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WHAT DOES THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT SAY?

In 1996 it became unlawful to refuse to serve a disabled person or to offer them a different service. Since 1999 service providers have had to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. It should be noted that "service" can include information as well as physical services.

Since October 2004 service providers may have to consider making permanent changes to premises, where physical features make access to their services impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people. The word "reasonable" is important as it doesn't necessarily mean you have to remove the feature if this is very difficult or costly for you. You can also:

- Alter the feature so it's no-longer so difficult.
- Suggest a way of avoiding it.
- Provide another way of making your services accessible.

When deciding what is reasonable, the law takes into account:

- Financial and other costs of making adjustments.
- The extent of disruption.
- The availability of financial and other help.

HOW IS "DISABLED" DEFINED?

A disability is "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

THE DISABLED MARKET IS HUGE...

- Accumulated spending power of over £45 billion pounds per annum
- UK disabled community - almost 9 million people, with a further community of 7 million carers who want/need to spend time (+ money) with disabled people

"WHAT SHOULD I SAY?"

Some people are nervous of speaking to disabled people or dealing with them because they are scared of saying "the wrong thing". Part of the reason for this is that they recognise that there are some politically correct phrases which it might be better to use but aren't quite sure what they are.

The organisation, "Greater London Action on Disability" gives some excellent guidelines for writing about and addressing disabled people. Here is a summary of some of them.

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Don't sensationalise a disability by using phrases like "afflicted with", "suffers from", "victim of", "crippled with" and so on.

Do use phrases such as "person who has arthritis" or "woman who has cystic fibrosis" instead.

Don't use generic labels for groups of disabled people, such as "the blind" or "the disabled". Try to emphasise the person not the impairment and say things like "deaf person", or "disabled people" instead. Say things like "children who are blind" rather than "blind children".

Don't use emotional descriptions such as "unfortunate", "handicapped" etc.

Don't use euphemisms such as "mentally incompetent" or "physically challenged" to describe disabled people. Such expressions can sound patronising.

The most important thing to remember is that you're dealing with people with disabilities. If you were to suddenly become disabled you'd still be the same person, and continue to think of yourself as an individual who probably doesn't like to be "lumped together" into a pot or described in a stereotypical way.

A group of people may be blind, and have similar physical needs related to their disability, but their mindsets and attitudes to life

will still be different. Disabled people are individuals, just like you. So any generalisation is difficult.

HELPING PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

There are many simple physical improvements which everyone can make without spending a fortune. Here are just some of them:

- Provide some rooms with telephones with large buttons and flashing lights when the phone rings - these are good for people with arthritis, dexterity problems and visual impairments.
- Have at least one copy of information in large print.
- Accept working or service dogs.
- Use coloured glassware and water jugs. When placed on a white table cloth, clear glasses can be difficult to see.
- Use clear typefaces, contrasting colours, and non-reflective signs. Ensure they are well lit. If you use Braille signs, make sure they are at the right height.
- The next time you decorate, make sure that door surrounds & frames are in contrasting colours with the wall and door.
- Ensure all steps are clearly marked.

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- Avoid using white towels in white bathrooms and public toilets use coloured towels that can be found more easily.
- Trim overhanging plants/hedges along pathways so they don't "attack" people as they pass by.
- Make sure that glass doors or other large glazed areas are identified with coloured stickers.
- If someone looks as if they need assistance, offer it, but wait for them to accept before you help. Speak to people with visual impairments before you take their arm. Tell them what you are planning to do as you guide them around, giving clear instructions and explanations such as "we're about to go up three deep steps".

HELPING PEOPLE WITH HEARING DIFFICULTIES

- Have writing materials handy for people with hearing difficulties.
- Try to speak to anyone with hearing difficulties in a place away from too many other sounds. Move away from a TV lounge (or switch off the TV).
- Ensure that you and your staff speak clearly and look straight at customers.
- Consider installing an induction loop to help people with hearing aids hear more clearly.
- Many people (up to half a million) find it difficult to use a conventional telephone. Offer alternative ways of communicating such as fax, or email. Many people with

- hearing difficulties use text on their mobile phone, even when standing next to the person they are "speaking" to.
- The next time you replace a TV, try to include teletext and subtitles as an option.
- Have a portable "vibrating alarm" available on request for guests who may have difficulty in responding to an audible fire alarm.

Could you or your staff enrol on a British Sign Language course? Even if you can only learn the basics, this might be very helpful to some of your customers.

HELPING PEOPLE WHO HAVE PHYSICAL DISABILITIES OR PROBLEMS WITH MOBILITY

Specialist equipment can often be hired from Social Services, Red Cross or Disability Information Advice Line (DIAL). Here are some other things you can do.

- If there is a bar or restaurant that has steps to reach it, offer table service to those who cannot access it.
- Provide adapted crockery and cutlery - for example with chunkier handles for people who might find it difficult to grip smaller versions.
- Make a low desk available for reception or ensure that reception staff approach a wheelchair user and don't lean over the desk.

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- Think about the height of seats and stools - are they easy to get on and off?
- Talk directly to the disabled person not the carer.
- When talking to a wheelchair user, don't lean on the wheelchair - it's their personal space.
- When promoting your services make sure you provide full information on how accessible it is. It is frustrating for people when they are given the wrong information. It is best to give full and accurate descriptions (e.g. entrance has one step, 7 inches high) so that individuals can decide on whether your building is accessible to them, rather than you trying to make a decision on their behalf.

MAKING PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL MORE ACCESSIBLE

Around 2 million people in UK are blind or partially sighted. This figure doesn't include those who have temporary sight disturbances for whatever reason or some older (and younger!) people who simply appreciate easy to read information.

There are several ways of providing information for people who are blind or have only partial sight.

- You can provide information in Braille, but don't assume everyone can read Braille - many people would prefer large print.

- Offer "large" print - this means usually a font size between 16 - 22 point font.
- Provide "clear" print by following the guidelines below. This means simply making your print material clear and easy to read so it's good practice for everyone not just to target people with visual impairments.

PRINT GUIDELINES

- Use a minimum font size of 12 (The Royal National Institute for the Blind recommend 14).
- Use plain English.
- Strong contrast aids legibility - e.g. dark text on light background.
- Use straightforward typefaces and avoid ornate ones or simulated handwriting.
- Keep plenty of space between lines - 1.5 - double-spaced text.
- Bold type is easier to read for many people, Capitals are harder.
- Make numbers distinctive - 3,5,8 and 0 are easily confused.
- Short sentences & paragraphs are easier to read (for everyone).
- Don't condense or stretch lines of text.
- Align text to left margin.
- Avoid justified text as large gaps can be confusing.
- Don't set type over images.
- Glare can make glossy paper harder to read.

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- Avoid thin paper - where type shows through from the other side.

PROMOTING YOUR ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES

Unfortunately, not enough places offer good and accessible facilities. If you can do so, it's great because you'll be able to attract new visitors and generate good publicity for your company.

Here are a few other ways to let people know what you offer:

- Buy or source mailing lists of people belonging to particular organisations or try to find lists with a higher proportion of older people who might be interested in your services;
- Target all the relevant publications and media for the disabilities you can cater for. Don't forget "talking newspapers" (www.tnauk.org.uk) to target people with visual impairments. Local radio stations are also a good way to reach them, as are newspapers such as "Disability Now";
- There are some guidebooks that specifically deal with holidays for disabled people such as RADAR's "Holidays in Britain and Ireland";
- Some websites like www.youreable.com have good communities of disabled people. There are websites

targeting people with practically every disability you can think of.

- Invite journalists and members of disability groups to come and try out your services for themselves. Word of mouth is a very important source of new business for many communities.
- Make sure local Tourist Information Centres are fully aware of how accessible your services are.
- Enter awards like England for Excellence and make sure everyone else in the country knows how good you are!

MORE INFORMATION

There are several ways in which you can get information about some of the physical changes you might need to make to your property:

- Ask a local disability organisation for their advice.
- Ask staff within your local authority for advice.
- Most local authorities have access officers within the planning department and these can generally visit your premises and offer advice that you might take to improve access.
- Carry out an access audit which looks at access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users. For details of accredited access auditors, contact the National Register of Access Consultants www.nrac.org.uk

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- You can also use a guide to carry out your own access audit. The Centre for Accessible Environments has a publication "Access Audits: a guide and checklists for appraising the accessibility of public buildings" which costs around £20 and explains how to do this.
<http://www.cae.org.uk>

There are a lot of useful resources on the web. Here are a few of them.

Site	Link
Official government site for disability matters	www.disability.gov.uk
VisitBritain	www.visitbritain.org/ukindustry
Disability Rights Commission	www.drc-gb.org
The Disability network	www.radar.org.uk
Holiday Care Service	www.holidaycare.org.uk
Tourism for All	www.tourismforall.org.uk
Royal National Institute of the Blind	www.rnib.org.uk
RNID - representing the deaf and hard of hearing	www.rnid.org.uk
Plain English Campaign	www.plainenglish.co.uk

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