

Missed Business?

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

A guide for small business

*"There is no doubt this has
helped my business."*

Small business owner

Acknowledgement

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You Could Be Missing Out On Potential Customers

Approximately 3.6 million people in Canada have disabilities, representing 12.4% of Canada's population. In Ontario, approximately 1.5 million people have disabilities, representing 13.5% of Ontario's population. Together with their friends and families, the number of people affected by a disability is bigger still - and every one of them is a potential customer.

Population projections estimate that by 2021, Canadians aged 65 and older will number close to 6.7 million, or about one-fifth of the total population. Many seniors have difficulties with mobility, sight and hearing and although they may not consider themselves to have a disability, easier access would be a great benefit.

As a small business, quality service is one of the most important things you can offer. This guide aims to help you, the small business owner, understand how to improve access to your goods and services for a large part of our community you may be missing out on - customers who have a disability.

Which Customers Are We Talking About?

Providing good access to your business will benefit:

- people who are blind or visually impaired;
 - people with learning or intellectual disabilities;
 - people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing;
 - people with a mobility disability who may use a wheelchair, cane, walker or who have arthritis;
 - people with long-term illnesses;
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- people with 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 baby strollers;
- older people;
- delivery people;
- shoppers with heavy bags; and
- every customer – particularly when it's busy.

Can you afford to miss out on all this business? Consider the following:

"I look for businesses that are easy to use for me and my friends. When I find one that I can enter without a problem I feel welcomed. When a business is accessible, has good service *and* an inclusive attitude, it gives you a feeling of belonging. They're the places I go back to and take my friends as well." (Anonymous)

Good Access Makes Good Business Sense

As potential customers, each of these people 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 level 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 patronizing – then people with a disability are more likely to become regular customers.

Remember: what you do to improve accessibility doesn't have to be extravagantly 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 disabilities.

Meeting Your Legal Responsibilities

Improving access will also assist your business to meet any legal responsibilities. For example, The **Ontario Human Rights Code** is a provincial law that gives everybody equal rights and opportunities without discrimination, in specific areas such as jobs, housing and services. The Code's goal is to prevent discrimination and harassment because of age, race, colour, sex, and disability, for example. The Code also covers a broad range of different types of disabilities. (Source: OHRC website)

From a business perspective, the Ontario Human Rights Code says that customers with disabilities have the right to be free from discrimination when accessing goods or services, or using facilities - just like any other customer. This right applies to many different types of businesses, including stores, restaurants and bars. 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. 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.

For more information on the Ontario Human Rights Code, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission website at: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca>

ODA - Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

The purpose of the ODA is to “improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province”. The ODA covers the same broad range of disabilities as the **Ontario Human Rights Code**. These include physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental and mental disabilities, and brain injury.

There are several aspects of the ODA legislation that will involve the private sector, including businesses. Some examples include:

- The provincial government and all municipalities will be required to consider accessibility in choosing which goods or services to purchase (See ODA, Sections 5 and 13). This has the potential to affect many private sector companies that provide goods or services to government.
- The ODA also creates additional municipal powers, which may in turn affect the private sector. The ODA gives municipalities the power to require that businesses be accessible to people with disabilities as a condition on obtaining, continuing to hold or renewing a license. (See ODA, Section 29)

- The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and the Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario will work with the private sector (e.g., business representatives) to facilitate the development of voluntary accessibility standards and codes.
- The Act may address codes of conduct, guidelines, protocols, and procedures in the private sector, and gives the government the authority to regulate these in the future. (See ODA, Section 23)

(Source: Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services website)

For more information on the ODA, visit the Accessibility Ontario website at: <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>

AODA - Accessibility For Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2005

The AODA requires the Provincial government to work with the disability community and the private and public sectors to jointly develop accessibility standards, to be implemented in stages of five years or less. The goal is to make the Province of Ontario accessible within a 20-year timeframe by implementing accessibility standards that remove barriers related to the full range of disabilities – including physical, sensory, mental health, developmental and learning. Until new accessibility standards are developed and in place, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001, will also remain in effect.

Examples of issues addressed by accessibility standards may include:

- Accessible pedestrian routes and entrances into buildings.
- Lower counter heights at cash registers to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Large print menus in restaurants for people with visual impairments.
- Staff training for serving customers with intellectual disabilities.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, meaningful, realistic accessibility standards will be developed collaboratively by members of the disability community, representatives of the broader public and private sectors, and government. New, provincial committees will develop accessibility standards on a sector-by-sector basis (e.g. hotels, restaurants, retail stores, pharmacies, grocery stores, movie theatres) and will submit proposed standards to the government for adoption as regulations. The **Accessibility Advisory Council of Ontario** and the **Accessibility Directorate of Ontario** will also facilitate the development of accessibility standards and other barrier removal initiatives. The proposed new accessibility standards will include timelines for compliance, and the AODA legislation is designed to provide penalties for violators.

(Source: Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services website)

For more information on the AODA, visit the Accessibility Ontario website at: <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>

Four Ways To Improve Access For All Your Customers

For the following examples, remember to refer to more detailed accessibility design guidelines, standards and best practices, prior to and during implementation, to ensure successful outcomes. Talk to City representatives, your local Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) or other accessibility experts for suitable guidance to assist with practical solutions that meet your needs and the needs of your customers.

1. 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 get to.

Advertise your advantages

- If your business is accessible, let people know. For example, if you provide wheelchair access, include this information in your promotions and advertisements.
- Put up clear exterior signs to help people with visual impairments or learning difficulties identify what your shop is. Accessible signage helps everyone, with or without a disability!

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 visual impairments. Highly contrasting colours not only distinguish an
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entrance from the general environment but also make it easier to tell the difference between the immediate door surroundings and the doorway itself.

- If there are multiple entrances, make sure there are clear directions and signage indicating where each entrance is located.

Be aware of reflective glass in your shop front. People with a visual impairment often find this presents them with 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

- Remove dangerous obstacles such as advertising boards, displays or furniture from the entrance so that people in wheelchairs, older people, or people with a visual impairment don't have to 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.

Tip: think about your surroundings

It also pays to look at the surroundings of your business. You will probably need detailed guidance about the following issues. Remember to talk to your local City Council and Staff, Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and accessibility experts.

Parking: Think about making at least one customer parking space available for users with disabilities. Ensure the location of accessible parking is as close to any accessible entrance as possible.

Pathways: Make sure the path from the parking area to your entrance is accessible for a person using a wheelchair or scooter (e.g., minimum of 1220 mm or 4'-0" wide is preferred), with smooth, non-slip and level surfaces, which is beneficial for all users (children, seniors or people using walking aids such as canes or crutches).

Lighting: Would better lighting make parking areas and pathways safer to use?

Hazards: Make sure overhanging trees or signage do not cause a bumping or tripping hazard for a person who is blind or who has a visual impairment.

2. Make It Easy For People To Get In

In new buildings, all customers (including people using wheelchairs), must be able to enter independently. However, 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.

While many of these ideas are easy to put into practice, some may require technical advice to ensure they are done correctly.

Level access

- Ideally, eliminate stairs or steps and provide a level entrance.
- If you can't provide a level entrance, design and build a suitable ramp adjacent to stairs or steps (running slope no steeper than 1:12) or provide a gradually sloped walkway (e.g., running slope of 1:20). Often, people with limited mobility who are ambulatory prefer using stairs or steps, assuming secure and accessible handrails are also provided to help them with their balance. Ensure ramp design includes accessible handrails, non-slip surfaces with detectable warning strips at transitions and suitable space dimensions for approaches and landings that accommodate all mobility devices (e.g., scooters & power wheelchairs).
- If these actions are not possible for technical or financial reasons, consider moving the main entrance to an alternate accessible location with suitable signage and directional information provided.

Better doors and doorways

- Reposition the entrance door hardware to an accessible height (1200 mm or 3'-11") and ensure hardware is operable by one hand, does not require tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist (e.g., lever-style handles).
- Make the door easier to open by making it automatic with accessible controls or ensure door is lightweight.
- Make the doorway wide enough to allow a person using a walker or someone who uses a wheelchair to pass through with ease (815 mm or 2'-8" wide minimum, 920 mm or 3'-0" preferred).

- If the door has a lot of reflective glass, attach safety markings across glass so people do not walk into it. (Mount markings at 1525 mm or 5'-0" center, measured from floor level. Use decals or striping 50 mm or 2" wide)
- Make sure any doormats are secure and well maintained to prevent any potential tripping hazards. Only use mats if they can be made flush with the surrounding floor or if they have a beveled edge. Recessed floor mat systems are preferred.

Clear sight lines

- Make sure there are clear sight lines between the entrance and the counter so that staff are aware when a customer needs assistance to enter the premises or purchase goods.

"Many customers comment on the fact that we have the ramp. It's not just people who use wheelchairs but also parents with strollers, and even people who don't have an accessibility issue".
(Anonymous)

3. Make It Easy For People To Get Around

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 cashier or receive services in the same way as people without a disability.

The following tips are designed to help business owners to understand and meet the needs of customers with a range of disabilities.

For people who are blind or have visual impairments

- **Signs:** Make sure signs and product pricing labels have clearly written information, with large, colour contrasted print provided. Ensure overhanging signs do not cause a bumping hazard.
- **Information:** Make board menus in cafés or product information displays easy to read. Provide written menus or other product information in large print versions (e.g., 18 point Verdana or Arial fonts). Consider having your staff read information out to customers if requested. Provide menu information in Braille, for example.
- **Lighting:** Ensure lighting levels are high, especially around service counters.
- **Layout:** Avoid having dangerously placed items that can make independent movement difficult for customers with visual impairments. Make sure your aisles provide a clear path of travel (minimum of 920 mm or 3'-0" wide is preferred) and do not have displays or products sticking out into them, resulting in a potential tripping hazard.
- **Electronic payment systems (e.g., Interac):** Make sure all electronic payment systems and devices have accessible features for all users (e.g., tactile buttons, large print numbering, flexible cord for easy reach by seated users). Consult with accessibility experts for more detailed information.

For people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing

- **Noise:** Find ways to reduce the amount of background noise and to easily turn down any music, when necessary.
- **Hearing loop:** Look into installing a 'hearing loop' or other assistive listening device for people using hearing aids at counters, especially if there is a screen from the public at the counter, or if the counter is enclosed.

For people with mobility disabilities

- **Aisles:** Make sure shopping aisles are wide enough (minimum of 920 mm or 3'-0" wide is preferred).
- **Counters:** Ensure at least part of your customer service area is at a height that is suitable for people using wheelchairs (850 mm or 2'-10" maximum counter surface height, measured from floor level). Make sure that at least one of your checkout aisles is wide enough (minimum of 920 mm or 3'-0" wide is preferred), has a lowered checkout counter section (850 mm or 2'-10" surface height, with 685 mm or 2'-3" of knee space below) and ensure that it is always open.
- **Reach:** Place goods, particularly the most popular ones, within reach of someone using a wheelchair, mounted no higher than 1220 mm or 4'-0" from floor level. If this is not always possible, make sure staff are trained to offer suitable assistance and are aware of disability issues and needs.

- **Chairs:** If your customers need to wait, make a chair available for someone who may be elderly, uses crutches or has poor balance.
- **Electronic payment systems (e.g., Interac):** Ensure that electronic payment systems and portable devices are on a long enough cord to pass over to someone using a wheelchair. Consult with accessibility experts for more detailed information.
- **Surfaces:** Make sure the floor surface is free from tripping hazards, is non-slip and does not reflect glare (also problematic for people with visual impairments). Do not store merchandise temporarily in floor space or aisles or leave maintenance equipment in the way accidentally.

Should you be providing accessible washrooms?

Where washrooms are provided for the public (e.g. in cafés or in other situations where customers may be on the premises for a period of time), an accessible washroom should be provided, whether individual washrooms for both Men and Women, or separate, unisex accessible washrooms.

If you do not have an accessible washroom, make sure all staff know the location of the nearest accessible washroom and, if necessary, get approval for your customers to use it.

If you decide to make your washroom accessible, get technical advice to ensure proper design, based on accessibility best practices.

4. Make The Most Of Customer Service

When talking about 'improving access', it's easy to think only in terms of installing ramps, washrooms and other fixtures. But 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 your customers and how to give practical assistance when it's needed. Additionally, many local community organizations or other experts provide formal disability awareness and sensitivity training, often customized to meet the needs of different types of businesses.

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 (e.g., such as a spouse or other family member, an Attendant or Sign Language 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 or scooter, ensure eye contact is maintained.

- **Asking questions:** Remember, ask customers with disabilities how they would like goods and services to be provided, particularly where there are known barriers to equal access. Being aware of their potential needs and accommodating them goes a long way compared to being unaware or appearing insensitive.

Communication Tips

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 patronizing.
- **Allowing time:** Allow your customer time to ask questions and try not to rush them. Try not to overload people who may have an intellectual disability with information. Reassure your customer you are there to help if they forget the information or need assistance.

For people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing:

- **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 – do not shout. If necessary, move out of the way of any potential background noise.

- **Interpreters:** If your customer is there 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 you communicate with your customer (e.g., at check out counter or reception area). Signage indicating its availability is also important (e.g., with the International Symbol for Deafness provided).

For people who have a visual impairment:

- **Using names:** Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so that 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. Never grab their arm without permission.
- **Guide dogs:** Never pat or distract a guide dog or offer it food while it is in harness. Guide dogs are working animals under the direct control of its owner and should not be looked at as “pets”.

Finding alternative ways to provide service

The best way of attracting business and fulfilling any 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 butcher's shop might consider operating a telephone, mail order or local delivery service.
- 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.
- A real estate agent might consider providing their service in an alternative, accessible location either by appointment or on a regular basis.
- Services or products can be purchased on the internet, if retailer's websites are designed with accessibility in mind and based on best practices.

Alternatives such as these will not provide full equality for people with disabilities, but they will assist in reducing the chances of a complaint. They are also a potential starting point for business owners to initiate longer-term solutions that will improve the bottom line and make their businesses accessible for everyone.

Further Information

- For examples of **Success Stories** related to Ontario businesses and service providers, visit the **Path to Equal Opportunities** website at: http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/themes/index.asp?page_id=103
- For general information, contact the **Accessibility Directorate of Ontario** at:

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Website: <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario>

For information on making your business accessible or any other planning, design or construction issue, contact:



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