes for key information:

Minimum: five point font.

Use for non-essential details that support brand storytelling or product promotion, including product descriptions, benefits, marketing claims, ingredients, and contact details.

Ideal: 14 point font.

Use for critical information that supports product selection and safe use, including product name, volume, usage directions, allergens, and warnings.

Why these sizes?

Five point font is the smallest readable size sufficient for young adults or typical users without low vision or blindness under ideal conditions.

14 point font is comfortably readable for most people, including people with common age-related or moderate vision conditions.

It's not always viable to display all information at the ideal size, especially on small products and packaging. Where this isn’t possible, provide access through an alternative accessible method, such as a QR code or NaviLens code that links to a digitally accessible version of the information.

Typeface and styling:

- Use sans-serif fonts that are clear and easy to read.
- Use bold or semi-bold weights for emphasis.
- Use either title or sentence case for clarity.
- Use horizontal text placements.
- Avoid blocks of capital letters, underlined, italicised or vertical text, as these reduce legibility for people with low vision or blindness.
- Stylised or decorative fonts can still be used for aesthetic elements, including your brand, but shouldn’t be relied upon for essential information.

Recommended typefaces:

- Aptos
- Atkinson Hyperlegible
- Lexend
- Tahoma
- Verdana

Why sans-serif fonts?

Sans-serif fonts are typically simpler in structure, making letters easier to distinguish from one another.

How to test the accessibility of your font:

Choose fonts with simple, familiar shapes, consistent portions, and clearly defined characters that aren't easily confused.

- Can you clearly distinguish between "Il1" (lowercase "L", uppercase "I", and the number "1")?
- Do the letters "c" and "e" have open apertures (the distance of the opening), or do they risk blending into an "o" or "0"?
- Is the shape of the "e" distinct enough to avoid confusion with a "c"?
- Do combinations like "vw" or "mw" remain legible, or do they merge together?

Spacing and alignment:

- Use consistent spacing and alignment.
- Use adequate tracking, kerning (space between characters) and leading (vertical space between lines of text) to improve legibility.

Recommended alignment:

- Left-aligned.

Recommended line spacing to improve readability:

- 1.5x line spacing.

Contrast:

These recommendations benefit users with low vision or colour blindness, helping ensure all content remains accessible and clear.

- Use strong contrast between the text and background. Black on white is the most readable and safest option.
- Use solid backgrounds and high-contrast colour pairings to support legibility.
- Avoid placing text over imagery, textured backgrounds, or using low-contrast combinations. These can camouflage important information and reduce overall accessibility.

Recommended contrast ratio:

Normal text	=	4.5:1
Large text	=	3:1
Graphics	=	3:1

Recommended contrast checker:

- Click to be taken to the WebAIM Contrast Checker.

Numbers:

- Numbers 3, 5, 8, and 0 can be difficult for people with low vision to distinguish.
- Use fonts that differentiate these numbers clearly, and consider repeating critical numbers in words where practical.

For example, 3 (three), 5 (five), 8 (eight), 0 (zero).

Integrating Braille.

Only an estimated 10 percent of people with low vision or blindness use Braille, often due to factors like reduced finger sensitivity, limited teaching resources, or low awareness. However, in recent years, the demand for Braille is reportedly increasing, with a 25 percent growth in production.

Even for non-Braille readers, Braille can serve as a helpful tactile marker, improving overall product accessibility.

- Use Braille for product names or key information where appropriate.
- Braille should supplement (not replace) other accessible features.
- Ensure Braille placement does not obscure visual information or disrupt packaging legibility for other users.
- Integrate Braille early and test the final format.

Braille application:

Place Braille on a fixed or attached component so it's not discarded or lost or during use.

Braille can be incorporated into packaging in a number of ways:

- By packaging type:
  - Primary packaging: raised three-dimensional, or ultra-violet printing or moulding.
  - Secondary packaging: embossing.
- By material or surface:
  - Rigid plastic, glass or metal: raised three-dimensional or ultra-violet printing.
  - Flexible plastic: moulding.

Braille size and spacing:

> The more raised the Braille is, the easier it is to detect and read by touch.

The application method will influence the final Braille dimensions. For example, card weight, embossing depth, additional coatings, and packing can all affect Braille on a box.

Recommended Braille sizes:

- Dot base diameter: 1.6 millimetres.
- Dot height: 0.9 millimetres.
- Cell width: 4.1 millimetres.

Recommended Braille spacing:

- Dots: 0.9 milimetres.
- Cell horizontal: 2.9 milimetres.
- Cell or line vertical: 4.4 milimetres.

How to measure Braille:

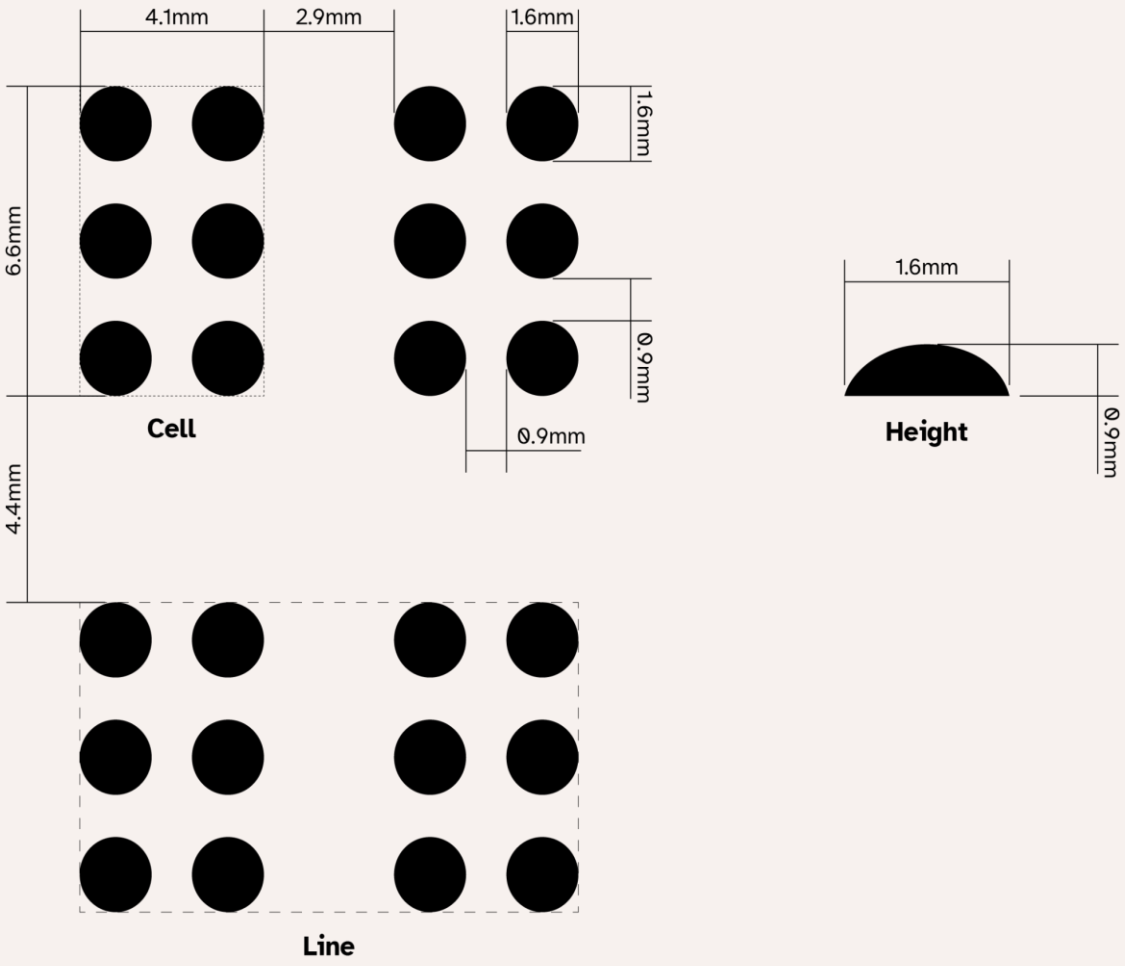

Image description: a black and white diagram detailing how to measure Braille, including cell, line and dot height and width.

Braille transcription:

- Use Unified English Braille (UEB), the standard Braille code in Australia.
- Text should be transcribed by a qualified Braille transcriber to ensure accuracy and readability.

Braille is commonly transcribed in two formats:

- **Grade one (uncontracted):** a direct, letter-by-letter transcription that is easier to learn and read, but requires more space.
- **Grade two (contracted):** a shortened version that uses abbreviations and contractions to reduce space, but can be more complex to learn and interpret.

For example, “this is Braille” in:

Grade 1: 

Grade 2: 

Source: VisAbility.

Braille Australia has a directory of qualified Braille providers.

Tactile markers.

These markers can indicate different product types or formats, make opening, closing and navigating product components more intuitive, and provide a physical cue to guide hand placement and device orientation when scanning QR or NaviLens codes.

While there is currently no universal standard for tactile symbols in the beauty industry, using consistent placements and shapes across your range helps build familiarity.

- Use raised markers like symbols, ridges, textured bands or tactile stickers to help users distinguish products even if they don’t read Braille.
- Use tactile markers, like a notch or indent, to help users locate functional parts of the packaging, for example, where to open a lid.
- Where possible, use simple, intuitive symbols like a dot, bar, or triangle to aid recognition by touch.

The more raised a tactile marker is, the easier it is to find and recognise by touch.

QR and NaviLens codes.

QR and NaviLens codes allow users to access information using their own devices, configured to their personal accessibility needs, enhancing independence and ease of use.

- Use QR or NaviLens codes to offer flexible, scalable access to audio, text or video instructions.
- Position them consistently across your product range and pair with a tactile locator to make them easy to find and scan.
- Ensure the linked content meets digital accessibility standards. Click to be taken to the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT suite of accessibility guidelines.

While these codes aid accessibility, they should not be the sole solution. Rather, they should complement other accessible design features.

Colour use.

Reinforcing colour with other cues ensures people with blindness, colour blindness or low vision can still navigate your products confidently.

Colour blindness affects how people perceive specific colours, most commonly reds and greens. Some people may not distinguish between certain tones at all. This makes strong contrast and dual coding essential.

- Use high contrast colour combinations.
- Use colour in combination with easy-to-read labels, icons, or tactile markers, especially when distinguishing product ranges or shade variants.
- Test your design using a colour blindness simulator.
- Avoid using colour alone to convey meaning.

Recommended tools:

- Adobe Color: build an inclusive colour palette and simulate colour blindness palettes. Click to be taken to the Adobe Color tool.
- Color Oracle: simulate how your design appears with different types of colour blindness. Click to be taken to the Color Oracle tool.

Material choice.

The recommended material choices improve accessibility while reinforcing brand quality and enhancing shelf appeal.

- Use uncoated or satin stocks to reduce glare.
- Use textures that support differentiation by feel, for example, matte UV for matte lipstick, and spot gloss UV for glossy lipstick.
- Avoid highly reflective or low-contrast finishes that reduce legibility, interfere with tactile recognition and increase visual noise under bright lighting.

For documents:

- Use at least 90 gsm paper to reduce text and image bleed.
- Print on one side to eliminate show-through.

Multi-sensory formats.

Offering a mix of formats supports autonomy, confidence, and equity in how users access and engage with your brand.

Use multiple sensory formats to make information more accessible, including:

- Large print with high contrast for users with low vision.
- Printed booklets or inserts that are easy to locate, open and read. Place the booklets in predictable locations and consider using tactile cues for orientation.
- Braille for key product details when visual access is limited.
- Audio formats for hands-free access.
- Digital content that works with screen readers and accessibility settings.
- Avoid relying on a single accessible format, as this excludes many users.

Accessible design process.

Designing inclusively is an ongoing process. These steps can help guide decision-making through each stage of your design or product development cycle. It’s not always easy or quick, but it’s no different from any product development journey.

It's important to recognise that not every solution will be accessible to everyone. Inclusive design involves making informed decisions based on observation, testing and feedback. The goal isn’t perfection. What matters most is starting, staying open to new ideas and methods, and committing to continuous improvement.

1. Learn.

Start by incorporating these practices when you’re designing products and packaging:

- Use guidelines and accessibility benchmarks to uncover where key friction points occur.
- Observe a diverse range of people, particularly those outside your typical user profile, as they interact with your product.
    - Pay attention to how they find, identify, purchase, open and use your product.
    - Observe real-world interactions to reveal access barriers and user-developed solutions. Interview and focus groups alone may not uncover important issues, especially when navigating those barriers has become second nature.
- Be open and curious. Intentionally challenge your assumptions.
- Don’t forget your average users either. Inclusive design should improve the experience for more people, not create new barriers.

2. Audit.

Assess your existing products, packaging, and digital experiences with these learnings in mind:

- Prioritise design choices based on values, feasibility and impact.
- Every brand's path will look different, and that's okay. What matters is that you start the accessible design process and keep going.

Here is a selection of consultants and service providers that can support this step:

- Access Consulting (Vision and Environments)
  - Guide Dogs Access Consulting
  - Digital Access Solutions and Assistive Technology (DASAT)
- Packaging and Product Design
  - By Ninja

3. Collaborate.

Collaboration will make the design process much easier:

- Co-design with people who have lived experience. This grounds your decisions in real needs, not assumptions.
- Small-scale usability sessions with people with low vision, blindness or dexterity challenges can reveal insights you might never uncover internally.

4. Test.

Run usability tests of your solutions with a broad and diverse user group, including both people with and without disabilities.

5. Refine.

Balance aesthetics and functionality based on real feedback.

6. Release.

Clearly communicate accessible features to your audience. Consider how users will discover, understand, and benefit from them, on the shelf, online, and in use.

7. Iterate.

Make accessibility and inclusion an ongoing commitment.

Accessible design is a continuous cycle of observation, learning, and adaptation. How people experience your product will evolve over time, just as new technology and solutions will continue to shape what's possible.

Use smart packaging, like QR codes, NaviLens codes, NFC tags and feedback loops to learn how your products are actually used and adapt them accordingly.

Inclusive design should improve experiences for everyone, not create new barriers. With each step you take, you build a brand that's more thoughtful, usable, human and commercially successful.

Recognition.

These guidelines were developed through the generous insights, lived experiences, and practical expertise of many individuals and collaborators.

Thank you to:

- Kathleen Casford (By Ninja), for leading the development and authorship of these guidelines.
- Storm Menzies (ByStorm), Jacqueline Beltz (OKKIYO), and Sandra Glynn (Sandra Glynn), for sharing your experiences and perspectives.
- Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Clients and Narelle Wright Gatti (DASAT), whose lived experiences continue to shape what accessible design truly means in practice.
- Keep Left, for your communications expertise and support in bringing accessibility to the forefront.

References.

- Brands certified as inclusive have grown 1.5 times faster than their competitors.
- 60% of the Australian beauty industry's customer base will experience a chronic eye condition in their lifetime.
- Over half a million Australians currently live with low vision or blindness.
- Minimum and ideal font sizes:
  - VisAbility, Accessibility Guidelines.
  - Macular Society, Preparing Documents for Visually Impaired People.
  - Guide Dogs Australia, Top 5 Accessibility Tips.
  - Guide Dogs Queensland, Accessibility Toolkit.
  - Vision Australia, Document Accessibility User Guide.
- 9% of people who are blind use Braille.
- 25% increase in Braille production.