

A photograph of two young boys sitting at a wooden table in a living room, playing video games. The boy on the right is seated in a wheelchair and is using a large, white, rectangular adaptive controller with two large circular touchpads. He has a surprised or excited expression on his face. The boy on the left is sitting on a couch, holding a standard white video game controller and smiling. The background shows a patterned blue and white blanket on the couch and a decorative metal wall hanging. The text 'How Microsoft's Adaptive Controller Changed the Game' is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters.

How Microsoft's Adaptive Controller Changed the Game

Microsoft, National Strategy

Jay Chiat Awards 2019



SUMMARY

THE STORY OF HOW ONE OF MICROSOFT'S SMALLEST PRODUCTS BECAME ITS BIGGEST HERO IN DEMONSTRATING ITS BRAND MISSION.

And how this product helped change the conversation of inclusion forever.

For everyone.

When people think Microsoft, they think about Word97 and Bill Gates. Not the things Microsoft is doing today to empower every person and organization on the planet to achieve more.

We wanted to use one of Microsoft's products to tell the story of its brand mission and demonstrate how the brand is bringing meaningful innovations to market. We thought it would be one of Microsoft's bigger products... until we discovered the XBOX Adaptive Controller.

This product, which made gaming more accessible to 33 million often left out disabled gamers, perfectly brought to life Microsoft's mission. And, it could spark conversation about the importance of inclusion, in and beyond gaming.

We took to the biggest stage, the Super Bowl, to elevate the conversation of inclusivity and show the world: *when everyone can play, we all win.*

Beyond bringing the brand mission to life and earning recognition for Microsoft's latest innovations, we sparked a national conversation around the importance of inclusion.



THE PROBLEM

What comes to mind when you think of Microsoft?
Office? Bill Gates? You're not alone.

Despite being one of the more innovative companies in the world and the driver of programs like Cloud, Microsoft was still known as the brand of productivity.

Although encouraging more women to enter STEM fields, providing internet access to underprivileged areas, and lots of other good in the world, most people do not know the brand's mission is *to empower every person and organization on the planet to achieve more*.

Unlike brands of similar stature like Nike, Google, and Starbucks, whose brand missions are widely-known, Microsoft's mission remained widely unknown. These two issues created a situation where:

1. People don't have a clear understanding of the brand mission and why it existed
2. Microsoft was not getting enough credit for all its innovations

We needed to demonstrate, through the vast suite of products, how the brand was using technology to empower all people and shift perceptions around innovation. Specifically, we wanted to demonstrate:

1. Microsoft is a leader in innovation
2. Microsoft empowers me to achieve more



THE ANSWER

The perfect ONE product to demonstrate our mission and innovation prowess:

The XBOX Adaptive Controller, developed by Microsoft in partnership with disabled gamers. Its inclusive design marked the first time gaming became truly accessible for the 33 million disabled gamers in the U.S.,¹ whose needs were avoided by most large gaming companies.

Everything about the Adaptive Controller was innovative, from its packaging design, which enabled people even without hands or arms to open it, to the controller itself, which had multiple ports to work across diverse needs of the disabled community.



Source: ¹AbleGamers Foundation, 2012

THE POTENTIAL HICCUP

There was never any intention to put marketing dollars behind this product. The controller was coming to market during the holiday season, a time when Microsoft traditionally focused on deals and advertised volume drivers like a Surface Laptop.

It was just one of the many passion projects Microsoft develops every year that don't usually receive any marketing support. We had the perfect product, but we needed to pivot from a sales moment to a brand moment.



THE INSIGHT

FOR GAMERS WITH DISABILITIES, GAMING IS SO MUCH MORE THAN A GAME.

It's a social connection. For those who may be homebound, it's a way to connect to the outside world. Most important, it's one of the only times people with disabilities feel treated as an equal to those without, since their opponents don't see their disability on-screen.

As one disabled gamer put it: "There's a joy in being able to take an avatar and have her run barefoot through the grass because I can't. *My avatar is as able as yours.*"²

Source: ²"For disabled, video games can be a lifesaver," NBC News



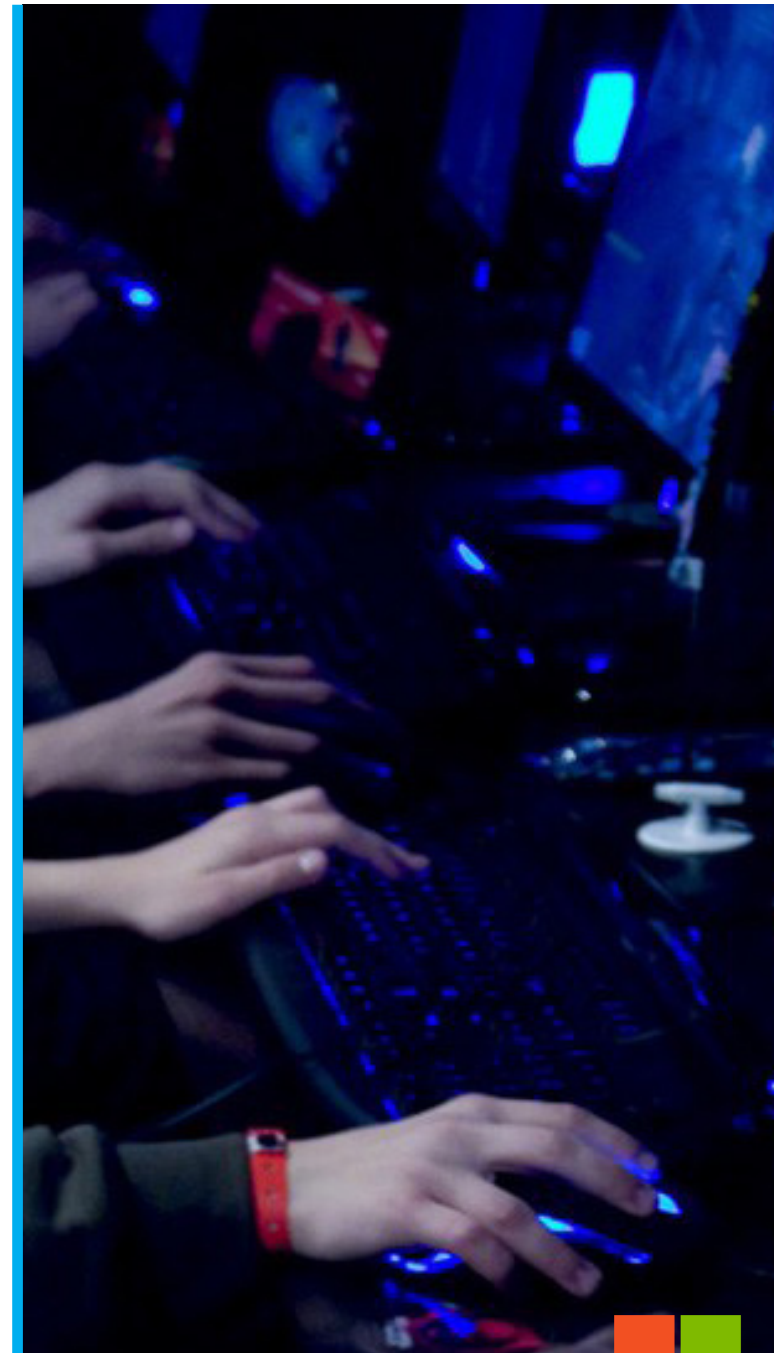
THE CHALLENGE

While we had the perfect product to deliver our mission, there was a big hurdle. If you weren't a disabled gamer—you **might not understand how something that looked so simple could actually be so game changing. You might not understand that this was the perfect product to deliver on the brand's mission of empowering people to achieve more.**

Most people who talked about or even thought about the need for products like this were the people it directly impacted—In this case, people with disabilities or people who knew them. These conversations tended to happen in small circles which wouldn't really shift the perceptions of Microsoft and the understanding of the mission outside the small community of disabled gamers.

Which is exactly why we needed to show how this controller could empower everyone.

To announce the adaptive controller, and to deliver a larger brand message, we needed to **demonstrate its importance in the world of gaming and beyond.**



[Image: Flickr/wlodi](#)

THE STRATEGY

**WHEN EVERYONE IS ABLE TO PLAY,
EVERYONE WINS.**



A photograph of two young boys sitting on a dark brown couch. Both are wearing large black over-ear headsets with microphones. The boy on the left is wearing an orange and grey patterned jacket and holding a white game controller. The boy on the right is wearing a teal long-sleeved shirt and also holding a white game controller. They appear to be engaged in a video game. In the background, there are patterned cushions and a window with blinds.

THE IDEA

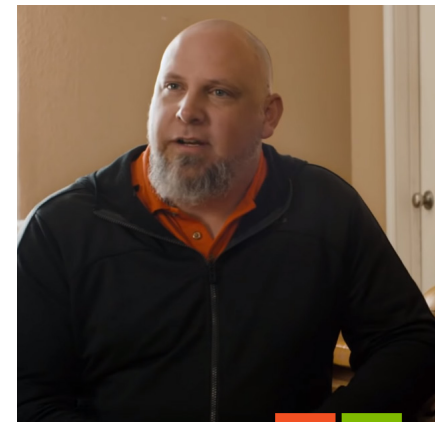
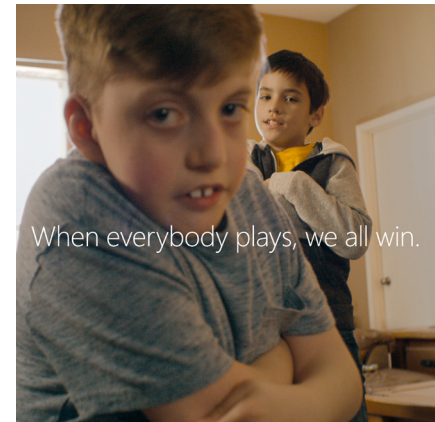
Show the human side of Microsoft's brand mission. Instead of focusing on the specs and technical side of the controller, we needed to show how the adaptive controller empowered everyone.

BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE

We changed the game—literally and figuratively—by using the real voices and experiences of gamers with disabilities to bring a human face to the mission.

Working directly with casting companies and our creative partners, we found real gamers with limited mobility for whom the adaptive controller would be a life changer. We gave them all the controllers before the shoot so they could be familiar with the product and use it as they would—in their own ways—so we could capture authentic product interactions and emotions.

Working with these kids, listening to their stories, seeing them as the bad-ass gamers they truly are, we also wanted to ensure we were doing them justice and creating work that heroized them, and did not pity them.





BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE



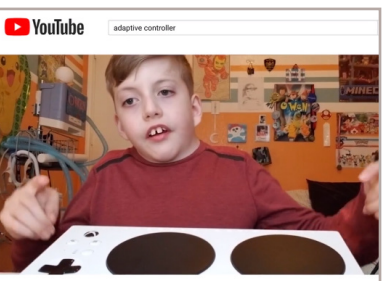
A LAUNCH WORTHY OF THE BIGGEST STAGE.



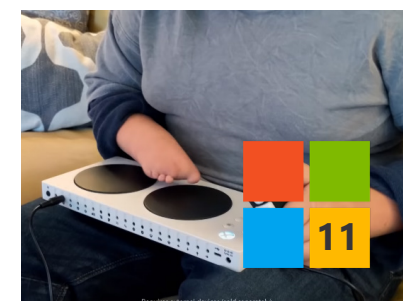
To reach our goals, a quiet launch solely to the disabled gaming community would not do the product or the amazing disabled gaming community justice. Nor would it create the dent around brand perceptions and education of our mission that we needed. So, we went the opposite direction and tackled the biggest sporting event of the year—the Super Bowl. Its focus around physical ability provided the perfect juxtaposition and context to shift the cultural conversation around inclusivity, and demonstrate the larger brand mission of Microsoft.



With so much noise during the Super Bowl, we had to seed momentum early, so we launched with a long form SOLV on our owned social platforms the Thursday before our :60 spot launched during the game.



We continued to ignite conversation after the Super Bowl by creating a gaming tournament amongst both abled and disabled gamers, the first of its kind. Owen, our hero gamer from the TV campaign, vlogged about his favorite video games and shared tips and demos on how the Xbox Adaptive Controller Works on his YouTube Channel...even becoming a Reddit sensation and racking up thousands of YouTube followers in the process!



WHAT HAPPENED?

WE BROUGHT OUR MISSION TO LIFE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY, EARNING BRAND LOVE...

Our “smallest” product launch of the year made the biggest splash and was able to resonate with gamers and beyond. Of those who saw the campaign, there was a:

- 30 point increase in “*Microsoft is a leader in innovation.*”³
- 35 point increase in “*likelihood to try Microsoft products and services.*”⁴
- 10 point increase in “*Microsoft provides the best gaming experiences.*”⁵
- 11 point increase in “*Microsoft is a brand that empowers me to achieve more.*”⁶
- 76% said Microsoft was a brand they loved.⁷

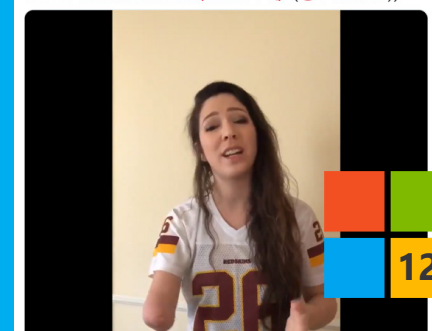
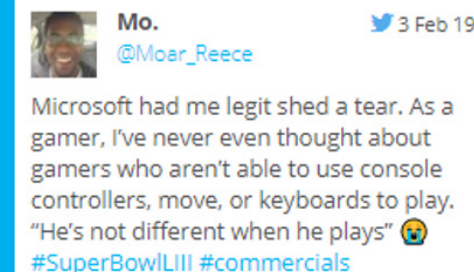
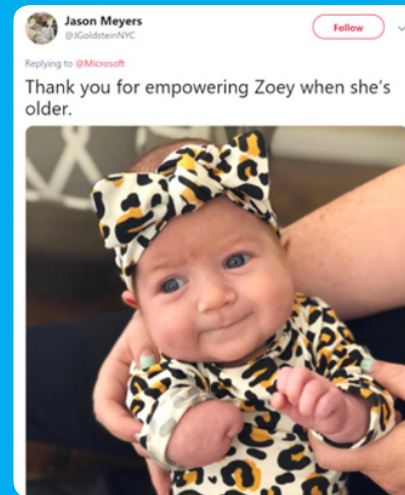
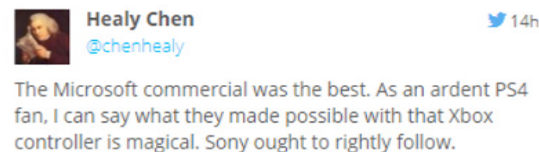
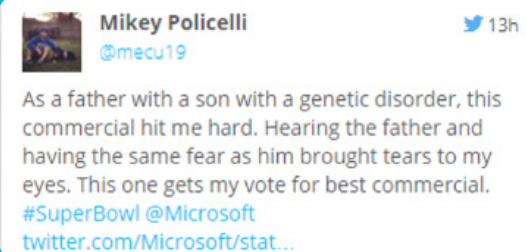
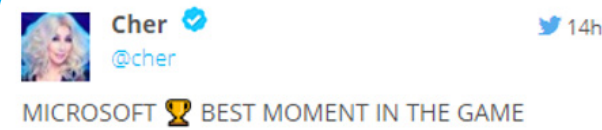
Given the technology category loses love and trust every day (think Apple losing its innovation luster and Facebook losing trust of users), it was a big deal to see these types of increases.

Sources:

³ Microsoft Internal Data, 2019. ⁶ Microsoft Internal Data, 2019.

⁴ Microsoft Internal Data, 2019. ⁷ Microsoft Internal Data, 2019.

⁵ Microsoft Internal Data, 2019.



WHAT HAPPENED?

...AND SPARKED A NATIONAL CONVERSATION AROUND INCLUSIVITY.

Not only were we the **#1 most effective Super Bowl ad of 2019**,⁷ we were able to get a national conversation going around the importance of inclusive design in tech. We saw an **879% increase in #GamingForEveryone** social share of voice,⁸ a **77% total increase** in conversation about inclusive gaming⁹ and a **58% total increase** in overall conversations about inclusive design.¹⁰

We're also seeing our principles of accessibility impact the *entire* gaming industry. Major Xbox competitors, like Google, are enabling their platforms to be compatible with the Xbox controller, and gamers are hacking other devices, like their Nintendo Switches, to work with the controller...truly changing the game for everyone who plays.

Making the gaming community more accessible is important, but there's still progress to be made in making the world a more inclusive place for everyone. **With \$1B impressions¹¹ generating over \$35MM in earned media,¹²** we've gotten the conversation going with a powerful start.

Sources:

⁷ Adweek, "Most Effective Super Bowl Ads, 2019"

⁸ Data collected from Spredfast, 2019

⁹ Data collected from Spredfast, 2019

¹⁰ Data collected from Spredfast, 2019

¹¹ Data gathered from partner agency and Microsoft, 11/19/18-2/4/19

¹² Proprietary data gathered from partner agency, 2019