

Customer Service

Ensuring full access to your business and services is one great way to expand your customer base. There are approximately 51 million Americans with disabilities (roughly 18% of the population). In addition, each of those people has friends and family members who care about disability and accessibility. Individuals with disabilities control \$176 billion in discretionary income, and this figure does not even include the spending capabilities of their companions. Older customers and aging baby boomers also benefit from your business' accessibility features.

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- ▶ Use common sense and extend common courtesies to everyone.
- ▶ Don't patronize; treat adults like adults.
- ▶ Be patient. People with disabilities and seniors might require more time to express themselves or to move about.
- ▶ Speak directly to the person and maintain eye contact; don't speak through a companion, aide, or interpreter.
- ▶ Describe and address people with disabilities appropriately. Avoid terms such as handicapped, victim, afflicted, confined.
- ▶ Make sure your business is accessible. Become familiar with accessible building standards and put them into place wherever possible.
- ▶ Offer assistance and listen for response—follow any specific instructions.
- ▶ Do not pet, feed or distract service animals. They are working animals, not pets.

AREAS TO ASSESS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

- ▶ Parking lot
- ▶ Entrance
- ▶ Lobby
- ▶ Service counters
- ▶ Outdoor areas
- ▶ Elevators
- ▶ Hallways
- ▶ Communication (TTY, Braille, etc.)
- ▶ Emergency exits
- ▶ Any area utilized by the public

All of these areas have specific accessibility requirements. Your regional DBTAC (Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center) is available to discuss these requirements, provide training, and answer your other ADA questions.

DBTAC:
National Network
of ADA Centers
(800) 949-4232 v / tty
www.adainfo.org

PRACTICAL TIPS:

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

- ▶ Train your staff in disability etiquette.
- ▶ Have a pad of paper handy in case a customer is deaf or unable to speak.
- ▶ Welcome service animals into your establishment. Service animals assist people with all types of disabilities, including individuals who are blind, deaf, have epilepsy, use wheelchairs, and many others.
- ▶ Whenever possible, provide grassy areas outdoors for service animals to relieve themselves.
- ▶ Make sure your staff is aware of your business' accessibility and is trained to respond accurately to inquiries about accessibility.
- ▶ Before denying a disability-related request, consider reasonable creative solutions, which may include borrowing or renting equipment. Remember, people with disabilities are your customers.
- ▶ Make sure customers with disabilities are included in your emergency evacuation plan.
- ▶ Make sure that your business' website is accessible and includes alt tags (text describing graphics) and/or a link to a text only version of your site.
- ▶ Utilize available federal tax incentives to make your business more accessible and to hire employees with disabilities. Many states also offer tax incentives.

You will find that many of these practices will also improve your ability to meet the needs of customers without disabilities.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- ▶ **DBTAC: National Network of ADA Centers**
Provides free technical assistance, training, and information.
800-949-4232 V/TTY www.adata.org
- ▶ **Reaching Out to Customers with Disabilities**
An online training developed by the US Department of Justice.
www.ada.gov/reachingout/intro1.htm
- ▶ **Checklist for Existing Facilities**
Accessibility checklist developed by Adaptive Environments Center, Inc. and Barrier Free Environments, Inc.
<http://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf>
- ▶ **Tax Incentives ADA Quick Tips**
A card developed by the DBTAC: Mid-Atlantic ADA Center outlining the tax incentives available for accessibility.
<http://www.adainfo.org/publications/quicktips/tax.pdf>
- ▶ **Sign Language Interpreters ADA Quick Tips**
A card developed by the DBTAC: Mid-Atlantic ADA Center outlining the provision of sign language Interpreters under the ADA.
<http://www.adainfo.org/publications/quicktips/interpreters.pdf>

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DBTAC
Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center
National Network of ADA Centers