

# Intellectual Property Enables the Disabled

The story of one business working with the disabled community to develop a safer, more accessible, and more inclusive world for all.

Imagine a world where pathways are more accessible and traffic intersections are safer for pedestrians. Mobility Unlimited Technology Worldwide (MUTW) isn't just imagining it. Driven by intellectual property (IP), MUTW is finding innovative solutions to safety and accessibility.

Approximately 55 million people worldwide currently live with a disability. Among those are an estimated 5.5 million wheelchair users in the U.S. alone; a number that grows by approximately 1 million each year. Despite recent metropolitan trends toward greater walking-friendly infrastructure, pedestrians—especially disabled pedestrians—still face significant risks. A 2015 study by Georgetown University Medical Center found that the mortality risk for wheelchair pedestrians was approximately 36% higher than non-wheelchair pedestrians, noting:

“When there is poor pedestrian infrastructure or it's poorly adapted to people with mobility impairments, people who use wheelchairs often are forced to use the streets, or are otherwise exposed to greater risk.”

Dr. Helen Dowdell-Brown, the CEO of MUTW, is all too familiar with the challenges disabled people face. Her father was a veteran, a wheelchair user, and her inspiration

to solve this challenge. She also identifies herself as a member of the disabled community. After her town experienced firsthand the effects of a local wheelchair user struck by traffic while crossing the street, she was prompted to action.

It is all too fitting that Dr. Brown's story reflects elements of fellow innovator Garrett Morgan's, inventor of the three-way traffic light, prolific patent owner, and the self-proclaimed “Black Edison.” Among MUTW's advances is its flagship innovation, Wheeldestrian, which is the first and only wheelchair traffic signal system. Wheeldestrian's first generation technology integrates into existing traffic signals, flashing the international symbol for accessibility toward motorists.

As Dr. Brown explained, “Science, medicine, and technology have outpaced our infrastructure. We were living in an era at one point where wheelchair users and people with disabilities that had mobility aided needs were pretty much confined to certain spaces. We've evolved into a space where wheelchair users and blind pedestrians and small statured individuals and parents with their strollers are out in the streets. They're going to walkable, rollable communities. They need sidewalks. They need curb cuts. They're integrating into spaces more so than ever before. So basically,



**Dr. Helen  
Dowdell-Brown**  
CEO, MUTW

our technology just creates a safe space for those individuals.” Integrating these persons through accessibility is also key for ensuring their talents reach and contribute to our communities, culture, and socioeconomic systems.



Images courtesy of MUTW

When asked about the role of IP in MUTW’s mission, Dr. Brown said, “IP in my industry is paramount. They basically safeguard your innovative solutions from imitation and ensure that your technology remains accessible and beneficial to those who need it the most.”

“IP protections make sure that you’re protected and beneficial to the communities that you serve. IP also provides a competitive edge and an advantage by allowing us, the creators, to establish our brand identity and to protect our inventions and to continue to drive innovation within this industry.”

A point of pride for MUTW—especially Dr. Brown—is their continued collaboration with those in the community they serve. “I work alongside persons with disabilities whose voices are not necessarily always a part of a design space. Things are designed for them, but

not with them in mind.” Imagine that: IP-enabled innovations and solutions by and for disabled persons.

Certainly, this sort of innovation isn’t without its challenges. Among those identified by Dr. Brown are resources and funding, rising IP infringement, inadequate enforcement of IP rights, and disparity in IP protections across jurisdictions. However, as Dr. Brown noted, collaboration between policymakers and stakeholders, alongside advocating for policies that support innovation and accessibility, will go a long way to solving some of these challenges.

MUTW can only maximize its reach and impact, creating a safer and more inclusive world, because of IP protections. As Dr. Brown stated, “Without IP rights, you lack validation. I’ve had a lot of great successes, but if I didn’t have my IP, I wouldn’t be able to accelerate in my innovation at all.”

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Accessibility. Inclusivity. Representation. Innovation. Thanks to IP, Dr. Brown and her team at MUTW are making the world safer, better, and more accessible.



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