

  **Abflug
Departures
Salidas**

Accessible Spaces Inclusion beyond screens



A research report by digital user experience agency, Sigma



Forward by Alastair Somerville Acuity Design

“Welcome: to greet hospitably and with courtesy or cordiality”

(Merriam-Webster definition)

This report has a lot about welcoming. Accessibility is often defined by its solutions to impairments and this ignores the fundamental humanity of it. Disability is exclusion from society: when you cannot travel to the place you want to visit, when you cannot experience the thing you want to explore, when you cannot be with the people you want to socialise with.

Accessibility is welcoming. It is about hospitality, courtesy and cordiality. Rather than simply building solutions to specific problems (an access ramp or alt text on website images), accessibility supports the whole experience, physically and emotionally.

In my museum work, much of what makes a place inaccessible is nothing to do with the building or the website. It is the unwelcoming feeling across the whole journey. Planning and booking travel as a person with physical and/or cognitive impairments is hard. Not merely is it hard because basic accessibility features are too often missing but it is inhospitable and shows neither courtesy nor cordiality. However much a person wishes to see a museum, go to the shops, share a cinema trip: it is the totality of unwelcoming that blocks them. The journey is hostile. The journey is disabled.

It is this lack of hospitality that this report discusses. How do organisations make their places clearly open to people with impairments? It is not simply about pointing out where the accessible entrances and exits are. It is about demonstrating how a visitor will enjoy their whole trip without needless anxiety and stress. How their individual needs will be supported whilst in places filled with many people. How diversity is recognised and enabled by organisations.

This report covers the successes and failures of accessibility in terms of welcoming. With examples of successful services, like NeateBox and Euan's Guide, and failures, the lack of support for autistic visitors to too many venues.

Read it to help understand more about how you and your organisation welcome people with disabilities.



Alastair Somerville
Acuity Design

Introduction

Access to public, leisure and event spaces is something that many of us take for granted. However, for millions of people across the UK with disabilities, even simple trips can be filled with unnecessary difficulty, confusion and apprehension.

We would like to explore this issue.

Whilst our previous research has focused on design for digital inclusivity, this report will look at accessibility beyond screens and explore the customer experience of people with ranging abilities in public, leisure or event spaces.

We will discuss the need for end-to-end accessibility, from event booking through to aftersales communication, meet and greet services for those who need them, travel to venues and what happens when things go wrong.

Our aim is to shine a light on the importance of inclusive service design and raise awareness of the problems that people face in their everyday lives. We will also look at positive steps organisations are taking to help improve the situation.

Why is accessibility important?

The commercial benefits of inclusive design are obvious. It is estimated that thousands of businesses could be turning away the custom of as many as [one in five people](#) by being inaccessible to people of ranging abilities or conditions; a commercial loss of £212 billion. However, considering how important accessibility is to everyday quality of life for the [13.9 million](#) Brits who have some form of condition, inclusion is not just a commercial obligation, but a moral imperative.

To illustrate the scale of the problem, a recent report from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission revealed that [93% of the 8.5 million rental properties in the UK](#) are inaccessible to people with ranging ability and condition; a clear sign of how people of ranging conditions are being forgotten by those in power.

The government has [pledged](#) to help one million disabled people into work over the next decade. However, this goal looks a long way off considering the challenges that many people of ranging ability and condition face just on their way to and from work. Just recently, BBC journalist Alex Taylor [reported his plight](#) being stuck on a train in his wheelchair – and [not for the first time](#). Unfortunately, this situation does not look set to improve any time soon, with Southern Rail parent company Govia Thameslink Railway recently [coming under fire](#) for reportedly telling staff not to help impaired passengers on and off trains if it is going to cause delays.

These issues also extend to the wider travel sector, as evidenced by the recent plight of BBC security editor Frank Gardner, who was left waiting for nearly two hours on an empty plane after staff [lost his wheelchair](#). Not only this, but Sigma's previous [research](#) into the usability of a number of leading travel websites found many of these sites to be lacking, particularly when it came to including the visually impaired. As more and more everyday leisure services, such as booking a holiday, make the jump to online, it's crucial to ensure that all customer touchpoints – both online and offline – are inclusive to all.

However, accessibility issues are by no means limited to the travel industry, with a selection of leisure venues and events also coming under fire. Indeed, a [recent report](#) from accessibility charity Attitude is Everything found that more than 80% of hearing impaired music fans have experienced issues when booking tickets to live music events. Unfortunately, these problems also come into play at the events themselves, as evidenced by the [recent lawsuit](#) involving Little Mix concert organisers LHG Live, and Sally Reynolds, who has a hearing condition.

Overall, while our society is ostensibly more inclusive than ever before, we still have a long way to go. Accessibility has a huge impact on how millions of us live, work, and spend our leisure time and, unfortunately, not enough is being done as it stands.

Real life experiences

We interviewed a couple of people who rely on brands, venues and organisations taking an inclusive approach to product and service design.

Molly Watt is an accessibility and usability consultant and inclusive technology evangelist. Living with a genetic condition called Usher syndrome, causing deafblindness, Molly is reliant upon and benefits from using mainstream assistive technology.

Claire Harvey M.B.E is CEO of Diversity Role Models. She is a wheelchair user and captained the GB Sitting Volleyball Team in the London 2012 Paralympic Games before turning her attention to athletics. In June 2017, Claire was awarded the MBE for services to Diversity, Inclusion and Sport.

The airport customer journey

Both have travelled extensively for their work so we asked them to describe their typical commute. Building on the work that Alastair Somerville did to look at [Easyjet's online accessibility](#), and [Sigma's own prior research on travel booking](#), we interviewed them about their experience when flying, so we could map the customer journey and highlight some of the issues they face.

“As soon as you say, ‘Yes I would like assistance.’ they assume you would like a person to come with a wheelchair.”



Molly Watt

On her experience of travelling through an airport as a deafblind passenger.

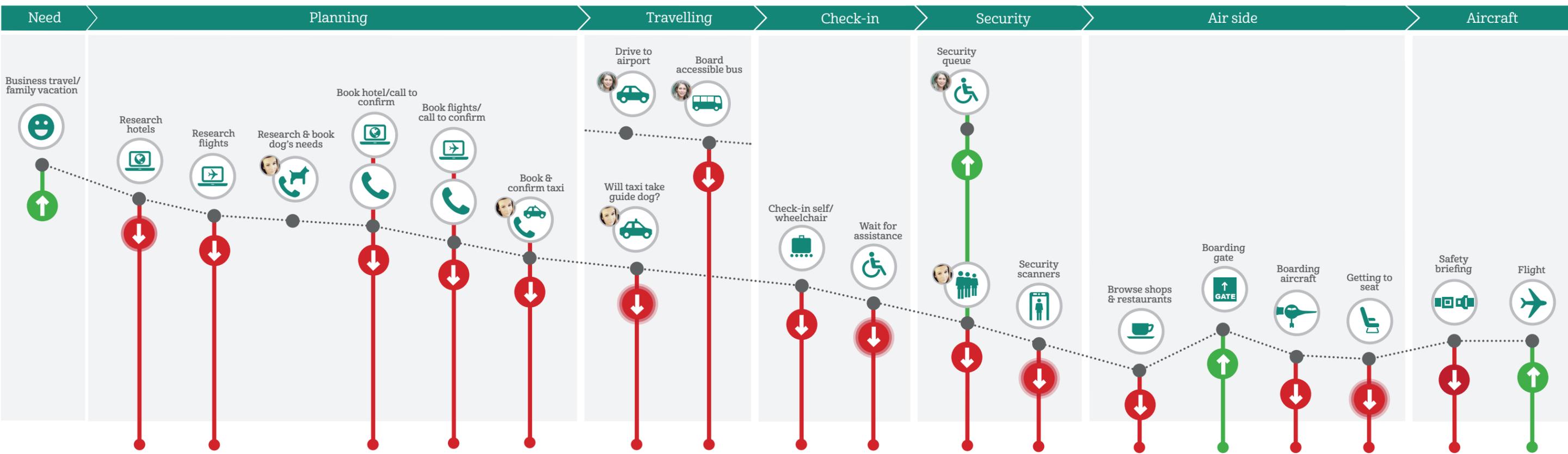
“Depending on how you enter the plane you watch your chair go off hoping it makes it (a few times it hasn't!). I then have to go in the aisle chair, where you are strapped in like Hannibal Lecter.”



Claire Harvey

On boarding a plane as a wheelchair user

Flying customer experience



Difficulties and frustrations

- No standards for accessible rooms
- Seen as a want rather than a need
- Rooms not always guaranteed until check-in
- Some airlines recognise deaf or blind but not deafblind
- Can't make specific requests when booking
- Not all staff understand rules on service dog travel
- You need to contact the taxi firm to advise you have a dog
- Dog must visit the vet to ensure vaccinations and worming are up to date

- You need to understand specific bus service
- Spaces can be limited
- Taxis often refuse guide dogs

- Traveller and wheelchair check-in separately
- Often only one family member is allowed to accompany, so family is split
- Delays when staff don't know how to check in a dog
- When visually impaired travellers request assistance, they get a wheelchair

- Often guided to shorter family queue but fear of bumping into children causes anxiety
- Putting articles in trays is difficult
- Body scanners are intimidating, can't see foot markers and staff intervene physically

- Queues in shops and layout make navigation hard
- Announcements for early boarding can't be heard
- Aisles aren't wide enough for wheelchairs, or canes and often you are seated away from the entrance
- Other passenger's baggage creates obstacles
- Given directions to seat but numbering is tiny or high up
- Staff talk to passenger's companion and traveller is ignored
- Fear of wheelchair getting lost or damaged
- Ambilift or wheelchair boarding uncomfortable and embarrassing

- Deafblind passengers can't follow the safety briefing
- In-flight entertainment systems are inaccessible
- One-to-one safety briefing done whilst plane is in the air, noise from the aircraft and other passengers makes hearing more difficult than normal.

Solutions and opportunities

- Standardise rooms using 'The Good Access Guide'
- Contact people to ask about their specific requirements and get permission to retain for future bookings to build up trust
- Share information across teams, from check-in to dispatcher and captain/cabin manager
- Try to seat passengers close to an entrance/exit to avoid using aisles
- Taxi and bus drivers should be trained to assist users with specific needs

- Allow a fast track service
- Train staff and have up to date procedures close at hand
- Offer accessible maps and clear instructions

- Have accessible queues for security
- Ensure all staff are trained to understand the needs of particular passengers so they don't cause any unnecessary anxiety

- Re-design layout of retail and leisure spaces to help people get around, as well as encouraging shopping and involvement
- Remove those awful zigzag shopping walkways

- Assist to the plane at the appropriate time
- Swap with other passengers
- Speak to the passengers directly
- Pre-board passengers with special needs before families with small children
- Blind passengers should be assisted to seat and given information to allow them to picture where they are on the plane
- Pre-board to reduce stress and give reassurance that wheelchair is safe

Attitudes to access requests

In order to get a picture of how well venues are catering for the 11 million people with ranging abilities in the UK, we completed a mystery shopper exercise. We approached 132 UK venues over email with two separate accessibility enquiries – one for a wheelchair user and one for a person with autism.

These were a mixture of large (established / national) and small (lesser-known / independent) venues from the below categories:

- Airports
- Train operators
- Music venues and festivals
- Sports venues (cricket, football, rugby and ice hockey)
- Cinemas and theatres
- Hotels
- Theme parks

We analysed the results of this email contact, assessing venues on their apparent awareness of the situation or condition in question, their ability to help and their manner in doing so. Differences between small and large venues have been pulled out where relevant; otherwise the split was fairly even.

We have also highlighted some positive and not-so-positive responses received.

Overall, while there were certainly examples of venues that are doing a fantastic job, there is still a lot of work to be done before we can consider the UK a completely safe and welcoming place for people with specific needs.

Key points

- Response levels for both enquiries were low – on average just 46% of venues replied to our email
- Both the response volume and general awareness of cognitive impairments were far lower than for physical ones
- On average, 18% of venues required stringent paperwork to be completed before offering any help or information whatsoever
- It took far longer to find the information required for someone with autism, with requirements having to be very explicitly spelled out. Some venues even replied initially but, after we explained what would be required, did not get back in touch
- The general tone for responses was practical and matter-of-fact, but few were friendly. On average, only 26% of venues were friendly and welcoming in their manner

Responses

- Only 33% of venues responded to our autism enquiry
- 58% of venues responded to our wheelchair enquiry

This general lack of response was concerning, particularly as almost all messages were sent to dedicated “accessibility@” email addresses, which have been designed specifically to capture this type of enquiry. You could surmise that they suspected this wasn’t a genuine enquiry and their request for further information could be viewed as a positive step towards understanding individual needs but the low response rate and subsequent lack of communication were concerning.

Furthermore, although the majority of venues analysed do have an ‘accessibility’ section on their website, the information provided was often incomplete; particularly for people with cognitive conditions. These pages were also often difficult to find; perhaps advertised in a small font or only visible in the website footer. For visitors that may have trouble navigating online materials, presenting information in this way could prove to be counter-productive, resulting in the creation of anxiety at a point in the booking journey where customers are looking to be reassured.

Awareness levels - autism

- Of those that replied, 41% of venues showed low or basic awareness of what’s required to accommodate someone with severe autism, needing to be prompted at least once on what we would need to ensure the person’s visit was completely comfortable
- 34% showed ‘fair’ awareness but had at least one issue (e.g. they thought that someone with autism required step-free access or help carrying their bags)
- 25% showed a high level of awareness and knew exactly what was needed
- Worryingly, 27% of venues gave a generic response that would only be suitable for a physically impaired person, and did not understand the difference between physical / cognitive conditions

Awareness levels – wheelchair user

- Of those that replied, 12% of venues showed low or basic awareness of what’s required to accommodate someone in a wheelchair, needing to be prompted at least once re: what was needed
- 67% showed ‘fair’ awareness but had at least one issue (e.g. they didn’t think about being able to access areas such as a food court or toilets)
- 11% showed a high level of awareness and knew exactly what was needed

It is extremely simple for businesses to access information on requirements for people with impairments of all types. Visit Britain, for example, has recently published a [thorough guide](#) on how to welcome and accommodate people with autism. However, despite this, it was surprising to find such a degree of unawareness amongst the venues we analysed. This lack of proactivity and understanding amongst tourist destinations – many of them highly-respected household names – is worrying. Ultimately it points to a need for better education on accessibility across the board.

Timings - autism

- 31% of venues responded within 24 hours
- 33% responded within 48 hours
- 36% took longer than two days to respond, with some taking as long as 10 days

Timings - wheelchair user

- 34% of venues responded within 24 hours. Of these, 69% of venues were small and 31% were large
- 63% responded within 48 hours
- 3% took longer than two days to respond, with some taking as long as 10 days

Amongst those venues that did reply, there was a huge disparity in response times. On average, 80% of venues replied within a respectable 48-hour timeframe. However, this dropped to just 64% for the 'request about a visitor with autism', suggesting both wariness and unfamiliarity with regards to less 'visible' impairments.

It was also alarming to see how many venues simply didn't put an accessibility request at the top of their priority list – particularly given that many of the email addresses we sent the request to were specifically tailored to provide this kind of information. Frustratingly, some venues failed to address our question about accessibility altogether, but still added us to a marketing email list.

Full accessibility - autism

- Only 61% of venues said they could fully accommodate
- 9% said they wouldn't be able to
- 30% said they could but access would be limited

Full accessibility - wheelchair

- 87% of venues said they could fully accommodate
- 13% said they wouldn't be able to. Of these, 80% were smaller venues

The Equality Act of 2010 makes it clear that public-facing venues must take positive steps to remove as many barriers as possible to allow full access for all users. However, an average of 26% of venues stated they wouldn't be able to fully accommodate for the impairments in question – a troubling statistic given the size and influence of many organisations we approached.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the smaller, independent venues that told us they would struggle most to fully support the needs of a person in a wheelchair. Some of the responses related to the physical accessibility of the buildings, which some claimed pre-dated the DDA. However, it is clear that more must be done to ensure that people of all abilities can use the same facilities in an equal way.

Ease of achieving info - autism

- 41% of venues were able to solve the enquiry within one email
- 41% of venues took two emails (back and forth) to solve
- 11% took three emails (back and forth) to solve
- 7% did not solve the issue at all – with 5% of venues initially responding, but once the disability was explained they didn't respond again

Ease of achieving info - wheelchair

- 63% of venues were able to solve the enquiry within one email
- 37% of venues took two emails (back and forth) to solve

A lack of knowledge and understanding was again apparent when considering the amount of time that it took to extract useful information from venues about the relevant facilities available.

For the enquiry regarding a person with autism, many venues had to be 'spoon fed' what would be needed, highlighting a reluctance to actively understand the daily issues faced by people with ranging abilities. Even if - due to staff turnover, for example - training around how to best accommodate people with disabilities may be difficult, it was concerning that staff seemed to have limited awareness of what people with certain impairments may need. There are [training organisations and consultants who specialize in staff training for inclusive customer service](#).

Paperwork required - autism

- 20% of venues required paperwork or documentation to be filled out before arriving, with 6% of venues refusing to provide further information until this was completed. All of these venues were in the large category

Paperwork required - wheelchair

- 16% of venues required paperwork or documentation to be filled out before arriving, with 6% of venues refusing to provide further information until this was completed. All of these venues were large in size

Although it's understandable that some services for people with ranging abilities – for example, queue jump tickets at a theme park – may be taken advantage of by less scrupulous visitors, it was still surprising to find how fiercely some responses enforced the need to fill out paperwork before even answering our initial enquiry. For many venues, this demand for 'evidence' of an impairment was simply a generic email reply, removing any opportunity for a personalised service.

There are numerous types of ability – all necessitating different facilities and services – so it was worrying to find that this email exchange was so process-heavy. Instead of providing useful information, such a response could deter the person from visiting at all, rendering it effectively useless. Moreover, this could cause a great deal of stress if the venue in question is a transport hub that the person has no choice but to use.

Tone of voice - autism

- Only 34% of venues came across as friendly and approachable in their responses. Of those that were friendly in response, 73% were small venues and 17% were large
- 16% of venues were very abrupt or dismissive in tone

Tone of voice - wheelchair

- Only 20% of venues came across as friendly and approachable in their responses, with the majority of these being smaller venues
- 25% of venues were very abrupt or dismissive in tone

Customer service is important for all, but people with ranging abilities may feel anxious about visiting new places, so a friendly tone is incredibly important for making people feel comfortable and fully catered for. However, we judged that an average of just 27% of venues came across in a supportive and pleasant way. Although this was higher than the percentage of venues that seemed unfriendly or abrupt in their communication (20.5%) it still underlines a widespread level of poor customer service in this space.

Interestingly, more places came across as polite and helpful when responding to our enquiry about someone with autism. Of these friendly responses, almost three-quarters (73%) were from small venues, suggesting that large – perhaps more corporate – companies should review and make changes to their processes.

Further support - autism

- 59% of venues offered extra support when arriving at the venue, or provided a personal email or phone number to call if further information was required

Further support - wheelchair

- 43% of venues offered extra support when arriving at the venue, or provided a personal email or phone number to call if further information was required

As this report shows, accessibility does not just extend to a person's arrival; it's important to consider that those with ranging abilities may require further assistance throughout their entire visit.

On average, just over half (51%) of venues provided extra help if needed – for example the contact number of a person on site to help navigate through a busy departures lounge or help with baggage. Some sports stadia even offered a free guided tour, for the person to scope out their visit with a friend or family member before the event, while the venue was closed to the public. This was great to see, but also shows how much more the tourism industry must do to ensure its services are fully accessible to all.

Specific responses

Below are some positive responses, and an overview of some equally poor ones, to provide a cross-section of results.

Dundee Rep Theatre

**DUN
DEE
REP**

Hallo

Happy to hear that you and your daughter may be visiting us in the near future.

Wheelchair access in the front of house areas is pretty comprehensive. There is a push button automatic door to enter the building and the Restaurant and an accessible loo are on ground level.

There is a ramp at the front door which leads to the Box Office and ticket collection and a lift which goes to the bar area, another accessible loo and the auditorium level.

The access seats in the auditorium are limited and we can advise on availability at Box office on 01382 223530. We can accommodate up to 2 wheelchair users and 2 friends on each side of the auditorium on the side sections of Row D (I attach a plan showing their location). There is an usher stationed just by these seats available to give any assistance needed.

Lord's Cricket Ground

LORD'S
THE HOME OF CRICKET

Thank you for your e-mail. I am responsible for access at Lord's and shall be very happy to try to facilitate and support your trip as best we can.

The facilities that are available will partly depend on your intended trip. For example, joining a public tour will be very different to coming to watch a busy Test Match with 30,000 people in the Ground. I understand there are different types of autism and so different needs requiring different responses.

Our major matches, including international matches and T20s tend to attract large crowds and so could be overwhelming - lots of people, lots of noise and (at T20s only) music and

lights. Also, if you were to move around at busy times the crowds can be heavy and you would be likely to be jostled, simply by the movement of the crowd. However, a county championship match has a much smaller crowd (hundreds to a couple of thousand, in a venue with a capacity approaching 30,000) and tend to be much calmer. You can also move around on a county match day and choose your own seat - so you could find a quiet place to sit, still in view of the cricket, whereas you have an allocated seat on a major match day. If you simply want to come to Lord's to watch some cricket I would suggest the quieter county match. Having said that, of course we will do our best to accommodate you on a major match day (though most of the tickets have been sold for matches this year).

We do not have a designated quiet space as such. On a major match day, we do have a Prayer Room which we consider to be a multi-use space, so could be used, but we would need to be sympathetic to other users. Other spaces that could be used would be the first aid room or to go to a non-public space such as a car park. I know that may not be ideal, but that is the reality of the facilities at the moment.

The county match scenario would, I suggest, be less likely to create the conditions that may trigger a problem. As mentioned, these tend to be much quieter and there is far more quiet space available. So, I'd suggest that a quieter game would be more relaxed and less likely to trigger a response, but I appreciate that you may want to watch a 'bigger' game. Essentially, we don't, currently, have a bespoke facility to provide a quiet space but we will facilitate and provide a response.

We also run the 'Companion Scheme,' offering a free ticket for anyone accompanying a person with a disability, should they be unable to attend or indeed travel here without assistance.

"It's very important to us that everyone feels welcome and able to enjoy a day out at Lord's, whether to watch cricket, come on a Tour or as a dinner guest. We've been here for more than two hundred years so, while a few parts of the ground may still be a bit tricky for some to negotiate, we work with our Members and visitors to improve access for all whenever and wherever we can. Often the best thing we can do is to provide information which gives our visitors confidence about what to expect, as well as the reassurance that we will do our best to look after them while they are here."

Russell Seymour PhD, Sustainability Manager at Lord's

Our aim with this report is to raise awareness of accessibility issues and bring about positive change – not simply point the finger at venues that are performing less strongly in this area. For this reason, we have omitted the names and locations of the below negative responses.

Thank you for contacting [X].

In order for us to assign your enquiry to the correct team, please could you provide some additional details for our investigations. For your convenience, this enquiry has been assigned the unique service request number: [X]

To provide further information, please log into Your Account area of our customer page: [X] or contact our 24-hour National Helpline on [X] quoting the reference number provided.

If we don't hear from you within the next five days, we will close this case as we are unable to progress it without the additional information.

Unfortunately, we do not have the facility for wheelchair access. We are a basement venue that pre-dates the DDA. Sorry this is not the news you wanted, but it's the situation we're stuck with.

Thanks for your further email. Whilst we welcome all, we are a hotel which is family and dog friendly. We have little control over our other guests so in all fairness it is impossible to give you any guarantees regarding the issues you raised. Perhaps a self-catering option might be more appropriate where you have full control over the environment?

In order to register as a disabled supporter you will need to provide a copy of your Disability Living Allowance Award notice confirming you are in receipt of the higher rate for either the mobility or care component. Alternatively, if you are in receipt of Personal Independence Payment this needs to be at the enhanced rate for either the mobility or daily living component. All documentation has to be dated 2018 and has to show the front page with your name and address on it. We will also require a contact number.

Digital roundtable - what is being done to help solve the problem?

As well as highlight some of the problems and negative responses, we wanted to shine a light on those who are helping to make things better. We interviewed the following organisations and individuals who are having a positive impact in the field of inclusion.



Gavin Neate
Founder of Neatebox

What is Neatebox - and why was it set up?

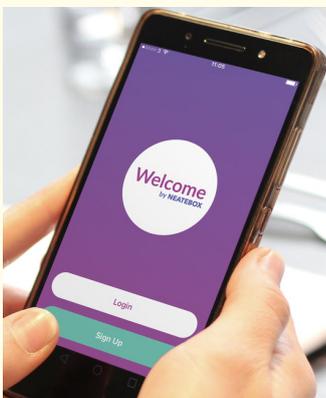
Our founder, Gavin Neate, spent 18 years with Guide Dogs UK as a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor, helping people with visual impairments to navigate daily life with the aid of a trained assistant dog.

When making these journeys, Gavin noticed that technology was beginning to play a bigger role in providing solutions for people with visual impairments. This led him to create Neatebox as a way to further the work of assistive technologies such as voiceover apps.

Neatebox's first app was called Button; it allows disabled pedestrians to activate pedestrian crossings using their phone. In Summer 2017, they launched Welcome.

What is Welcome, how does it work and what are its main benefits?

Welcome is an app which addresses the issue of customer service for visitors with specific accessibility requirements. It allows people with disabilities to access everyday venues such as hotels, theatres and transport hubs with confidence. It works with the venues themselves to ensure they are both aware of the visitor's arrival and are equipped with the knowledge to provide them with the assistance they need.



Users simply download the app, which can be personalised as per each user's specific requirements. Through the app, users can notify venues ahead of time that they would like to use their services, to ensure that they can offer what the user needs. On approach, a geofence system alerts the venue when the person is within a certain radius, allowing them to prepare for the visit.

The venue can also see an overview of that person's disability and will get 5-10 top tips on how to effectively interact with the visitor; essentially acting as a refresher on any disability awareness training that staff may have received.

From the business' perspective, it's a very simple process to implement through a browser-based platform. We provide a Bluetooth beacon which is placed at the entrance to the venue, then you're good to go.

The statistics around the value of the purple pound are hugely important; if organisations can engage with this £249 billion market – which is growing due to our ageing society – they stand to really boost their profile and bottom lines. If you want to be ready for the customer of the future, you need to understand inclusion and feel confident to offer that service.

Do you find there's a mismatch between how venues generally see 'disability'?

Yes, definitely. For many people, making a venue accessible just means providing ramps for a wheelchair. However, it's so important to remember that many impairments may not be simply physical – or even visible – so it's not just the building that must be accessible, but also how staff behave towards people with a disability.

In this respect, there is a mismatch in general understanding between what the different impairments are and how to address them appropriately. Of course, we would never expect everybody to be aware of all disabilities, but there needs to be more education for venue staff and the general public, too.

For example, if a person with a cognitive impairment like autism struggles in busy travel situations, all they might need is somebody to have a calming conversation with. However, many of us may not feel comfortable in approaching this situation – which makes matters worse. Welcome helps to remove that barrier and ensures that venue staff are more prepared to handle such scenarios.

Do you have any examples of how the Welcome app is having a positive effect on people's lives?

Absolutely. One of our venues, Edinburgh airport, has been working hard to improve the experience of passengers with disabilities, through linking up with the National Autistic Society, using Welcome and implementing other initiatives to improve people's lives with ranging abilities.

Another example is Jenners House of Fraser in Edinburgh, which has recently launched Welcome and received many great reviews from disabled visitors, such as the below.

“These visits with the Welcome App have helped me to get out. There is a purpose in going out if you know that you can get help and not struggle to find somewhere to sit or find a member of staff and I think that is really important. It would be too easy to become housebound, ordering online and missing out on interaction with other people.”

What challenges did you find in setting up and implementing the app?

Our challenges were the same as any start-up; it's always a leap of faith, you need to find a business case and creating a new tech system from scratch can be tough.

The misconceptions around disability can also be difficult to overcome, but once venues are more educated they realise how simple it can be to change their customers' lives.

Have you found that venues are generally open to being involved?

Generally yes. Of course, implementing a new system like this has an operational impact on venues and there is a certain degree of change required. Although Welcome is not a difficult system, you do

have to monitor it. There is therefore naturally some resistance, as some companies think they don't have enough resource to cover this added responsibility.

A common misconception is that the venues "don't have enough disabled visitors" to warrant the app - which is worrying given the number of people who live with an impairment of some kind in the UK. However, once we present the current statistics and the case studies from our participating venues, they recognise the significance of this customer segment.

Where is next for Neatebox - what does the future hold?

At the moment, we're working on the scale-up of the app to ensure it is put into practice at venues across the UK and Ireland, build our user base and get more venues signed up. We have plans to target global retailers like Tesco, plus all transport hubs, as these are used frequently.

We're also working on the app to make sure it's specific for particular venues. At the moment, the system is quite general but we want to make it more robust and applicable for all different industries. Once we have full UK coverage, the next step is to go international!



Jacob Adams

Head of research and campaigns at Attitude is Everything

What is Attitude is Everything and why was it set up?

Attitude is Everything is a disability-led charity and Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation. Led by CEO Suzanne Bull MBE, we focus on working in partnership with audiences, artists and the industry as a whole to make live music accessible to Deaf and disabled people across the UK.



Our work began in May 2000 as a one-year pilot programme funded by Arts Council England, which reached out following articles Suzanne had written in the UK music press about the significant barriers disabled fans faced when seeking to access live music events.

This quickly developed into an ongoing project to meet the demand for change from disabled people and provide the support the music industry needed. This led to the creation of our Charter

of Best Practice for venues and festivals, which has been recognised by the UK Live Music Group as the UK's 'industry standard' when it comes to live music accessibility. We also recently launched the Grassroots Venue Charter to support this crucial end of the UK live music market.

In May 2017, Suzanne was asked to be the UK Government's Sector Champion for the Live Music Industry and, more recently, we announced the Ticketing Without Barriers Coalition with the launch of our fourth [State of Access Report](#), which focused on the ticket and access booking process for Deaf and disabled audiences. This unprecedented coalition is a growing group of over 40 industry umbrella organisations, ticketing companies (including multi-nationals), venues and event companies who collectively represent the majority of the UK's live music market.

How does the organisation work and what are its main benefits?

What we do is entirely formed by the social model of disability; that people may have impairments but they are only “disabled” by the barriers they encounter in everyday life.

Our professional expertise is informed by a rolling programme of research and the continual feedback of hundreds of Deaf and disabled mystery shoppers, who report back on their experiences accessing venues and events across the UK. Over 1,500 mystery shops of live music events have contributed to our current advice and guidance to date.

Our ethos is that disabled people should be as independent as they wish to be in any aspect of their lives, including when seeking to access live music and outdoor events. Around 3.3 million Deaf and disabled people access live music events in the UK every year – that is 11% of the UK’s live music audience.

Do you have any specific examples of how Attitude is Everything is having a positive effect on people’s lives?

A recent snapshot of 20 Charter venues and festivals showed that Deaf and disabled audiences increased by 151% on average between 2014-2018 with our support – and we think that’s a really impressive statistic. Although everywhere is different, we should make the overall user journey as uniform as possible, both in music and across different sectors.

What’s great about the Charter is that it gives teams the opportunity to use their imagination. For example, Just So Festival in Cheshire has created an incredible innovative programme which categorises every show (for example on the level of engagement expected of the crowd) so everyone would know what to expect. Not only is this great for families or children with disabilities, but it was well received by everyone, showing the importance of universal design.

What challenges did you find in setting up?

Initially, it became apparent that the majority of organisations want to do the right thing but they lack the knowledge and confidence to do so. There is also a real fear of getting it wrong which needs to be overcome.

We have found it equally difficult to get our voice heard. Accessibility is just one topic of many competing priorities in our sector, but our mission is so important and we want to make sure it’s featured alongside other issues. Wider shifts in consciousness around inclusion – for example the role of women and mental health stigma – have really helped this and disability is now joining the discussion table which is great. We are so pleased that this is the case, and are happy when we can share this platform, but there is still some way to go.

And what challenges are you still facing?

An ongoing problem is trying to highlight the legal implications that venues and organisations face if they don’t comply. Although live music should be accessible to everyone, there hasn’t always been much clear guidance around the Equality Act – but that’s where we come in; to translate the legislation into actions for the entire industry. Most of the time, we find that people simply don’t know what they should be doing, and that’s why they ask us for help.

For many organisations, the main problem is that – although they do offer lots of accessible facilities

– they are just not communicating them properly, so the person in question (and all their friends or family) stay away. A short note on the event website, for example, which outlines available facilities, can make a difference between someone feeling confident enough to come to your festival, or to avoid it altogether. This can have serious financial consequences for that venue, as the value of the ‘purple’ pound is so high.

Where next for Attitude is Everything – what does the future hold?

We want to look further at how we can boost our impact; not being a single voice on the edge of the industry but maximising our relationships and partners to unite around some of these key issues. We’d also like to have more influence internationally. There is lots of interest from many other markets as there aren’t many organisations doing what we do anywhere in the world. We’ll be working alongside the British Council to achieve this – so it’s onwards and upwards.



Euan MacDonald at [Euan’s Guide](#)

Image source: BBC

What is Euan’s Guide – and why was it set up?

Euan’s Guide is the disabled access review website that was created in 2013 by myself, a powerchair user, and my sister Kiki. Ten years earlier, I had been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND), and over time my access requirements changed. Gradually, we began spending more time and energy on the phone or searching websites to find out where we could go that would work for me. I needed to know whether there would be an accessible loo, or a step-free entrance among other things before visiting everyday places such as cafes or the cinema. The information was difficult to find, and many attempts to visit places ended in disappointment.

There was a lot of trial and error involved, but eventually we had a solid list of places in Edinburgh that we knew were accessible. At the back of my mind, I knew we couldn’t be the only ones doing this, and we needed a platform to share the places we knew about with other disabled people, but also to find new places to go – there are only so many times that you can go to the same café!

The reality we faced was that there was nowhere to share this information in one place with other disabled people, and this is where the idea for Euan’s Guide came from. We created a charity online that was built as a friendly and honest alternative to hours of web searching and phone calls before visiting somewhere new. Euan’s Guide now has thousands of disabled access reviews submitted by over two thousand disabled people all over the UK and beyond.

How does it work and what are the main benefits?

The site is built by disabled people for disabled people. Reviews added to the site are read by others with similar access requirements, and this can give disabled people a clearer idea of what to expect before going somewhere for the first time. The worry of whether they will be able to get through the front door quickly diminishes once they’ve read that another wheelchair user did it just last week.

With lots of disabled people adding reviews for places locally and further afield, the options available to people with access requirements is growing every day. Disabled people can easily find the information they need to explore beyond the same cafes or bars where they always meet their friends. Eventually, people who use the site to plan trips start reviewing too, and before you know it, we have a community of thousands of people sharing their experiences of disabled access, from Shetland to London and beyond.

Do you have any specific examples of how the guide is having a positive effect on people's lives?

There are many! There is one story which I think about often, regarding a person who got in touch with us about Euan's Guide. After becoming a wheelchair user, they stopped going to the cinema because they didn't think they would be able to. They doubted the generic access information that is often depicted by a symbol of a wheelchair in a brochure or on a website, and assumed, as many people often do, that it wouldn't work for them.

After discovering Euan's Guide, they came across a review written by another wheelchair user who loved going to the cinema. The review was written from a perspective that they could relate to in so many ways, that for the first time in ten years they went to watch a film at their local cinema!

What challenges did you find in setting up the guide?

It all started around our kitchen table! To go from there to working with our team in central Edinburgh has been an exciting journey, and we learned lots as we established our charity as a disabled access review website. One of the biggest challenges we have faced is getting the word out to disabled people that this resource exists. We're a small charity working hard to reach as many disabled people as possible!

Have you found that venues are generally open to being involved?

Many are very open to being involved, but there are still venues that aren't thinking about accessibility as intuitively as they could be. Many places don't realise the importance of making their disabled access information visible and wait for disabled people to reach out and ask. Others go above and beyond and are very eager to read what their disabled visitors think about their disabled access, and some go on to make physical adjustments to their venues as a result!

Do you find there are discrepancies in how venues see disabled access?

Some venues see disabled access as a one shoe fits all requirement by thinking disabled access equates to being just wheelchair accessible. While this is very important, there is much more to disabled access than checking boxes off a list. No two disabled people are the same, and some are not wheelchair users. Those who are wheelchair users use different types, sizes and styles of wheelchairs that are not all suited to some ramps or door widths. Therefore, it's important for venues to communicate their disabled access information upfront. That way, disabled people can make an informed decision about whether they'd like to visit.

The venues that are getting it right tend to go above and beyond to welcome all their guests, and this includes making it easy for disabled people to see that they are accessible (or not) before they've even visited. Having staff or volunteers who are welcoming and aware helps too. It's the little things, like knowing how to work the hearing loop or where to find the portable ramp, that can make a huge difference.

Where is next for Euan's Guide – what does the future hold?

More disabled access reviews! We're working very hard right now to make our website the best it can be for our reviewers. Slowly but surely, we're improving how people submit reviews, researching some exciting new tech ideas, and continuing to work with our amazing group of Euan's Guide Ambassadors to help spread the word about the information that's out there. We're also getting ready to start the countdown to the next Disabled Access Day!

Conclusion

As it stands, almost 14 million people are “disabled”; not due to any condition they live with, but rather due to the society in which they live. Millions of people could be – and indeed, are – missing out on everyday experiences the rest of us take for granted because of a basic lack of accessibility awareness across the travel, leisure and tourism sectors.

In the course of our research into this issue, it was particularly disappointing to see just how often vital information on accessibility was incomplete, difficult to find or even just missing altogether, forcing us to proactively reach out to venues to attempt to find the information we needed. While many of the staff we spoke with were friendly, helpful and professional, a concerning number displayed a basic lack of accessibility awareness – particularly when it came to less “visible” conditions such as autism.

People of ranging ability and condition should never be made to feel “impaired” or “disabled”. Unfortunately, a lack of accessibility awareness across a variety of sectors means that this is often the case. If somebody living with a condition feels excluded, it can often bring up associated negative feelings such as frustration, shame and even guilt, in some cases. These people are not likely to attempt a repeat visit to venues which have made them feel this way – an unfortunate, and entirely avoidable, loss for both the individual and the venue alike.

On a more positive note, there are clearly those with a willingness to make things better. Solutions such as Neatebox, Euan’s Guide and the recently announced “Purple Tuesday” are an incredibly positive step forwards in making things better for individuals, and the brands that serve them, alike. The solutions and training needed to make things better are there – better use just needs to be made of them.

Simply put, exclusion is not a disability issue, it’s a diversity issue. The Equality Act (2010) clearly states that “public places must take positive steps to remove barriers disabled people face to ensure we receive the same service, as far as this is possible, as someone who is not disabled”. Unfortunately, nearly a decade later it’s clear that, as a society, we still have some ways to go to accomplish this.



Chris Bush
Head of User Experience Design
Sigma



Talk to us!

We're always happy to listen, talk and help. Please contact us with any questions, ideas or suggestions.

E: simon.wissink@sigma.se

P: +44 (0)1625 410 982



Thank you to our contributors

Molly Watt

Claire Harvey

Euan MacDonald

Alastair Somerville

Gavin Neate

Jacob Adams

PR Agency One

