



EVERYONE IS INVITED

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

HELP YOUR VENDORS AND SPONSORS BE ACCESSIBLE PART ONE:

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

Festival producers, have you noticed that your vendors and sponsors are not always accessible to your patrons with disabilities? Their staff may not know how to serve customers with disabilities and their booths may not be accessible. This will be a two-part series. Part one will focus on tips for serving customers with disabilities. Part two, in the next issue of this magazine, will provide information about accessible booth design.

Good Business Sense

Tell your festival's vendors and sponsors that your event is inclusive and does everything it can to accommodate its patrons with disabilities. Remind them that the Americans with Disabilities Act, a federal law, requires that businesses serving the public be accessible and that if they are not they could risk litigation.

A large part of accessibility is training staff how to serve customers with disabilities. Without training, staff may make unfortunate mistakes. Vendors and sponsors can provide their employees with the tools they need to confidently serve customers with disabilities by giving them the following information. It's good for employee morale, good customer relations, and good for business.

3 Fundamental Principles

- Treat customers with disabilities with respect and dignity. Do not talk down to or use a different tone of voice than you would when talking to people without disabilities.
- If someone appears to need assistance, ask how you may help. Do not assume you know what to do. Listen and follow directions.
- Communicate directly with the person who has the disability. Don't expect a companion to represent the person with the disability.

Know Your Access Program Facts

Become familiar with the event's Access Program and the services provided for patrons with disabilities. Review the Access Program brochure and map. Identify where these features are located:

- The Access Center or Information Booth for patrons with disabilities.
- The nearest accessible toilet.

- The nearest accessible ATM.
- Learn if there is a sign language interpreter available should one be needed to assist in communicating with deaf patrons.

Serving People with Mobility Disabilities

If your booth is not accessible and until you redesign your booth – use these techniques.

- Do not reach over a high counter. Come around and hand the item to the person.
- If the booth is not accessible and a patron is not able to enter, ask what items they would like to see and bring the items out for viewing.
- If your counter is high, have a clipboard handy for signing credit card receipts.

“Hello. Let me tell you about what products we have. I would be happy to bring out anything that interests you so that you may see it.”

Serving People Who are Blind or Have Low Vision

- About 80% of those who use a cane or guide dog and are legally blind have some vision. It is very difficult to guess the amount of vision a person has so do not make assumptions.
- As soon as you notice that a person who is blind or has low vision has entered or approached your booth, introduce yourself.
- Speak directly to the person who is blind, not to their companion. You may lightly touch the person's arm so that they know with whom you are talking. Ask the person who is blind for their name so that you can address the person directly from then on. There is no need to speak especially slowly or loudly unless the person is also hard of hearing.

“Hello. (Touch arm lightly). My name is Valerie and we are WYYY, the media sponsor for this event. May I ask your name?” ... “I am going to get you some of our swag, but I will be back in a minute. Please stand by.” ... “Goodbye and thanks for coming. I am stepping away now!”

- When you are about to leave the area, let the person who is blind know so that they are not left talking to the air.

Craft Vendors

- Offer to let that individual touch or hold your product when it is appropriate. Describe the products in your booth. Talk about function, color, design, texture, how they are made, and other details.

“Hello, this is my craft booth and my name is Pat. What’s your name?” “It is nice to meet you, Max. I make hand thrown ceramic goblets that are very smooth and colorful. Would you like to hold one?”

Food Vendors

- Offer to read the menu aloud. Include the price of each item. As you place each item on the counter, identify what it is. Indicate the location of each item on a plate using the face of clock as a guide.

“I’m putting a plate of fruit salad down in front of you and to your right is the cup of ice tea.” “The tortillas are at your 3 o’clock, the guacamole is at 11 o’clock, and the salsa is at 7 o’clock.”

Making Change

- People who are blind or have low vision keep track of the denominations of the bills they have by putting them in particular places in their wallet or folding the bills in certain ways. When a blind person hands you a bill, state out loud what denomination it is. Then hand the change back one denomination at a time, stating what the bills are as you do so. Coins can be identified by feel so just hand them back all at one time.

“The total is \$12.50. You are handing me a \$20 bill. I’ll give you \$7.50 in change. Here is one \$5 bill. Here are two \$1 bills. And here is 50 cents. Thank you.”

Serving People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Hearing loss can range from mild to profound, and may involve one or both ears. Some people use hearing aids. Some may communicate with lip reading and gestures, others with sign language, others by writing.
- Do not shout at a deaf person.
- The person will let you know how they communicate best. If they lip-read, look directly at the person, do not cover your mouth with your hands, speak clearly and slowly and expressively. Use a lot of body language and gestures.
- If they communicate with sign language and have an interpreter, look at the person who has the hearing loss, not the interpreter. Do not say “Tell them the burritos are \$4 each.” Simply say “The burritos are \$4 each.”
- Sign language interpreters may be available through the Access Program. Find out in advance if this is a service that is provided and learn how to make the request.

Serving People Who Have a Speech Disability

- Conditions such as stroke, deafness, brain injuries, developmental or learning disabilities can cause a person to have difficulty speaking.
- Their response time may be delayed. Be patient and encouraging. Do not rush the person or try to fill in with words. Ask questions that can be answered with a few words or a nod of the head. You may need to repeat or rephrase your question. Offer a paper and pencil.
- A person’s ability or inability to speak clearly is NOT a measure of their intelligence.

Instead of “How do you take your coffee?” ask yes/no questions: “Do you take sugar?” “Do you take milk?”

Serving People with Service Animals

- By law, people may bring their service animals with them into any area where the public is invited including vendor and sponsor booths. Note that service animals are allowed in areas where food is served.
- If a service animal is not house-trained, displays threatening behavior such as growling at or biting a person or another animal, or if it is not under the control of the person handling the animal, then the vendor may have the handler remove the animal from the booth. If necessary, call for festival security and describe the animal’s behavior. It may be necessary to remove the animal from the festival. If the animal is taken off-site, the person must be allowed to return without the animal.

Good for All

Being accessible means that patrons who are living with disabilities are included in more aspects of the festival. It means that the vendors will be able to offer their food, crafts, and other wares to all who attend and that sponsors can promote their products or experiences to everyone. It is good for our community and good for business to be accessible to everyone.

Be sure to check the next issue for “Part Two: Accessible Booth Design.”

Laura Grunfeld writes a regular column helping producers make their events accessible to people with disabilities. Suggest topics to her by writing to Laura@EveryonesInvited.com. She has worked many festivals across the nation and readers can learn more about her event accessibility consulting, training, and production company at www.EveryonesInvited.com, www.linkedin.com/in/lauragrunfeld, www.youtube.com/lauragrunfeld, www.facebook.com/everyones.festival, www.instagram.com/everyonesfestival.