

“Fujitsu is enthusiastic, fast-paced and genuinely interested in making an authentic impact, rather than just being a token charity sponsor.”

James Cusack
Director of Science
Autistica

Autistica turned to charity partner Fujitsu to provide guidance in the form of a HXD workshop during the development of a new community platform for autistic people.

At a glance

Country: United Kingdom

Industry: Charity

Founded: 2004

Website: autistica.org.uk

Challenge

Autistic people can find it difficult to navigate a modern world full of sensory issues, leading to poorer physical and mental health. Autistica wanted to develop a community platform to enable autistic people to share information and experiences to help manage these triggers.

Solution

The charity turned to sponsor Fujitsu and The Alan Turing Institute to develop the platform. The first step was to take part in a Fujitsu-led Human Centric Experience Design (HXD) workshop at its Digital Transformation Center to address different stakeholder needs, providing a better idea of the functionality and design required.

Benefit

- Fujitsu HXD methodology helps map priorities and understand stakeholder needs
- Flexible and agile approach enables the project to evolve as the conversation continues
- The new platform will positively impact on autistic people, enabling them to avoid sensory issues
- Policy-makers can understand how to make environments more accessible in the future

Customer

Autistica was founded in 2004 by philanthropist and entrepreneur Dame Steve Shirley. It is the UK's leading autism research charity and aims to ensure a long, healthy, happy life for autistic people and their families. The charity harnesses the potential of cutting-edge science to improve outcomes for autistic people of all ages.

Products and Services

- FUJITSU HXD Workshop
- FUJITSU Digital Transformation Center



Helping autistic people lead fulfilling lives

There are 700,000 autistic people in the UK, each of whom has a unique lived experience. Interacting with the world and other people can be a challenge for autistic people, leading to social exclusion and poorer health outcomes. Autistica aims to address these issues through novel innovations by partnering with leading companies, including Fujitsu.

"There is a real need to take action to counter the poorer physical and mental health autistic people often face, so we undertook an extensive consultation with The Alan Turing Institute to understand the priorities and come up with concepts to address them," explains Dr James Cusack, Director of Science, Autistica. "What came through strongly was that navigating the modern environment with different sensory experiences presented systemic challenges. For example, if you can't use public transport because of the noise or crowds, you can't see the doctor or go to a job interview."

Autistica wanted to create a platform that would enable autistic people and their families to share experiences and data on sensory issues around the country. With The Alan Turing Institute as research partners, Autistica wanted to add a technology leader to the conversation. Fortunately, the organisation had recently been appointed Fujitsu's designated charity partner, making it the perfect choice.

"With Fujitsu as our charitable sponsor, it made sense to involve it in this project so we could pick the team's collective brains," adds Cusack. "Finding the right fit can be tricky but it turned out that Fujitsu is already closely aligned to our vision and values."

Participatory approach breeds success

Fujitsu's first contribution was to host a one-day, Human Centric Experience Design (HXD) workshop at its Digital Transformation Center in London, attended by Turing Institute professors, Autistica specialists and autistic people with a genuine insight into the challenges faced. By gathering all these perspectives in one room, Autistica aimed to build a plan based on true co-creation and collaboration that would reflect its resources and budget.

"The Fujitsu HXD session helped us map priorities and address different stakeholder needs, eventually providing a better idea of the functionality and design required," continues Cusack. "Fujitsu has an exemplary track record in this field and its HXD methodology brought the best out in all participants."

What became clear during the workshop was that tools that might work for one person might also be disabling for another, so a one-size-fits-all-approach would not work. The key to unlocking this challenge is accumulating data to understand specific triggers to help people develop coping strategies long term.

"This is very much a research driven project that will ultimately provide a community platform to connect with other people, while also building open source software that can be interrogated and manipulated," says Cusack. "Because it is open source, everyone is free to develop new technologies."

A platform to connect and share experiences

The most immediate outcome of the HXD workshop was an outline of the platform to be created: a portal for autistic people and their families to share experiences of specific locations, including factors such as sensory triggers and stressors. It was agreed that another organisation would build the back-end; Fujitsu would create the front end; and the Turing Institute would handle data research. Before work can begin in earnest, however, the project is subject to ethical approval by Cambridge University, which will give any research output full academic credibility.

"The vision is to create a platform that will collect rich experiences through different media to show what environments have what effects," comments Cusack. "We can then find baselines and draw distinctions. Eventually, users will be able to plan journeys and trips to avoid triggers such as crowds, noise and bright light. And policy-makers will be able to understand how to make environments more accessible."

In the longer term, Autistica aims to add an AI element to the research, making it easier to identify patterns among different groups to enable the development of new approaches. As the project evolves in the years to come, Fujitsu will maintain its involvement, bringing a wide range of skills and technologies to the table.

"Fujitsu is enthusiastic, fast-paced and genuinely interested in making an authentic impact, rather than just being a token charity sponsor," concludes Cusack. "It is easy to make a gesture but to actually engage with the nuances of the stakeholders is difficult. Fujitsu has proven it can provide that engagement using its HXD methodology."

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