U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Disability Rights Section

Expanding Your Market

Americans with Disabilities Act
ADA Business Connection

The U. S. Census Bureau projects that the number of people 65 and older will more than double between 2000 and 2030 - from 35 million to 71.5 million people. And, the number of older adults will not only increase at the 65-year-old end of the spectrum: There will be twice as many people 85 and older in 2030, with 9.6 million individuals projected to be part of the population. (1)

Accessibility Benefits Older Adult Customers

Baby Boomers, mature consumers, older adults, senior customers -- whatever one names this market, it is large and growing. In 2006, the leading edge of the Baby Boom generation turns 60. Plus, the net worth of older adults has been climbing over the past two decades: Between 1984 and 2001, the median net worth of households headed by people age 65 and over increased by 82 percent. (2) And, more than 50% of the total U.S. discretionary income is controlled by those 50 years and older. (3) This is not a market that businesses should turn away from their doors.

Older adults make up a diverse group in many ways. Their one certain commonality is that they will experience at least some physiological and cognitive changes and, perhaps, disability as they age. (4) The 2000 U.S. Census found that 41.9% of adults 65 years and older identified themselves as having a disability. (5) For the remaining percentage of those 65 and older, the changes may be less severe but are likely to affect everyday life nonetheless.

Whether older adults have disabilities or not, they benefit from accessible features and customer service practices in stores, museums, restaurants, printed publications, and online shopping, among others. Accessibility makes a visit to the grocery store, a theater performance, and an internet search easier and more enjoyable for people who experience limitations in vision, hearing, mobility, or memory. Older individuals are most likely to use accessible features when they are integrated into the overall design of the building, publication, or website. Many older adults, whether they have disabilities or not, are often unwilling to be categorized as “old” or in need of “special services.” Seamless accessibility - access that blends cleanly into customer service practices and building and product design - works best for everyone.

Information about the ADA and Business

For specific information about how businesses can comply with the ADA and reach this nearly untapped market of older adults and people with disabilities, visit the U.S. Department of Justice’s ADA Business Connection site at **www.ada.gov;** or, call the toll-free ADA Information Line: 800-514-0301 (voice)
800-514-0383 (TTY)

Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA Business Connection

Think about the accessible features or customer service practices businesses have (or could have). See how effective they can be in welcoming older customers, whether or not they have disabilities. Here are a few features to consider:

- Many older adults with diminished heart and lung functions and reduced mobility will have placards or license plates for accessible parking. When parking is near the main door of the facility, these patrons have strength left after entering your business to shop, enjoy entertainment, or eat heartily.

- Clear, wide paths without stairs to the establishment's entrance and throughout the business leave room for canes and walkers and accommodate people with reduced mobility and stamina.

- Minimum-weight doors with accessible hardware are easily opened by people who have arthritis or use a cane for extra balance. For heavier doors, automatic and power-assisted openers are helpful to everyone.

- Entrances and aisles with adequate head clearance and minimal projections into the path of travel result in easier navigation for people with lessened visual acuity or those who may be disoriented by clutter.

- Bright, glare-free lighting on merchandise and pathways enable people with cataracts or aging eyes to shop and make purchases more easily.

- Precise directional and informational signage in high-contrast colors with clear, large type and good lighting make shopping more comfortable for people with diminished short-term memory or vision loss.

- Assistive listening systems that are easily and discreetly obtained along with ushers who speak distinctly and at proper volume provide great help for people who are beginning to lose their hearing and may or may not use hearing aids.

- Captioning on promotional, special event, and exhibition videos for people with hearing loss or cognitive changes ensure the message is not lost in the ambient sound and music.

- Printed programs, advertisements, and brochures with large, clear type, in high contrast colors on solid backgrounds on satin- or matte-finish paper are more legible for people with vision changes due to age.

- Websites designed to be visually accessible with text written clearly and simply, including only relevant images and explicit navigational instructions, make interested but less-seasoned older adult web users comfortable enough to shop and purchase online. (6)

Older adults may have patronized a business for years or they may be brand new customers. If the establishment does nothing to accommodate the physical and cognitive changes they are experiencing, they may not be back. It makes good business sense to comply with the ADA and welcome the expanding market of older adults and people with disabilities.

References

1. U.S. Census Bureau, "Interim Projections of the Population by Selected Age Groups for the United States and States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2030," 21 April 2005, <www.census.gov/population/projections/summaryTabB1.pdf> (30 January 2006).

2. Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, "Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being," Modified 13 January 2005, <www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2004/economics.html> (1 February 2006).

3. William D. Novelli, "How Aging Boomers Will Impact American Business," Speech given at meeting of The Wisemen, The Harvard Club, New York, NY, 21 February 2002, <www.aarp.org/about_aarp/aarp_leadership/on_issues/baby_boomers/how_aging_boomers_will_impact_business.html> (2 February 2006).

4. Deloitte and Touche USA LLP, "Wealth with Wisdom: Serving the Needs of Aging Consumers," January 2006, <www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/US_CB_wealthwithwisdom_0106.pdf> (26 January 2006).

5. U.S. Census Bureau, "Disability Status: 2000," March 2003, <www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-17.pdf> (2 February 2006).

6. National Institute on Aging and National Library of Medicine, "Making Your Web Site Senior Friendly," Revised September 2002, <www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/checklist.pdf> (15 February 2006).