

Why Business Need Make Themselves More Accessible to Deaf People

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Meeting the needs of deaf customers is an important issue, therefore businesses need to give focused attention with an aim to creating barrier-free access and providing a world class customer service.

There are a variety of differing needs across the deaf customer population, for example those whose preferred language is BSL, those who can lip-read and those who can access hearing loops.

Businesses need to understand that not only do these things need to be taken into account, but also team members need to be provided, or keep up-to-date with, deaf awareness training in order to provide deaf customers with a world class customer experience.

Customers are becoming more and more discerning about who they are doing business with. People want to know that their coffee is fair trade, that their cosmetics are not tested on animals and that their tuna is dolphin friendly. We no longer tolerate poor customer service and the choice we have to take our business elsewhere is bigger than ever before.

Word spreads fast in the deaf community. There have been various stories about deaf customers receiving terrible customer service because they are deaf. For example, customers being refused service because they can't speak, or being told they shouldn't be ordering coffee because they are deaf!) These have gone viral within a matter of hours.

The other side of the story is that stories about exceptional customer service – like a barista in a well-known coffee chain in America learning ASL to communicate with a regular deaf customer, also go viral just as quickly.

Both will have an impact on a business' deaf and hearing customer base. I can only imagine which most businesses would prefer! The fact of the matter is that if you make your business more accessible to one community, you automatically improve customer service for all of your customers.

And in case you were wondering what your deaf customer base might look like, here are the facts:

There are 10 million people in the UK affected by hearing loss – which is 1 in 6 people

- 3.7 million are of working age
- 2 million deaf people in the UK have hearing aids
- About 800,000 are severely or profoundly deaf
- There are 45,000 deaf children in the UK
- 90% of deaf children are born to hearing children
- There are around 250,000 people who are deafblind

- At least 105,000 deaf people in the UK communicate using British Sign Language (BSL)

terptree is an award-winning business full of deeply passionate people who care about creating social change and truly educating and empowering deaf and hearing people.