

Newsletter preview:

Pop2See, Nestlé Greece, AB Vassilopoulos, and ACEin joined forces through the SmartGen initiative from ECR Hellas to explore how shopping can become more accessible for blind and visually impaired consumers.

The pilot focused on real everyday challenges, from product recognition and barcode scanning to expiration date identification, customer support access, and in-store guidance. What emerged was a practical, evolving accessibility solution that shows how innovation, retail, and inclusion can come together to create meaningful and scalable impact.

This collaboration is a strong example of how brands can turn accessibility into action. Retail brands interested in building more inclusive customer experiences are warmly invited to connect with Pop2See and explore future collaborations.

Making shopping more accessible: the story of the Pop2See x Nestlé x AB Vassilopoulos pilot

Innovation becomes truly meaningful when it helps more people participate in everyday life with greater ease, dignity, and independence. This was the spirit behind a pilot collaboration that brought together [Pop2See](#), [AB Vassilopoulos](#), [Nestlé Greece](#), and the Athens Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation ([ACEin](#)) of the Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB), through the SmartGen initiative from [ECR Hellas](#).

At the heart of this collaboration was a simple but powerful question: **how can shopping and product interaction become more accessible for blind and visually impaired people?**

For many blind consumers, everyday actions that most people take for granted, such as identifying a product, checking its expiration date, navigating inside a store, or reaching customer support independently, can still be major challenges. Shopping often requires the assistance of another person, limiting autonomy and making access to information more difficult. This pilot aimed to address exactly that.

From robotics to AI-powered accessibility

Pop2See began in 2021 as a robotics team focused on creating assistive solutions for blind students. One of its early efforts explored how text written by a teacher on a classroom blackboard could be converted in real time into Braille, helping blind students access educational content more independently.

The initiative quickly gained recognition. The team represented Greece in EUCYS 2022 and earned international distinction at the World Robot Olympiad 2022, where it placed second globally.

Following this momentum, and as AI technologies were launched and rapidly evolved, the team expanded its vision. What started as a robotics initiative gradually transformed into a broader accessibility ecosystem powered by artificial intelligence. Pop2See began developing digital solutions to help blind users access previously inaccessible information through a mobile app, exploring use cases such as product identification, medicine recognition, educational content, and environmental understanding.

As the initiative matured, Pop2See joined the wider innovation ecosystem of ACEin, where it continued developing as an accessibility-focused startup.

The SmartGen from ECR Hellas opportunity

Through ACEin, Pop2See applied to participate in SmartGen from ECR Hellas, a platform designed to foster meaningful collaboration between startups and established companies around real-world challenges.

There, Pop2See was successfully matched with Nestlé Greece and AB Vassilopoulos, a pairing that felt both natural and promising.

On one side, Nestlé Greece helped shape the product side of the experience, matching the Pop2See Team with Nescafé, contributing to how the Nescafé-related journey would work for blind users.

On the other hand, AB Vassilopoulos helped shape the store side of the pilot, supporting the operational process and enabling access to the relevant information needed to build the in-store experience.

Pop2See contributed its growing expertise in AI-powered accessibility and product recognition for blind users.

Together, the teams formed a pilot around a highly practical use case: improving the product and in-store experience for blind consumers.

Defining the challenge

The collaboration focused on two connected journeys.

The first was the interaction with Nescafé products, both at home and in-store. This included making it easier for blind users to identify products through packaging recognition, scan and recognize barcodes, identify expiration dates, distinguish between similar products or product

variations, access product-related information through structured databases, and connect more easily with customer support when needed.

The second was the in-store journey inside AB Vassilopoulos, especially the path from entering the supermarket to reaching the relevant product section. This involved exploring how a mobile app experience could support users with verbal guidance, image-based assistance, and indoor navigation elements.

This broader shopping journey can be understood in three stages.

1. Before entering the store, a blind person may need information about the space itself, such as the layout, number of floors, and general organization of the store.
2. During the visit, they may need support identifying products, prices, categories, packaging, and expiration dates.
3. After the shopping experience, they may need an accessible way to connect with customer support, ask follow-up questions, or resolve issues independently.

This made the partnership especially relevant under the guided navigation and accessibility challenge of SmartGen from ECR Hellas.

Building with real users, not just for them

A particularly important part of the pilot was that it was shaped with direct input from a blind partner of the Pop2See team, Juliana Bousi, who contributed throughout the testing and definition of the solution.

Her involvement helped ground the collaboration in real user behavior and real accessibility needs. Like many blind smartphone users, she already navigates digital life through screen readers such as VoiceOver on iOS and TalkBack on Android. This meant the question was not whether blind users can use smartphones, because they already do, but rather how to design a better solution for a specific retail and product-access challenge using tools that already fit naturally into their daily routines.

The goal was not to create a separate accessibility path, but to design a user experience that could integrate smoothly into familiar smartphone-based interactions.

The people behind the pilot

The collaboration was also defined by the working relationships developed between people from the participating teams. From Pop2See, Alice Rangou led the process, alongside Eftychia Baka, Head of Ecommerce from Nestlé Greece and Gregory Bantras, Data Insights & Analytics Director from AB Vassilopoulos.

What the team built

Through multiple meetings, mentoring sessions, testing cycles, and collaborative discussions, a practical pilot solution gradually took shape.

What emerged was a mobile digital experience within the Pop2See Application ([iOS](#), [Android](#)) that aimed to support blind users across five key areas.

1. Generic image recognition
2. Barcode-based product identification
3. Expiration date recognition
4. Interaction with structured product databases
5. Connection to customer support

Together, these capabilities aimed to help users browse products more independently, understand what they are holding or facing, and access important information that is often unavailable to them in accessible form.

The pilot included approximately 40 Nescafé products, and multiple testing sessions, mainly with Juliana, and a focus group in collaboration with organization [Me Alla Matia](#).

At the same time, the team explored the challenge of indoor retail navigation, one of the most ambitious parts of the collaboration. The pilot was designed to take place in two stores and proved to be one of the most demanding parts of the project, as AI support for physical indoor navigation is still evolving. Even so, this part of the collaboration helped clarify both the opportunities and the current technological boundaries in the field.

Why accessibility matters commercially too

Accessibility is first and foremost about autonomy, dignity, and equal access. But it also matters commercially.

When brands invest in inclusive solutions, they do more than improve one customer journey. They create scalable ways to reach more people, strengthen loyalty, improve customer experience, and build stronger social impact through practical action. Inclusive design can turn previously inaccessible information into accessible experiences, opening the door to more meaningful engagement between brands and consumers.

This is especially relevant at scale. OpenAI has officially shared that more than 250 million people around the world are blind or have low vision.

For brands, this means accessibility is not only a matter of responsibility. It is also a way to respond to a large and often underserved community with solutions that are meaningful, scalable, and capable of building long-term trust.

A successful pilot with long-term potential

The pilot became a strong example of how startups and established brands can work together to address accessibility in practical, scalable ways. It was presented at the ECR Hellas Conference in June 2025, where it stood as a case of real collaboration between innovation, retail, and inclusion.

The duration of the pilot was roughly six months. Following the program, the collaboration continues as a live and evolving partnership between Nescafé Greece and Pop2See, with the aim of further developing and refining the experience for blind users who want to interact more independently with products and services.

Beyond the immediate pilot, the broader value is clear. For blind users, solutions like this represent greater autonomy, better access to information, and a more equal experience in everyday life. For brands, they show how accessibility can move from intention to implementation.

Joining this journey

The process behind such an experience is both practical and replicable. It requires collaboration between Pop2See and an interested retail or product brand to structure the right datasets, define product patterns, organize barcode and packaging information, and shape a user flow that is genuinely accessible.

This pilot was not only a successful collaboration. It was also a proof of concept for how accessibility innovation can be deployed in real consumer environments.

Pop2See welcomes more retail brands that want to work at the intersection of accessibility, AI, and retail, helping transform inaccessible information into accessible experiences and making shopping more independent for blind consumers. Brands interested in building more inclusive retail experiences are warmly invited to connect with Pop2See and explore future collaborations.

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