

Accessibility equals good business

By the Caledon Accessibility Committee

The numbers are staggering.

Seniors and people with disabilities will represent 20 to 25 per cent of the Canadian recreation, retail, entertainment, work place and housing market in the next 10 years and beyond. In Ontario there are more than 1.5 million people, including nearly 40 per cent of people over the age of 65, with disabilities and, as our population ages, those numbers will continue to rise.

Here's where it gets really interesting from a business perspective: 75 per cent of people with disabilities are physically and financially able to travel. And when you add in their circle of family members, work colleagues and service providers, we are talking billions of dollars in new retail and tourism spending annually.

Clearly, being accessible can add to your bottom line.

To become more accessible, consider the following:

- ? Make entrance easy ? clear snow, remove any trip hazards, add a handrail, power door opener and/or ramp.
- ? Adapt for difference ? provide service counters at a lower height, install ?tap? payment options.
- ? Communicate clearly ? use clear language, design and test your website to ensure it is user-friendly and accessible.
- ? Offer multiple methods of service ? consider alternatives such as home delivery or on-site personal shopping assistance.
- ? Promote best practices ? encourage staff to clean up any spills and water/slush as soon as possible.
- ? Use large print menus and high contrast signage.
- ? Have seating available to allow individuals who have difficulty standing for long periods of time or become easily tired an opportunity to rest.
- ? Have clear icons along with text labels on products or services.
- ? Keep aisles free of displays and clutter.

And let's not forget the importance of equal customer service for all:

- ? Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- ? Don't make assumptions about what type of disability a person has. Some disabilities are not visible.
- ? Take the time to get to know your customer's needs. Be patient.
- ? If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, ?How may I help you?? If you can't understand what someone is saying, politely ask again.
- ? Ask before offering help; don't just jump in. Your customers know how you can help if they need it.
- ? Look at your customer, but don't stare.
- ? Speak directly to person with disabilities, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- ? Don't touch or address service animals.
- ? Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or piece of equipment.
- ? Every business should have emergency procedures for customers including those with disabilities. Make sure you and your staff know what they are.

Serving the needs of the growing number of seniors and people with disabilities is simply good business. To learn more about accessibility, visit ontario.ca/accessibility.