



Missed Bu\$iness

How to attract more customers by providing better access to your business

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You could be missing out on potential customers

In 2006*, an estimated 13,510 Casey residents – or 5.8 per cent of the population – had disabilities causing profound or severe restriction of communication, mobility and self-care. For 21,870 residents, their disabilities can limit their employment or educational opportunities.

Overall, approximately 19 per cent of Casey residents had a disability, including over 4,170 children, 27,750 people of working age, and 12,460 older residents.

With a current population of over 253,000 and more than 10,000 new people moving into the area each year, the City of Casey's population is forecast to reach approximately 370,000 by 2026 (Victoria

in Future 2008). Due to the municipality's rapid growth, it is important that the City of Casey address current disability needs and prepare for the future demand for disability services and increased community participation.

This guide aims to help small business owners understand how to improve access to goods and services for a large part of our community that may be missing out – customers who have a disability.

Quality service is one of the most important things that a small business can offer.

(*Source – ABS 2006)



Which customers are we talking about?

Providing good access to your business will benefit people who:

- Are blind or partially sighted
- Have learning or intellectual disabilities
- Are deaf or hearing-impaired
- Have a physical disability who may use a wheelchair or walking frame or have arthritis
- Have a long-term illnesses
- Have mental health or psychological difficulties, and people with an acquired brain injury

Good access also benefits:

- Parents or carers of young children – particularly those with strollers or prams
- Older people
- Delivery people
- Shoppers with heavy bags
- Every customer – particularly when it's busy

Good access makes good business sense

As potential customers, each person will make choices about your business based on how easy it is to use.

If a person uses a wheelchair and there is a step at your front entrance, they, and the people who accompany them, will probably go to another business in your area which has a flat entrance or a ramp. If they find your staff unhelpful they probably

won't come back to your business.

But if you make an effort to provide corridors that aren't cluttered with boxes that could be fallen over, then people will appreciate the ease of shopping at your business. If you train your staff to be respectful – not patronising – then people with a disability are more likely to become regular customers.



Corridors free of clutter will make shopping easier.

Meeting your legal responsibilities

Improving access will also assist your business to meet your legal responsibilities.

In Australia, the law says that customers with disabilities should be able to access your goods or services just like any other customer. If a customer with a disability cannot get into your building or cannot access your goods or services they could make a complaint of discrimination under either:

- State or Territory anti-discrimination laws, or
- Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Act, 2006
- Disability Discrimination Act, 1992,
- Disability (Access to Premises-Buildings) Standards 2010
- Equal Opportunity Act, 2011.

Employment

The Equal Opportunity Act, 2011 specifies the requirements of employers and providers of goods and services to make reasonable adjustments for the employment of a person with a disability. Making reasonable adjustments requires an employer or service provider to balance the need for change with the expense or effort involved in making this change. Guidelines are www.hreoc.gov.au.

Making your business more accessible is also likely to make it safer for both customers and staff and could have an effect on your public liability and workplace safety responsibilities.



Remember

What you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be expensive – a combination of providing easier entry and improving staff training will go a long way to making your business more attractive to many people, including people with a disability.

Access to Premises – Buildings Standards

The Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards) commenced on May 1 2011 and has been developed to improve access to public buildings in our community.

These include issues such as:

- Accessible entrances and doorways to buildings
- Increasing circulation space, lifts, accessible toilets and at doorways
- Signage in relation to accessible facilities
- Passing and turning spaces in passageways
- Hearing augmentation systems in rooms with a built in PA system
- Access features within lifts
- The number and distribution of accessible spaces in cinema and theatres
- Access requirements to certain common areas in new apartment blocks in which there is one or more short-term rental units
- Requirements for accessible facilities in some specified new or upgraded holiday accommodation such as B & Bs bed or cabins in holiday parks
- Requirements for accessible units in hotels and motels
- Requirements for access into certain public swimming pools
- Unisex accessible toilets and 'ambulant accessible cubicles' in standard toilets

Disability (Access to Premises) Building Standards

www.hreoc.gov.au



Four ways to improve access for *all* of your customers

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Make it easy for people to find you

To attract customers who have a disability you can take some simple steps to make your business easier to find and access.

Advertise your advantages

- If your business is accessible, let people know. For example, if you have wheelchair access include this in your promotions and advertisements.
- Put up clear external signs to help people with a vision impairment or learning difficulties identify your shop.

Make the entrance easy to see

- Paint the entrance to your business in a colour that contrasts well with the surroundings. This will make it stand out for people with a vision impairment.
- Highly contrasting colours not only distinguish an entrance from the general environment but also make it

easier to tell the difference between the immediate door surrounds and the doorway itself.

- If there are multiple entrances, make sure there are clear directions to where each entrance is.
- Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. People with a vision impairment often find this presents a confusing picture of reflections, light and shadows. One good solution is to put safety markings on the glass so people don't walk into it. This makes it easier to tell the difference between the window display and the doorway.

Avoid obstructions

- Ideally, remove dangerous obstacles such as advertising boards, displays or furniture from the entrance so that people in wheelchairs, older people, or people with a vision impairment don't risk falling over them.
- If you are permitted to have advertising boards, display items or furniture outside your business, make sure there is a clear pathway leading to the entrance.

Tips

Think about your surroundings

- **Car parks:** think about making at least one customer car space wider for a person with a disability to use.
- **Pathways:** make sure the path from the car park to your entrance is accessible for a person using a wheelchair (e.g. wider and more even) and less slippery for someone older or using walking aids.
- **Lighting:** would better lighting make car parks and pathways safer?
- **Hazards:** make sure overhanging trees or signage do not cause a hazard to a person who is blind or vision impaired.

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Make it easy for people to get in

In new buildings all customers, including people using wheelchairs, must be able to enter a shop independently. In many older buildings the main entrance may have one or several steps, or be difficult in other ways. Here are some ideas on how to make it easy for customers to get into your business.

Level access

- Ideally, get rid of steps and provide a level entry.
- If you can't provide a level entry, build a ramp.
- If either of these are not possible for technical or financial reasons, consider moving the main entrance to another more accessible position.

Better doors and doorways

- Reposition the entrance door handles to an easier height.
- Make the door easier to open by making it automatic or lighter.
- Make the doorway wide enough to allow a person with a walking frame, or someone who uses a wheelchair, to pass through with ease.
- If the door has a lot of reflective glass attach safety markings so people do not walk into it.
- Make sure any doormats are secure and only use them if they can be made flush with the surrounding floor.
- Put in a handrail.

Clear sight lines

- If possible, ensure there are clear sight lines between the entry and the counter so that staff are aware of when a customer needs assistance to enter the premises or purchase goods.



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Make it easy for people to get around

Ideally, once inside your shop or premises customers with disabilities should be able to find their way to all sales areas, browse and inspect goods, bring them to the cash register or receive service in the same way as people without a disability.

The following tips are designed to assist you to better understand and meet the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

For people who are blind or have a vision impairment

- **Signs:** make sure signs and product pricing labels are clear and use high contrast colours. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause a hazard.
- **Information:** make board menus in cafes or product information displays easier to read. Provide written menus or other product information in large print versions (e.g. 18 point Arial) or have staff read information out to customers. Look at the

possibility of providing information such as menus in Braille.

- **Lighting:** think about improving lighting, especially around service counters.
- **Layout:** avoid having dangerously placed fittings and fixtures that can make independent movement difficult for customers who are blind. Make sure aisles provide a clear path of travel and do not have displays sticking out into them.
- **EFTPOS:** make sure the electronic payment system and EFTPOS machines have features that allow people who are blind to use them.

For people who may have difficulty hearing

- **Noise:** find ways to reduce the amount of background noise and to easily turn down the music when necessary.
- **Hearing loop:** look into installing a 'hearing loop' or other system to assist people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a screen from the public at the counter.



Should you be providing accessible toilets?

Where toilets are provided for the public (e.g. in cafes or in other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time) an accessible toilet should be provided where possible. Under building laws a unisex accessible toilet counts as a male and a female toilet.

If you do not have an accessible toilet make sure all staff know the location of the nearest accessible toilet and, if necessary, get approval for your customers to use it. If you decide to make your toilet accessible you should get technical advice on how to do so.

For people with mobility impairments

- **Aisles:** Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough (preferably 1.2 metres).
- **Counters:** Ensure at least part of the customer service area is at a height that is suitable for people using wheelchairs (750–800mm from floor level). Make sure that at least one of the checkout aisles is wide enough, has a lower checkout counter (750–800mm), and is always open.
- **Reach:** Try to place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair. If this is not always possible, make sure staff are trained to offer assistance.
- **Chairs:** If your customers need to wait, make a chair available for someone who may be older and frail, uses crutches or has poor balance.
- **EFTPOS:** Ensure that electronic payment systems and EFTPOS machines are on a long enough cord to pass over to someone using a wheelchair.
- **Surfaces:** Make sure the floor surface is free from trip hazards and is non-slip.



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Make the most of customer service

When talking about ‘improving access’ it’s easy to think only in terms of installing ramps, toilets and other fixtures. One of the simplest and cheapest solutions is to change the way you think about customer service for people with disabilities.

It’s not difficult to train your staff on how to communicate effectively with all of your customers and how to give practical assistance when it’s needed.

Respect

You and your staff should treat customers with disabilities as you do all customers – with respect:

- **Focusing on the person:** Treat each customer with a disability as

an individual customer with their own likes and dislikes. Always focus on the person, not their disability. Always address the customer directly, not the other people who may be with them (such as a deaf sign interpreter).

- **Giving assistance:** Always ask the customer first if they want help; do not assume they need assistance. Always accept the answer if the customer declines your help. If you have a conversation that will last more than a few moments with a customer using a wheelchair, bend to eye level or pull up a chair.
- **Asking questions:** Remember: ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided particularly where there are barriers to equal access.



Communication

For people who may have a learning difficulty, an intellectual disability or brain injury:

- **Being clear:** Address the customer directly, listen carefully, speak clearly and check for understanding. Always use clear language without being patronising.
- **Allowing time:** Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people with an intellectual disability with information. Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information.
- **Web accessibility:** Web accessibility refers to inclusive practice of making websites usable for people of all abilities. The use of assistive technology such as screen readers, speech synthesizers, i technology and information in recorded form i.e. podcast and video/CD are important and useful forms of communication for people with a disability. With many business transactions taking place on line, it makes good business sense to make a website and

printed materials accessible for all. Guidelines are available at www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/standards/www_3/www_3.html

For people who have a hearing impairment or are deaf:

- **Lip reading:** Always face the customer so they can read your lips. Try to make sure there are no bright lights behind you that may limit their ability to see your lips.
- **Sound:** Use your normal tone of voice and volume. If possible, move out of the way of background noise.
- **Interpreters:** If your customer is with a sign language interpreter always address your comments directly to your customer rather than to the interpreter.
- **Pen and paper:** Have a pen and paper on hand to help communicate with your customer.



For people who have a vision impairment or are blind:

- **Using names:** Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so they know you are talking to them and not to someone else.
- **Giving assistance:** If a customer asks for assistance to go somewhere, ask which side you should be on and offer your arm so they can hold just above your elbow.
- **Guide dogs:** Never pat or distract a guide dog or offer it food while it is in harness, it is a working animal under the control of its owner.



Finding alternative ways to provide service

The best way of attracting business and fulfilling your legal responsibilities is to make your business as accessible as possible. Where it is not possible to provide full access in the short term, you might also consider alternate ways of providing the same service. Here are some examples:

- A butchers shop might consider operating a telephone, mail order or local delivery scheme.
- A florist might have a call bell at the entrance and have staff put together an order and bring the goods to the

front door or the nearest easy collection point.

- A hairdresser might consider offering a home visiting service for a customer with a disability.
- An estate agent might consider providing their service in an alternative, accessible location either by appointment or on a regular basis.
- Alternatives such as these will not provide full equality for people with disabilities, but they will assist in reducing the chances of a complaint.



What's the best language to use?

If you are making the effort to make your business more accessible it is also important to make sure your staff and the signage you use is part of that effort.

Use signage that identifies:

- **'Accessible Toilet'** not 'Disabled Toilet'
- **'Accessible Parking'** not 'Disabled Parking'
- **'Accessible Entry'** not 'Disabled Entry'

And always refer to:

- A person **with a disability** rather than a **disabled person**
- A person who **uses a wheelchair** rather than someone **confined** to one
- A person who **is** blind rather than a person who **suffers** blindness

Where to get more information

For more information on planning issues, building approvals, the City of Casey's access requirements and ways to support access for all contact:

The City of Casey

Phone: 9705 5200

Translating and Interpreting Service:

TIS: 131 450

For the deaf, hearing or speech impaired:

National Relay Service

TTY/ Voice Calls: 133 677

Speak and Listen: 1300 555 727

For more information on legal issues and responsibilities:

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Phone: 1300 369 711 (toll free)

Web: www.hreoc.gov.au/

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Right Commission – Victoria

Phone: 1300 891 848

Web: www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/

Other Resources:

Disability (Access to Premises) Building Standards

www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/buildings/access_to_premises.html



National Relay Service: For the deaf and hearing impaired

www.relayservice.com.au/



Vicdeaf: Provider of specialised services to deaf and hard of hearing people in Victoria.

www.vicdeaf.com.au



TIS National translating and interpreting service:

Phone: 131 450

Vision Australia: For the blind or partially sighted

www.visionaustralia.org.au/

City of Casey Contacts

Tel: (03) 9705 5200

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TIS: 131 450

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National Relay Service
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