

More on Accessibility...

Of all the points made in last weeks e-news, investing in accessibility certainly garnered the most attention. However, as more than one Main Street member pointed out, accessibility goes beyond store hours. Yes, it is vitally important to remain open when people are available to shop, but accessibility also means giving consumers the ability to ACCESS your business conveniently. That access isn't always defined by the ability of a consumer, volunteer or group member physically walking into your physical location. Sometimes access means simply being able to get information, or leave information quickly and easily. Below are some of the "New Rules" of accessibility to ensure organizational success in today's world.



1. It all starts with SET, CONSISTENT AND CONVENIENT HOURS.

People get frustrated with the unknown. Variable hours and inconsistency in specialty staffing can be a put off. Customers are busy, and they have more shopping, dining, service and recreational options than ever before. Businesses need to adapt to the two income household demographic, which means that most of your potential clients are working at least 9 to 5. Regardless of your business or organizational type, if your hours don't extend beyond those working time periods you are cutting out a large potential customer base simply through the lack of accessibility. Unfortunately, consistency with entrepreneurs extends beyond their own business or organization. If customers attempt to shop in a certain store that isn't open during convenient shopping hours, entire areas or business types may get branded with the dreaded "I'd like to shop (enter an area or type of business here), but they are never open" label. Thank those businesses that are "open late" and determine if changing hours is the correct strategy for you.

2. Uh oh, it's a busy tone on the phone... Part of the nuance of modern society is the "I want what I want, and I want it RIGHT NOW" attitude of consumers. Those wants translate into the desire to obtain or leave information. Although e-mail has become a very prevalent form of communication, the telephone is still a vital part of your organizational communication arsenal. Monitor your system and ask yourself these questions: "How many lines do I have, and how often are all of my lines tied up?" "If a customer calls in and the line is unavailable, what happens?" "If a customer calls during off hours, what happens?" Your answers to those questions will determine if you need to invest resources to expand your phone system. Each missed call or unrecorded message could result in a lost opportunity for your organization. Answering machines or message services, phone lines that "roll over", call forwarding and the ability to place calls on "hold" can all be effective tools in gaining and retaining customers.

3. Invite people in. Too often, we expect people just to "show up" to a business or organization. I'm sorry, but it generally doesn't work that way. You have to let people know that you are accessible. Now, you can achieve that "invitation" in a few different ways, but I'll use an example from this week to illustrate the power of a more traditional "invitation" approach: Live in the Lot is a Flint Hills Music event that Emporia Main Street has the honor of helping with. Tim and Kristi Mohn use the two month series of concerts to "invite" people into their business by exposing the public to live music and our wonderful local bands. This week, it looked as though it was going to rain during the time Live in the Lot took place. Flint Hills Music had a back up location in place, but it was new, and how could we get the word out? As part of our contribution to the Flint Hills Music event, Emporia Main Street contacted our advertisers asking them for help. Within four hours, the Emporia Gazette, KVOE (and its sister stations), KANSas Radio (The Wave) and KISS 103.1 got the word out while Cable One and the Shopper had already pumped up the use the Main Street Web site (allowing us to capture e-mail addresses), and we utilized our traditional local media to relay the message to the public that the Live in the Lot venue had been changed to the Granada Theatre. A normal rain date for Live in the Lot would have resulted in about 35-40 people watching a concert. The last minute blast advertising of the event at the Granada resulted in the attendance of over 150 people. Advertising works. Use it to "invite people in."

4. The Web is the ULTIMATE access tool. A website is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week across the entire globe. An attractive, clean and well maintained web site with current information is extremely important to any growing organization. An increasing segment of the population uses the web to research product and service availability, price, location, amenities and other business, entertainment or service related information. Here's one thing that many people don't comprehend: if you aren't inputting information about your business or organization on the web, someone else is. A lot of "information" sites pop up all over the Internet that can contain inaccurate, incomplete or unflattering information about your business or organization. Using a web designer, like our local [Emporia Gazette](#) or [IM Design Group](#), can put you on the right track when designing an information based site. If you are looking for content and design ideas, remember that [Jon Schallert's Destination University](#) has an entire section dedicated to the web and e-marketing that is absolutely FREE for Emporia Main Street members. Log onto [Destination University](#) with the Emporia Main Street log in code, which you can get simply by e-mailing the Emporia Main Street office @ main.street@emporia-kansas.gov.

5. Create an accessible environment. Have you ever driven by a really scary looking house? Outside of Halloween, did you ever feel compelled to go in? Now, have you ever driven by a beautiful home? Did you ever wonder what that house looked like inside and want to go knock on the door? Beauty, proper design and attention to aesthetics are vitally important when you are attempting to lure the casual passer by or driver into your business. Trash, weeds, building damage or incorrect design elements can create that "scary" feeling that makes people keep walking. For potential FREE help with design assistance, contact Emporia Main Street. Our Design Committee may be able to help! But remember, a storefront is your front porch. Are you inviting people in?

6. Part of accessibility means being a good host, and inviting people back. I've got two very large mentally challenged dogs at home that seem to eat their rather significant body weight in food every couple of weeks. When I go to *L&L Pets*, one of the staff members carries the food I purchase to my vehicle for me. When I go to new Main Street Member *Bluestem Farm and Ranch Supply* for pet supplies I generally have at least two people speak to me. When I run into *Reebles Countrymart* for some pet treats, someone generally knows my name and strikes up a conversation. Yeah, I'm just buying something for my dog, but in all three instances I cited I felt welcome. Once you have a great experience with a business, it's important to maintain and cultivate that customer relationship. For "bring back" coupon ideas, contact *Chester Press* or *Navrats Office Supplies*. If you have a sales component to your web site, make sure people know (because even if the individual is from out of town, they can still shop your store). The point is, even if you are accessible through attention to every point listed above, its that final experience that sells a client and attention after the "sale" that keeps them coming back.

Back to home page: www.emporiainmainstreet.com