

"M & M's" of accessibility



by Peter M. Robertson, MA CPCM

It's one thing to implement an adequate barrier removal and access accommodation plan. It's another to aggressively **Market** and **Maintain** the accessible environments.

The most successful accessibility management plans include operational components—policies, procedures and training—that effectively and consistently promote the level(s) of accessibility available while ensuring that the accommodations are maintained in an accessible and usable condition.

Marketing and maintaining accessible environments functions much like the protective thin candy shell on a glob of milk chocolate. It's attractive, while ensuring there won't be an embarrassing moment (i.e., mess).

Get the word out—Market

You have likely expended time and resources to develop and implement a plan that enabled your operation to accommodate people with specific disabilities. Your plan might include architectural, communication, transportation, employment or public relations accommodations.

Don't keep it to yourself.

Distribute a press release for the media in your service area about what you have accomplished. Your new accommodation(s) presents a unique angle for a story of how you have strategically opened doors to and bridged gaps between significant segments of the community.

Integrate copy or graphic symbols about the level of accessibility in all forms of advertising, including letterhead, business cards, brochures, and advertisements—print or broadcast.

Conventional graphic symbols like these are commonly used to indicate the availability of the different types of accommodations that are sought by a significant segment of the population.

Your goal should be to integrate your accessibility information, consistently in all "mainstream" promotional efforts.

Integrating access accommodation information into the materials you already produce proves to be much more cost effective. If your market includes non-English speaking groups, be sure to make "non-English" versions of your promotional materials.

While in Vancouver BC this year, I was impressed at the plethora of bilingual materials—English and French—in one publication.

Targeting special interest groups with separate promotional pieces should

also be considered, but don't limit yourself to this measure alone. Identify organizations that cater to people with disabilities and advertise in their newsletters or magazines.

Some of the organizations concentrate on one disability, while others may serve all groups. Do your homework.

If you commit resources to television advertising, don't forget to have the commercial captioned. Consider using "open" vs. "closed" captioning on your ads. This strategy enables your ads to reach everyone that can benefit from this access technology, whether or not a person has a decoder. This approach will also serve as a public education tool by exposing people without hearing loss to captioning.

If your facilities are available to other organizations, be sure you inform them about the access accommodation(s) available. Show them how to promote and advertise the access accommodations in their materials.

Get the most out of your efforts—Maintenance

Now that everyone knows about the accessibility of your facility, programs, services or accommodations, make certain that your ability to accommodate is maintained in a functional state. This practice will help prevent those embarrassing moments for both you and the customer when an access accommodation promoted is unavailable or in a dysfunctional state.

When you promote that you have, for example, widened your primary entrance, added a Telecommunication Display Device (TDD) to your telephone, offer printed material in alternate formats—large print, audio cassette, Braille, etc., make sure it's readily available and in working order. It's a good practice to periodically inspect and perform routine maintenance checks.

If part of your plan includes architectural or mechanical access accommodations, be certain that a doorway clearance is not reduced by propping the door open with a display rack or that a vertical access lift doesn't work when needed.

Be sure all public contact personnel are made aware of the access, accommodations that are available, and the policies and procedures for providing them.

Be sure all personnel answering the phones are familiar with TDD operation and protocol. There's nothing more frustrating than calling a phone number that is designated as TDD accessible and being hung up on because the person answering the phone thought the TDD tones were a FAX machine or computer modem.

If your printed materials are available in alternate formats, keep them with the regular ones. A common occurrence is going to a place that proudly informs that its printed materials are available in Braille, but none can be found when a request is made.

If you provide Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs), make sure the receiver batteries are fully charged and that the receiver accessories (headset, neck

loop) are readily available.

If you promote the ability to provide auxiliary communication assistance (American Sign Language, other forms of communication, such as Spanish, etc.), make certain everyone on staff knows the policies and procedures to make the services available.

Invite formal or informal evaluations of the accommodations provided by those that use them.

As with most operations, there should be a periodic re-evaluation of your access accommodations. As technology and our understanding of truly accessible environments grow, your ac-

cess accommodation plans and priorities will change.

Peter M. Robertson is founder and President of ACCESS Unlimited (AU), an accessibility management consulting firm with offices in Santa Barbara CA since 1986. AU advises public and private entities, professionals and individuals that are trying to create and manage environments without barriers. Letters requesting that Robertson answer specific accessibility questions, address specific access problems, topics, can be sent to him at the National Focus, PO Box 37485, Phoenix AZ 85069

THE NATIONAL FOCUS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

The Newspaper for Disabilities Issues • Lifestyles • The Future

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

THE NATIONAL FOCUS



The Newspaper for Disabilities Issues * Lifestyles * The Future

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

WHAT'S THE ACCOMMODATION OR BARRIER?



Photo: ACCESS Unlimited

Accommodation — presence of designated, accessible parking spaces.
Barrier(s): — 1. The cross slope of the parking space will definitely result in a few "run-aways". 2. The lack of curb ramps/cuts from the "access aisle" to the accessible route leading to the primary entrance will result in people traveling in vehicular ways and behind other parked cars. (OOPSI) 3. In California, the lack of signage with International Symbol of Access (ISA) mounted with bottom edge at 80" for each space constitutes a "barrier". What about your state? (Site: Harbor/UCLA Medical Center, CA)

WHAT'S THE ACCOMMODATION OR BARRIER?



Photo: ACCESS Unlimited

Accommodation — presence of a temporary, accessible sanitary facility during local event.
Barrier(s): — (OOPSI) The Vendor forgot the ramp that would allow access to this "access accommodation". (Have you used this type of "access" accommodation? Is it truly "usable"? By what standards? We think — "NOT" (Site: Courthouse, Fiesta Celebration — Santa Barbara, CA)

AVOID COSTLY MISTAKES...

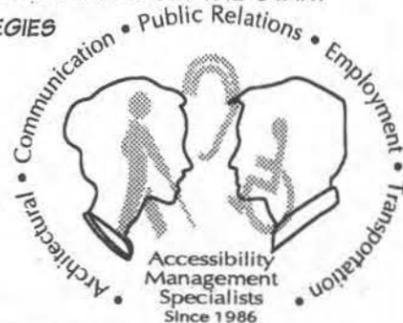
...DESIGN OVERSIGHTS CAN CAUSE PROJECT DELAYS OR POST-CONSTRUCTION REMEDIES

SATISFY ACCESS CODES FOR NEW OR REMODEL PROJECTS EASILY, EFFICIENTLY AND FROM THE START

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT SIMPLE STRATEGIES CONTACT:



805-963-0221 VOICE OR TT OR
 800-464-4771 VOICE OR TT
 TOLL-FREE (CA)
 805-963-6060 FAX



709 E. Mason St. • P.O. Box 2245 • Santa Barbara, CA 93120-2245

©AU 1992
 All Rights Reserved