

Introduction

This section discusses how your marketing can meet the needs of people with disabilities. Many disadvantages and problems experienced by people with a disability are the result of a lack of recognition of their specific needs, rather than any attempt to deny them what is available to others.

The following shows how to apply the principles of marketing to people with disabilities. Clear, practical steps are described under each of the six headings: people, product, place, price, processes and promotion. It is worth bearing in mind that putting these suggestions into practice will not only allow you to follow the law but will benefit people with disabilities, people without disabilities and you yourselves.

" While it may take a little time, consultation at the beginning can make sure that the right services are provided. "

Getting started: Consultation

This audience, like any other, needs to be asked what they want. In the same way as a young audience will quickly condemn as 'boring' any event forced on them without checking what is 'in' at the time, or without attempting to understand the diversity of their tastes and preferences, so will people with disabilities give slight credence to programming or facilities provided inappropriately through lack of consultation.

For many organisations beginning to market to people with disabilities the whole issue can seem daunting. Who do you contact? Where do you get the best advice? How much will it cost? How much time will it take?

The biggest hurdle is the first - who do you contact? Consultation is the key. The network you need to tap into is the one which will bring you into contact with the people with disabilities themselves. Keep in touch with disability organisations to keep up with changing needs and demands. Information on these groups is given in section 5, the resources section, and in appendix 3 which lists arts and disability organisations.

" The simple rule is for frontline staff to extend courtesy at the same level as they would, hopefully, be giving to all patrons. "

People

The people in your organisation can be the most beneficial source for improving access for people with disabilities. Conversely, they can also be one of the greatest barriers. People with a disability often point to negative or hostile attitudes from staff as being far more significant barriers than the physical.

One of the most successful ways of eliminating unfriendly service is to provide staff training. Staff may also need training to help them meet the needs of their patrons with a disability, eg. how to guide a blind person to their seat or how to use facilities such as hearing loops.

Training of staff should:

- Present people with a disability as customers, rather than a 'problem'.
- Address misconceptions and prejudices about disability.
- Include techniques for communicating and providing assistance.
- Prevent inappropriate offers of help which may be patronising.
- Increase understanding of the requirements of different disabilities.
- Teach staff to use all facilities.
- Make sure that all staff know everything about access within the premises, including the location of accessible facilities.

General Suggestions:

- Brief the box office. It is very important that all staff can give friendly, accurate and constructive advice. Not doing so is not just a missed marketing opportunity - it can put people with a disability at risk of physical discomfort or danger.

- Be honest if you are unsure and, as with any other patron, ask whether the person requires assistance. Take the cue from the response and do not be offended if the person declines.
- Ask 'Do you have any specific requirements?' if you're unfamiliar with a situation.
- Treat the patron with a disability as the expert about their disability and requirements. Saying 'What's wrong with you?' or 'You don't look like you have a disability' are definitely unacceptable.
- Keep in mind that it's not unusual to feel uncomfortable or confronted when first dealing with issues of disability. Just try to relax and be helpful.
- Try to rephrase your answer if you're asked to repeat something.
- Write things down if necessary.
- Be aware that some behaviour, such as short attention span, mood extremes, language and comprehension difficulties, limited concentration, drowsiness and thirsty, dry mouth may be caused by side effects of medication or a variety of disabilities. Be considerate with requests to take drinks into auditoriums and be clear, calm and confident in your communications.
- Give your name, talk to the person directly and say goodbye when leaving (particularly for people with a sight disability).
- Don't avoid or be embarrassed about using words that may refer to a person's disability, such as 'see' if they have a vision disability or 'walk' if they are in a wheelchair or use sticks. These are everyday words and don't cause offence.

Like any other audience segment, it takes time for word to get around and for people to try a new service. It is important to persist and to recognise that changes made to attract people with a disability inconvenience no-one and benefit many more than just the target audience.



Product

This section discusses straightforward ways to change the product your organisation is offering to make it more accessible.

Programs, Guides and Labels

These are very important to someone with a disability, particularly someone with a hearing or sight disability. They help that person to orientate themselves to the production, show or event.

- Make material for the public available in alternative formats whether it's specifically meant for people with a disability or not, for example, use large print versions of written material available.
- Offer a script, synopsis of the performance, or a written version of the audio tour. This is especially important for people with a hearing disability or acquired brain injury.
- Use a tactile map to give an impression of an artwork or sculpture that cannot be seen or touched. These can be embossed images produced on heavy paper or moulded in plastic.
- Use Braille labels. These should also have a descriptive element.
- Mount labels at a level where everyone is able to read them. This includes people in wheelchairs and children.
- Say how much wheelchair access is available on visitor's guides and plans. Try not to only indicate where the toilets and lifts are. Is there access to all facilities?
- Use desktop publishing software, photocopier enlargements and personal stereos or 'walkman' as simple ways of improving access.

On the Stage

There are ways of making your production more accessible. These include the use of sign language and also a fresh awareness of the roles people with disabilities portray.

“ It's possible to be sensitive to these issues without compromising artistic standards. ”

- Try to include sign language interpreted and audio described performances as a regular part of the season.
- Avoid old stereotypes of using disability as a metaphor for evil or to portray tragedy.
- Avoid more modern stereotypes, such as disability as a medical story and the 'super cripple' overcoming incredible odds.
- Use actors and performers with a disability in roles that portray a disability.
- Use actors and performers with a disability in non-disability roles.

Scheduling

The timing of the events can be crucial to people with disabilities:

- Learn through your consultation with people with disabilities what times are more suitable for them and for yourselves. Some people with disabilities and older people do not work. Daytime sessions are often the best for these people.
- Be aware of school holidays when scheduling access programs such as tactile and Sign Language interpreted tours. Many people may be uncomfortable in crowds, such as people with restricted mobility, schizophrenia or acquired brain injury. Try tailoring your access programs to school children with a disability during these periods.

People with a disability may rely on support workers, which places restrictions on attending morning and evening events. Galleries, museums and theatres are available in the afternoon but concerts and opera rarely are. The afternoon is also a preferred time for many older people.



Place

Accessing the Venue: Getting there

Access begins by getting your customers to your venue. Knowledge of the public transport available, good parking, set down areas for taxis, and clear signs help all of your visitors.

- Make staff aware of the area's public transport routes and times.
- Make staff aware of areas where taxis, including accessible taxis, can comfortably set down passengers. How far is this area from the main entrance?
- Put reserved parking spaces for people with a disability as close to the venue entrance as possible. Accessible parking bays are generally wider than usual to allow for wheelchairs on either side.
- Find out the nearest secure parking areas if parking is not provided at the venue. What is the condition of the route to the venue? Is there a proper footpath? Is there a steep hill? How many steps are there?
- Offer discounted or free parking in the nearest secure parking area.
- Give a realistic assessment of the safety considerations of the area, especially at night. Be aware of safety issues if, when closing at night, patrons are still waiting for taxis.
- Offer a fact sheet detailing all this information and including a map. Post it out, hand it out, and keep copies at the box office/reception for the staff and customers.

Outside the Venue

Physical access has to be considered outside the venue. The following suggestions look at things you can do.

- Enable all patrons to use the main entrance.
- Keep entrances well-marked and well-lit at night.
- Use dropped kerbs to help people crossing roads or moving from parking areas to your venue.
- Make sure paths, steps, ramps and entrance ways are made from a non-slip material, have a clear edge strip and are well-maintained.
- Put handrails up for steps and ramps.

Inside the Venue

Improving physical access inside your venue means reassessing the layout of your venue from a fresh perspective.

" At Disneyland there is a guide to its facilities and activities for people with visual impairments. People with disabilities in the USA expect to have free range within an institution. We need this in Australia. "

- Make sure your box office, reception and information areas are close to the main entrance. It should be clearly defined, well-lit and at a height accessible to all, including those in wheelchairs.
- Check that doorways, corridors and display areas are unobstructed.
- Check that visitor flow-routes are wide enough for walking frames and wheelchairs.
- Avoid using posts, single steps, projections and overhangs. If you can't change these immediately then highlight them by lighting or changes in textures and colours of the floor or wall, to reduce the risk of falls and injuries.
- Use clear labelling and colour coding on your venue map. Make it clear what areas are accessible.
- Use non-slip floor coverings. Don't use busy patterns that hide changes in the level of the floor.
- Use doors that open easily. Check that the handles are easily reached.
- Provide seating. Many people are unable to stand for long periods.
- Do not allow patrons to sit on stairs as it blocks the way for others.
- Use flashing light theatre bells and fire alarms as well as audio versions.
- Consider converting lift information to audio control. This can be done using computer software. Include information about what is located on each floor.



- Give warnings if using glare, mirror effects, reflections, flickering and strobe lights, and sudden changes from light to dark.
- provide an accessible telephone in the foyer.
- Welcome the guide dogs of people with a vision or hearing disability. Guide dogs do not misbehave or pose a hygiene risk. If the dog is unable to enter the theatre or auditorium, make 'dog-sitting' available in the lobby. Give the dog water and bring it to its owner at the interval and at the end of the performance.

Inside the auditorium

- Make aisle seats available for those who request them.
- Offer people using wheelchairs the opportunity to transfer to a theatre seat.
- Consider a flexible seating plan in theatres and auditoriums where people in wheelchairs or walking frames can sit with friends. Many allocated wheelchair places are often to the side or back of a venue, restricting the person's view and helping to create a sense of segregation since people can't sit with friends.
- Offer tactile or guided vision disability tours. Check that staff are aware that people with a vision disability may lean towards an exhibit. They should not be treated as a security threat. For theatre companies, offer a pre-show tour of the set.

Signs

Use signs to show people with disabilities what facilities are available for them. These include things such as audio guides, staff assistance, large type labels and toilets.

- Check that your signs are clear, prominent, and well-lit with maximum contrast. Place signs at a consistent and suitable height throughout the building.
- Use a key to explain what each symbol means.
- If you choose to use symbols to make space on your literature (although this should still be accompanied by written information on an access leaflet) make sure the symbols are meaningful and easily interpreted.
- Use internationally recognised symbols.

Price

Ticket Pricing

Living with a disability can be expensive. People with disabilities often have a limited amount of money available. Ticket pricing must be seriously considered as a marketing tool to attract people with disabilities. The benefits for your organisation are the potentially loyal audience you will be cultivating.

- Use discounted tickets to attract people with a disability, as with other audience segments. By promoting comprehensive concessions, regular visits are encouraged. This contributes to better attendance throughout the season.
- Offer discounted tickets to the support person as well. People with a disability may need or prefer to be accompanied by a companion. Market research conducted by Arts Access shows that the issue of free or discounted tickets for carers and companions is a crucial factor in attendance by people with disabilities.
- Try using a tiered pricing strategy similar to those available to young people, the unemployed and older people. This recognises the potential impact this audience segment may have on the arts.
- Offer access seats at the same price as the cheapest seats. A person's disability may require them to sit in expensive seats to see the stage or to see a sign interpreter. Those in wheelchairs or needing to occupy aisle seats may be disadvantaged by their position in a venue.



Processes

Making sure your processes, such as providing information and ticketing, are suitable and open to everyone is a straightforward, cost-effective way of improving access.

Buying Tickets

- Try to improve remote access to the ticket office. Accessing a ticket office in person or by phone can be difficult. Improving service may include booking by fax, e-mail and the Internet. For example, Victoria's Arts Access EASE information service and booking is on-line.

"Many people with disabilities have fluctuating health and this can make advance purchasing difficult."

- Relax ticket exchange conditions for people buying tickets for specific-needs events. Illness, accident and misadventure are disruptive for people with a disability. For example, the failure of an accessible taxi to arrive may mean the loss of the whole evening, often with no refund or replacement ticket available.
- Make exchanging tickets for all performances easy. Difficulty in exchanging tickets may also stop people from buying season or subscription offers.

Promotion

Letting people know that you have taken action to improve their access is a crucial part of your marketing strategy.

People with disabilities come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of ability. Their tastes vary from the classical to the zany. Sweeping generalisations such as 'deaf people like pantomime are of no more use here than statements like 'women like Mills and Boon' or 'kids prefer to see the Spice Girls'.

" People with disabilities come in all shapes, sizes and levels of ability. Their tastes vary from the classical to the zany... "

Advertising

- Include access information on the advertising you are currently using. It will be seen, read or heard by a percentage of people with a disability. Include a message, such as 'accessible venue, accessible program'.
- Promote access information to existing subscribers, as many may benefit from increased levels of accessibility and know others who would become new audience members because of it.
- Include questions on disability in your audience surveys. The information received will let you know the community's reaction to your initiatives and give you suggestions about areas for further improvement. The survey will also help to create awareness in the community of your organisation's efforts.
- Use disability organisations. Appendix 3 is a list of arts and disability organisations that publicise programs and venues to their members in printed and also alternative formats. This service is often offered free or for a small amount.
- Approach radio and television networks. They broadcast community service information and may advertise access services in return for a 'thank you' in the event program.
- Use 'Radio for the Print Handicapped'. This is available in all capital cities and accepts advertising for disability specific events, such as audio described performances and tactile tours of exhibitions.



- Advertise through more than one organisation.
- Advertise broadly through disability organisations.
- Use a mailing list to market more directly to people who will both benefit from services and facilities and have an interest in the art.
- Include people with a disability in your promotional material. This has been found to be successful in companies in the US.

Be aware that word of mouth networks are important to people with a disability. If a venue is found to be successful or not, word will spread.

" Don't worry about prejudging what may be required or expected, simply tell it as it is. "

Brochures

- Give access information in season brochures, guides, programs and handbills.
- Simply tell it as it is when describing your facilities.
- Use symbols to save space on handbills and programs. Make sure the symbols you choose are meaningful. Letraset produce a set of standard symbols (distributed by Esselte -code IL5207 - ask your stationer to order it for you). There are also computer fonts available which include some access symbols. If you do choose to use these symbols, make sure that a key is available somewhere giving a clear and concise outline of what you mean by each symbol.
- Give a more detailed listing in the subscription and season brochures. Include the disability access information in the main sections of the brochures if you can. Try not to use a separate flier.

One way of presenting your information is to divide it into sections, such as:

- Public transport and parking
- Getting in
- Using the box office/reception

- Ticket pricing policy
- Seating in the auditorium
- Social facilities (bar, restaurant)
- Facilities such as toilets
- Communication assistance
- Taking care of your guide dog/wheelchair
- Events and performances
- Feedback.

“ Give a positive message. This is done not just by what you say but how you say it. ”

Language

Language is a powerful tool. It's not just what we say, but the way that we say it that can make all the difference.

The amount of information you give and the language you choose to use may, inadvertently, give a negative message. Compare your normal approach to potential party bookers (“Bring along 10 of your friends and you can get in free!”) with the information you give to people with a disability (People with disabilities are catered for. Phone the box office”). Here the tone of the second message speaks to the reader, socially, in a different way. It can be interpreted by someone with a disability as saying any or all of the following, ‘I don’t know what to tell you’, ‘I see you as a problem’, ‘I don’t understand you’, ‘I see you as different’.

The solution is to use truthful and easy to understand language that honestly details your facilities. The following is one example:



“Our auditorium has three spaces for people using wheelchairs, all of which are next to seats for your companions, and we can help if you would prefer to transfer to a seat for the performance. Your guide dog is welcome to stay with you, or we will dog-sit and provide water in the foyer until the interval, when the dog will be brought to your seat. If you are deaf, please ask for the dates of our sign interpreted performances (on some, but not all performances). The bar can only be reached up a steep flight of steps, but we can bring drinks into the auditorium for people with disabilities if you make your order known to an usher on arrival. We are keen to make your night out an enjoyable one - please tell us if there is something we haven't thought of and we'll do our best to put it right.”

If in doubt, check out your language with people with disabilities. Think about being to the point and explaining what services and adaptations you have. The following is a list of words that you may find useful in your publicity.

Useful words and phrases

The following are acceptable words and phrases which may be of use in your publicity material.

- People with disabilities
- People with learning disabilities
- Deaf, or people with hearing disability
- Blind, or people with a sight disability
- People without a disability (as opposed to able-bodied)
- Person who uses a wheelchair (as opposed to wheelchair bound patrons or patrons confined to a wheelchair)
- Person with epilepsy (as opposed to epileptic)
- Person with a psychiatric disability (as opposed to mental patient or insane)
- Person with an intellectual disability (as opposed to mentally retarded or slow)
- Person with cerebral palsy (as opposed to spastic)
- Audio described performance

- Sign language interpreter (signer is inaccurate - you wouldn't call somebody translating into French a 'Frencher')
- Sign language interpreted performance. (A signed performance is one where all the cast would be using sign throughout - be careful to make the distinction)
- Accessible toilet, or wheelchair accessible toilet (as opposed to disabled toilet)
- Specific needs (as opposed to special needs)

All of these terms are preferred by people with disabilities. By using them, you let your intended audience know you are considerate of their needs.

Words and phrases to avoid

Avoid offensive terms such as 'cripple', 'dwarf' or 'midget', 'spastic', 'mongol' and inaccuracies such as 'invalid' or 'patient'. Try also to avoid value judgements such as 'sufferer from' or 'victim of' in public relations language, and disability sector terms such as 'client'.

The use of non-specific phrases, such as 'special facilities for people with disabilities' is also not particularly useful. It is much better to be clear about what you offer - flat access from the street, induction loop etc.

