

# The benefits of marketing to people with disabilities

There are two very good reasons why people with disabilities should be given the same opportunities as others:

- It's to everybody's advantage; and
- It's the law. By law, barriers to participation must be removed.

## It's to everybody's advantage

The rewards for arts organisations include more diverse and larger audiences, greater customer satisfaction and better designed services and premises.

One in six people in Australia has a disability. This fact was unearthed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Survey of Disability, Ageing and carers 1993). Though many of these people already attend arts or cultural activities this figure of one in six shows the tremendous untapped potential of the disability audience. If access were made easier, many more people with a disability would be likely to attend and would bring their friends and family.

Improving access for people with a disability will increase customer satisfaction. All patrons will benefit from the greater comfort and ease of use of the facilities. Inclusive design and services can be appreciated by everyone, including overseas guests.

Proper staff training in how to provide better service to people with a disability results in improved relations with all your patrons.

A recent guide released by the Arts Council of England found that there 'is a need for marketing managers to be more realistic about the motivation and process of attracting disabled people. If you view the provision of facilities for disabled people as a favour, you place a burden on the disabled customer who is expected to feel grateful for being able to attend an event. This sets up the risk of mutual disenchantment'. What we are seeking here in Australia is mutual benefit.

Research proves that it is far more efficient to develop an ongoing relationship with customers than to constantly have to seek new customers. The importance of repeat business in the arts and entertainment sector cannot be overemphasised.

A loyal base of customers who regularly attend exhibitions, or purchase subscription tickets to see a number of plays or concerts, makes it easier to plan and to predict sales.

Focus groups and surveys conducted in New South Wales as a basis for this publication show that the majority of people with a disability hold a positive view of the arts, encouraging family, friends and support workers to attend arts events with them. This enthusiasm lends greater strength to the reasons for regarding people with disabilities as a viable target market for the Australian arts industry. In the United States and United Kingdom this sector is already regarded as a serious target for arts and cultural participation.

**“ Many people benefit from the services and facilities provided for people with a disability. This includes parents with small children, visitors from overseas and the aged. ”**

#### **It’s the law. By law, barriers to participation must be removed**

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with a disability. This includes the following areas:

- Access to premises that are open to the public, (‘access’ is defined below)
- Provision of goods, services and facilities
- Education and training
- Membership of clubs and associations - this includes arts, literary or cultural clubs

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) applies throughout Australia. It affects all public and private arts, cultural and entertainment organisations offering services and facilities to the public. It also affects organisations offering education or training in the arts.

As well, many States / Territories have their own legislation making discrimination against people with a disability unlawful. Arts organisations must comply with both the Federal and State legislation.

**" Attitudes can be as impassible as physical and sensory barriers. "**

#### **Disability definition**

The definition of disability under the DDA is very broad. It includes physical, intellectual, sensory and psychiatric disabilities.

Definitions of disability are constantly shifting. Disabilities can be permanent or temporary, debilitating or not, clearly defined or 'hidden'. Asthma, diabetes, heart and lung conditions, migraines and epilepsy are all hidden disabilities. Removing barriers, therefore, is not as simple as just providing ramp access for people in wheelchairs!

**" One in six people in Australia has a disability. "**

#### **Access definition**

Access means making sure that your services can be used by people with disabilities. Improving access means providing facilities, technical aids, and staff training that allow people with disabilities to use your services.

Access, then, should be understood in its broadest sense. Though increased physical access is perhaps the most obvious interpretation of improving access, it can also be understood in terms of improving people's attitudes and actions, putting processes into place such as on-line access and fax bookings, promoting your venue and events, pricing your tickets and timing your shows. In fact, all the suggestions in Section 4 are aimed at improving access.



### Some background on disabilities

More than one in six Australians has a disability. That means 3,176,000 people have one or more disabilities and the figure is rising. Projections indicate that by the year 2000 the figure will have risen to one in five.

Rates of disability are directly linked to age. Up to the age of 35 less than 10 per cent of the population has a disability. But from 35 onwards, disability rates rapidly rise. For those aged 45 to 54, 21 per cent have a disability; for those aged 60 to 64, 36 per cent have a disability; for those aged 75 and older, 67 per cent have a disability.

A physical disability is reported as the main disabling condition by 89 per cent of people with a disability and mental disorders by the remaining 11 per cent. Perhaps surprisingly, only 2 per cent of people with disabilities use wheelchairs.

**“ Most people will at some times in their lives experience a level of disability through accident or illness. ”**

The main disabling conditions reported by people with disabilities are arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions (27%); disorders of the ear and mastoid processes (14%); mental disorders (11%); and respiratory diseases (9%).

Focus groups held in New South Wales by Accessible Arts and written surveys carried out by Arts Access in Victoria, have shown that the majority of people with a disability have a positive image of the arts. Arts activities are popular and those who attend persuade their family, friends and support workers to accompany them. Those surveyed are not uncritical but they confirm that improved attention to issues of access from the arts industry would increase their participation.

### Terminology

The terms 'disabled' and 'the disabled', whilst in current use in the United States and United Kingdom, are considered inappropriate in Australia.

It is important to place the person before the disability; therefore, the phrase 'person with a disability' is acceptable, whereas 'disabled person' is not. A disability does not 'disable' a whole person

Note: all statistics in this section are derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.