SIMPLE WAYS TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS ACCESSIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

It is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation that you make reasonable adjustments to ensure that your product or service is accessible to individuals with disabilities or learning differences.

Being accessible also means that more customers can access what you have to offer, including older individuals, young parents and people who have health conditions or issues such as dyslexia or poor eyesight, for example.

This guide will give simple, inexpensive tips on measures you can introduce quickly to become a more accessible business.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

#1 You become more profitable

There are several studies which demonstrate that businesses which are accessible are more profitable. A very obvious reason for this is that you can reach more potential customers. With one in five individuals experiencing disability or a long term health condition in their lifetime, you'll be opening your doors to far more customers.

REVENUES ARE HIGHER **28%**   PROFIT MARGINS ARE HIGHER **30%**

#2 YOU IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Many of the changes you make when you begin to increase accessibility appeal to individuals who don't live with disabilities. For example, many people appreciate wider gaps between tables, or being able to call and talk to a person rather than being forced to communicate online.

#3 ITS GOOD FOR YOUR REPUTATION

Lots of businesses pay lip service to doing the right thing and being inclusive and kind, but nothing is as powerful as putting that into practice. That genuinely impresses people, and from that comes the most powerful marketing of all, word of mouth.

#4 YOU WILL RECRUIT TALENTED STAFF

1 in 5 working age people are disabled. They are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than if they did not have a disability. Often, however, very simple changes, like being able to work from home or flexible hours, for example, mean a very experienced and talented person can do a job very well. By being more accessible, you get to recruit from an often overlooked pool of talent. And, as every employer knows, getting the right people for the job makes all the difference.

IT'S THE LAW!

Under the Equality Act 2010, every business offering products or services to the public has a legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that what they offer is accessible to everyone. Obviously, it is not always possible to overcome all barriers, but if you fail to make efforts considered reasonable, you are breaking the law and could be sued. For example, if you refuse access to assistance dogs without good reason, you are breaking the law.

New laws are also being introduced around digital accessibility and currently many public sector organisations must already ensure that their websites or apps are accessible to people who live with disabilities.

SIMPLE WAYS TO MAKE YOUR WEBSITE MORE ACCESSIBLE

Use Alternative (Alt) Text for Images. People who cannot see an image sometimes use screen readers or text to voice software such as Speechify. If you add alternative text, then they will be able to understand what is in the picture via the voice reader.

Enable good colour contrast between text and background. Dark text on a light background often works best.

Add subtitles to videos. If you have a YouTube channel you can use the platform's speech recognition technology to generate subtitles automatically. There are also apps such as HappyScribe and Power Director you can use.

Check your website on a mobile device.
Websites that offer a good mobile user experience often meet a lot of key accessibility goals.

Use Accessibility software.
You can use free plugins or software such as Userway, or built-in accessibility features if you use Microsoft 365. Paid for software such as Recite is also available.

- Only 7% of people who are disabled use a wheelchair, but when many people think of disability they assume this is the group they are helping. In fact mobility impairment can also include those who use walking frames, have sensory processing challenges or long term health conditions which means they cannot stand or walk for long periods.

- If you do want to accommodate wheelchairs, you don't have to spend a fortune. You can buy portable ramps; good ones cost as little as £75.

- The average width of a wheelchair is 75cm. Usually you need at least a metre in width for a wheelchair to get through a space.

- When it comes to disabled toilets, you need enough room for the wheelchair to be placed next to the toilet. Also turning space.

- Wider, level pathways are helpful. Sometimes you can achieve this just by tidying up or moving furniture. Surfacing is important too. Gravel and mud are particular problems.

- No auto-opening door? Just put a notice on your door telling customers who have trouble opening it to call on your mobile, or put in a doorbell.

- If your premises are up steep stairs, or inaccessible, can you offer service or help over the phone, via a video meeting or in a cafe or hired meeting room?

- Very few people with vision impairment are 'black blind' most have some vision, so high contrast, large print signage for steps, for example, can be helpful.

- Having useful information, such as a menu, on your website or available as an email will mean that individuals who are vision impaired can use text to speech software, they will often have this installed on their own phone.

- Remember to always write a description in the Alt Text box for an image on a website. This is a description of what an image shows for people who cannot see it. It also helps with your SEO. It's hard to go back and do this retrospectively so train staff to always fill this box in when adding a new image.

- Tidy up and make sure people have enough space to walk through places without tripping.

- You don't always need to have braille descriptions, but using free software such as Userway or the Microsoft Office accessibility software means that people can make text bigger on their screens if they are looking at your website or emails

- Allowing assistance dogs isn't really optional, you should always do this unless there is a very good reason not to do so.

Many people with hearing impairment are not even diagnosed and some are perhaps unaware of their hearing challenges. Many may not wish to tell you. Always to ask: How would you prefer that I get in touch. Some people prefer emails for this reason. Try not to get annoyed if someone is having trouble understanding what you are saying. People tend to get cross with people who cannot hear well.

If you are talking to someone with hearing impairment do the following things:

- Stand so that the light is on your face, and you do not have your back to a light source, such as a window, for example.

- Speak and enunciate as clearly as possible. Even if someone is not trained in lip-reading, they will get clues from your expression and the way your mouth is moving.

- Background noise makes it very hard for people using a hearing aid to pick out particular voices or sounds. Hearing loops can help, but so can reducing background noise as much as possible. Use soft furnishings or soundproofing to muffle the acoustics. If you run a venue, ensure there are quiet spaces available for those with hearing difficulties.

- If you have a video or audio description about your services, provide the same information in text form as well.

- Always add subtitles to any videos you use.

- There are many different kinds of deafness, some individuals can talk, others cannot. Ask individuals how you can help. Good customer service is the key to accessibility.

- If you know in advance that a customer or visitor may need a British Sign Language translation, you can book an online translator who works via a mobile device.

AUTISM / SPECTRUM

- People who are autistic quite literally have a different brain structure. The definition is: someone who has difficulty with social interactions, communicating and they may exhibit repetitive behaviour (repetitive movement for example, or, needing to stick to the same rigid routine).

- There is a huge range of differences in the challenges faced by people who are autistic. Some individuals cannot speak and need symbols or picture boards to communicate. Other individuals are highly intelligent but may need support in day-to-day life. with issues, like coping with sensory processing issues (loud noises) or unexpected changes in routine.

- Videos showing your premises or a guide to what happens when someone uses your service or product help individuals who are autistic to prepare and plan to buy from you or visit you.

- Social stories, which set out short pictures and sentences explaining what you might expect to see and happen when they visit you are also helpful. You can get guidance on how to write these at the National Autistic Society website, www.autism.org.uk.

- Having a quiet space with no busy patterns or stimulating colours on the walls — or just being able to serve customers via video call in their own home helps many autistic individuals.

- Many individuals who are autistic find the social interactions, noise and frustrations of being in a queue overwhelming. Offer pre-booking or a way to avoid queues as a reasonable adjustment.

- Ask the individual and if appropriate, carer what help they need.

- We don't say individuals who are autistic have learning disabilities because many neurodiverse individuals are faster at learning some things than neurotypical people.

- Learning differences and difficulties often mean people struggle to read things. Use straightforward language, avoid jargon and anachronisms. In fact, this helps most people.

- Using images, symbols and videos can be really helpful in communicating your product, service or information about your premises.

- Individuals who are dyslexic may (but not always) find it helpful if you use sans fonts and strong contrast in text. Dark font on a light background is generally easier to read. Software such as Userway or Microsoft 365 offers different colours and contrasts which can help.

- If you meet someone with a learning disability and they are with a carer, always address the individual not the carer. Don't talk about them or assume they cannot understand. The individual may simply not be able to speak but may understand very well. The same applies to children.

- Ask the individual and carer what they need and what is helpful.

WRITING YOUR ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Many people confuse the accessibility statement with the information you put on your website to explain how the website is accessible. Your accessibility statement is a document which gives people information about how you help people with disabilities and learning differences to access your product or service. Here are some things you should include:

- Include all the key categories we have included in this guide. Access is not just about wheelchairs, it it about supporting individuals with different mobility, vision and hearing impairments and also autism and learning disabilities as well as long term health conditions.

- You may think you do nothing for some of these groups, but if, for example, you ask staff to take a short, free online course in autism awareness or working with people with learning disabilities (see our Useful Links page) you will have trained staff, which is hugely appealing and improves accessibility.

- As well as carefully thinking about all the key areas of accessibility, ensure you have a main point of contact who can help with accessibility enquiries and share their contact details in your statement.

- Include images where possible of parking, pathways, entrances and ramps as it helps individuals to plan a visit.

- Include several different ways to get in touch about accessibility, email, post, or phone – that's putting accessibility into action.

- Schedule regular updates to your Accessibility Statement. There is nothing worse for a disabled person than arriving and being disappointed because the information is out of date.

WHERE TO GET SUPPORT

FOR TOURIST AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES

TOURISM FOR ALL offers a free online training course 'So you think you're not Accessible?' with helpful case studies and tips. tourismforall.org.uk

ACCESS CORNWALL
We are happy to support Cornish leisure and hospitality businesses in writing accessibility statements, reviews and offering helpful tips. Our staff and volunteers who live with disabilities can also visit and offer tailored advice. accesscornwall.org.uk

FUNDED TRAINING
You can access funded courses such as Level 2 in Working with Individuals with Learning Disabilities or Understanding Autism at The Skills Network. theskillsnetwork.com

GRANTS
Staff members can access funds to help you as a business provide support in their role via the Access to Work scheme. www.gov.uk/access-to-work

USEFUL LINKS & RESOURCES

DisAbility Cornwall www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk

Hearing Loss Cornwall www.hearinglosscornwall.org

iSight Cornwall www.isightcornwall.org.uk

National Autistic Society www.autism.org.uk

Mencap mencap.org.uk

Disability Confident disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk

Access to Work www.gov.uk/access-to-work

British Deaf Association guide to sign language
bda.org.uk/help-resources/

FOR MORE HELP AND ADVICE ON ACCESSIBILITY CONTACT US AT HELLO@ACCESSCORNWALL.ORG.UK

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