

Customer Service Issues for People with Disabilities

[U.S. Dept. of Justice ADA Business Connection](#)

Poor customer service can ruin the stay of a guest with disabilities, even if the hotel facility itself is fully accessible. Here are a few examples of ways hotels and lodging establishments can turn guests with disabilities into satisfied, repeat customers.

Reservations

-Staff working in central reservations as well as in individual hotel reservations offices need to know and be able to accurately inform potential guests about the accessible features offered in each of their facilities.

-Understanding what constitutes an accessible feature and how each feature serves guests with disabilities will enable staff to provide essential information to customers. Correctly answering a reservation inquiry about a hotel's accessible features helps avoid an awkward or unsolvable situation when the guest with a disability cannot use the room that was reserved.

-Once an accessible room is guaranteed to a prospective guest with a disability, an accessible room must be available to him or her upon arrival

at the hotel. If an unexpected problem occurs that makes it impossible for the hotel to provide the accessible room promised, the hotel should make every reasonable effort to locate a comparable accessible room in the hotel or in another local establishment and cover cost differences, if they occur.

Communication

-Hotel team members who have direct contact with guests should be prepared and ready to communicate with customers with disabilities.

-When telephone calls are received from a deaf person using a TTY or relay service, the call should be answered promptly and appropriately.

-When a guest with a disability arrives, hotel staff should talk to the customer with a disability rather than to her companion. Front-line employees must be informed and attentive to details related to guests with disabilities.

Maintaining Accessible Features for Customers

Attention to detail also plays a major role in maintaining a hotel's accessible features.

-Sidewalks blocked by large trash receptacles, lowered reception desk areas filled with decorative

vases, routes to public restrooms blocked by supplies, and poorly placed, oversized furniture in accessible rooms all convey to the customer with a disability a lack of understanding about accessibility.

Hospitality is not provided when a guest cannot get to the front door, register at the front desk, eat in the restaurant, or maneuver around his room. Without training, housekeeping staff and bellmen can unwittingly compromise the best intentions to provide access.

- For example, if an employee places the television remote control atop a tall chest of drawers or leaves the adjustable shower head at the highest position, then a guest who uses a wheelchair cannot reach them.
- If the housekeeping staff adjusts the thermostat or opens the guest room curtains during a post-arrival room cleaning, a guest who is blind may be left in an uncomfortable and possibly embarrassing circumstance.

With instruction and consistent service, employees can maintain accessible features and raise the level of a hotel's guest satisfaction rating.

Great Plains ADA Center

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The Great Plains ADA Center provides technical assistance, information and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act to Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska as part of the ADA National Network. The ADA National Network is a project of the National Institute on Disability and Independent Living Research (NIDILR).

Trends that Enhance or Hinder Accessibility

Trends in hotel decor and service can limit access:

- Popular large furniture, such as armoires, may take up valuable maneuvering space in accessible rooms, and plush, pillow-top mattresses may make beds too high to transfer to from a wheelchair.
- A platform bed precludes the use of a personal lift in an accessible room.
- A hotel restaurant that creates ambience with low lighting can make travel to a table difficult for an older customer; while a restaurant menu with a crisp, high contrast contemporary design will make it easier to read for that same guest.
- It is essential to understand the positive and negative effects of trends on service to all customers, including customers with disabilities.

Good customer service practices that assist people with disabilities will bring repeat business from guests with disabilities, older travelers, and friends and families that accompany this large and growing market.

Best Practices ★★★★★

To improve accessibility in your hotel, follow these recommended best practices:

Ensure beds are an accessible height (recommended bed height is between 20 to 23 inches from the floor to top of the mattress).

Ensure that portable shower seats are safe and accessible by providing features such as a seat back for support, adequate structural strength, sufficient seat depth, and non-slip caps on seat legs. Where folding shower seats are installed on the walls of accessible shower compartments, technical requirements of the 2010 ADA Standards should be followed including the appropriate wall for installation so that shower controls are within reach, distance of the front edge of seat from wall where seat is attached, and height of seat surface.

Provide multiple outlets and cords. Power strips or multiple outlets close to the bed allow patrons to use electrical equipment after they have made a bed transfer. Make sure these outlets and cords are within the reach range (15"-48")

Train hotel staff on:

- General ADA regulations.
- Accessibility features available for guests.
- The use of respectful language and practices for guests with disabilities.
- Effective communication practices that would benefit guests who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Hotel policies addressing the use of service animals.

[From the ADA National Network Accessible Lodging Fact Sheet](#)

Transporting Customers

[From Hospitality & Disability, An ADA National Network Initiative](#)



Transportation as a convenience for customers.

Some businesses provide transportation for their customers as a convenience that supports their primary business. Examples include hotels that provide courtesy shuttle vans for guests going to or from an airport or tourist attractions that offer shuttle service to move visitors around the site or to and from parking lots. If you offer services like these must offer transportation to people with disabilities.

Equivalent service.

If you provide transportation services on demand (for example, your hotel sends a van to the airport to pick up a customer when the customer calls), you can acquire vehicles that are equipped with a lift or you can contract with another company to provide accessible service for the customers who need it. For example, you might hire a local transportation company that has a lift-equipped van to transport your customer who uses a wheelchair.

The important thing to remember is that the service provided must be equivalent. If customers without disabilities can get transportation quickly and easily, people with

disabilities deserve equivalent service. The services offered to people with disabilities must be as convenient as the services offered to other people in terms of fares, schedules or response times, hours of operation, pick-up and drop-off locations, and other measures of equivalent service.

Accessible vehicles.

The rules are slightly different for companies that provide courtesy transportation on a fixed route (for example, your hotel runs a shuttle bus continuously to and from an airport). In this case, all vehicles purchased or leased since 1992 with a capacity of over sixteen people must be equipped with a lift. Vehicles purchased or leased since 1992 with a smaller capacity must also be equipped with a lift, unless the company provides equivalent service as described above. These rules apply to companies not primarily engaged in the business of transporting people.

Summary

If you provide transportation services to support their primary business, you **must** provide equivalent service for people with disabilities.

You can provide equivalent service by acquiring and operating accessible vehicles or by contracting with another company to provide accessible transportation services when needed.