

The background is a deep blue gradient. On the left, a glowing sphere is partially visible, with a dark silhouette of a person standing on its surface. The person appears to be looking towards the right. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and professional.

PSN In Action – A Case Study
Pragmatic Research that Can
Make a Difference

PSN – PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS NETWORK

PSN

*Providing innovative and workable solutions
to today's business challenges*

PSN In Action – A Case Study Pragmatic Research that Can Make a Difference

We all benefit when everyone has access to places, people, and experiences. There are however obstacles that prevent many from participation and engagement and limit access to everyday goods, services and activities. Barriers can be attitudinal, physical or result from organizational policies, practices and procedures. Barriers can also relate to information, communications and/or technology.

Accessibility is about the extent to which a person can obtain a good or service, or participate in an activity, at the time it is needed and in a way that meets their needs regardless of age, ability, or situation. While removing barriers that can inhibit interaction with people, information, goods and services is a critical component to enhancing accessibility, the reality is that accessibility means more than just removing barriers. It is about inclusion and making goods, services, information and technology and participation in activities easier for everyone.

Enhanced accessibility and usability of services benefits people who are young or old, with excellent or limited abilities, in ideal or difficult circumstances.

Why Conduct Research on Customer Service and the Accessibility Needs of People with Disabilities?

Facilitating accessibility makes good economic, social and legal sense.

The Business Imperative

Customer service expectations are changing. In fact, customer service expectations are almost 20% higher than just 12 months ago and almost 40% higher than 5 years ago.

Almost 60% of customers state that their customer service expectations are rarely or only sometimes being met; 86% of consumers state they never go back to doing business with a company if they had a bad customer experience. Additionally, customers are becoming more vocal about their service experiences and are sharing their views with others.

Understanding and responding to customer service expectations clearly affects bottom line profitability and growth. Research shows that it is 2 to 20 times as expensive to get a new customer as to retain an existing one. Research also shows that a 5 percentage point shift in customer retention consistently results in 25-100% profit swings.

In Canada, people with disabilities account for an estimated \$25 billion in consumer spending annually and influence the spending decisions of 12 to 15 million other consumers. Responding to the customer service needs of this significant consumer segment makes good business sense.

The Demographic Imperative

The characteristics of our customers are changing. Consumers are aging. In Ontario, seniors aged (65+) currently account for 13.7% of the population and it projected that almost 40% of Ontario's population will be over 50, by 2025, with nearly 3.1 million people aged 65+.

Ontario's disability rate is also increasing. In 2006, 1.85 million Ontarians or 15.5% of the population had a disability. Statistics clearly show that Ontario's disability rate increases steadily with age. While the disability rate was just over 5% for people 25-44, and about 21% for people 45 to 64, the disability rate rose to almost 40% for individuals 65-74 and 60% for people aged 75 plus.

The Legal Imperative

In Ontario, making customer service accessible to all is now the law. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities

Act and its associated Standards are laying the foundation for changes designed to make the Province barrier-free by 2025. By January 1, 2012, all Ontario businesses and organizations, with one or more employees, must establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities and must provide training to staff who interact with the public.

The PSN Approach to Research on Customer Service and the Accessibility Needs of People with Disabilities

What is the Customer Service Project?

Since June 2009, PSN, has been engaged in the "Customer Service Project", a two-pronged study that examines barriers people with disabilities experience when attempting to access everyday goods and services and quality customer service. The Project includes both a Survey and Focus Groups.

- This survey looks at attitudinal, information and communication, architectural and physical, as well as policy and systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing goods and services and from receiving quality customer service. The Customer Service Survey also seeks ideas and suggestions on what can be done to make customer service experiences better.
- Focus groups held in Toronto and other communities in Ontario including in Ottawa, Cornwall, Barrie, Hamilton and Windsor have provided opportunities for individuals to elaborate on their experiences and to further communicate stories, issues and suggestions.

Why A "Customer Service Project"?

A variety of factors influenced PSN's decision to undertake the "Customer Service Project" including:

- A desire to engage in an inclusive approach for identifying barriers, service needs and priorities that provides a voice to people with

disabilities who want to contribute and who traditionally have not been engaged.

- A desire to better understand the range of barriers, issues, concerns and needs that people with diverse disabilities experience and the frequency with which they experience barriers.
- A desire to better understand the commonalities and differences in barriers, experiences and needs of people with different types of disabilities.
- A desire to show how and why inclusion makes economic, social and legal sense.
- A desire to provide businesses and organizations with research-backed advice on how to enhance accessibility and usability of their services that will make them a provider of choice.

How we are doing it

The strength of any study lies in the quality and breadth of responses received. The assistance and cooperation of National, Ontario-based and local associations, organizations, and Municipal Local Advisory Committees have helped ensure the survey's distribution to people with a range of disabilities. Attendance at various community events, email campaigns through distribution organizations, articles in Newsletters, as well as word-of-mouth have also helped ensure participation by people with diverse disabilities.

To accommodate people with various disabilities and differing needs the survey has been made available in multiple formats and through various channels. The survey has been available for completion online, as well as in accessible WORD and PDF formats. Telephone assistance has been provided to those who may experience difficulty in completing the survey themselves.

About the Survey Instrument

The survey instrument is a 75 question structured survey focusing on types of barriers, the importance of each barrier and the frequency with which each occurs.

While focused on customer service, the questions cover a range of potential attitudinal, information/communication, physical and policy barriers. All questions are randomized, not categorized either by type of disability or type of barrier. Prior to finalizing the survey, all questions were validated by people with disabilities and other key informants.

A Preliminary View Of What We have Been Told

Some of what we have been told....

- Focusing on barriers rather than disabilities is critical to understanding needs and to identifying solutions
- Many barriers are not disability specific. The same barrier often affects people with different types of disabilities and needs
- Many people have identified their daily activities are limited by more than one disability
- People with multiple disabilities identify more large or medium barriers than individuals with a single disability
- Older people are resigned to doing less and not participating when there are barriers. Younger people express frustration when they cannot participate
- Attitudinal barriers impact people with all types of disabilities
 - Younger people view attitudinal barriers as larger issues impacting accessibility than older people
 - People with multiple disabilities rate attitudinal barriers as less important to accessibility than other types of barriers

Where Do We Go From Here?

The data collection phase of the Customer Service Project is coming to an end. We are now in a final push to ensure the survey is distributed as broadly as possible so that all those who want to participate have the opportunity to do so.

Preliminary data analysis is currently underway. The introductory and background components of the Project Report have been started. The final Project Report will include the survey results, an analysis of key findings and trends, as well as the ideas, suggestions and concerns expressed to us at the many Focus Groups held in communities across southern Ontario.

The Final Project Report will be shared with all those organizations that have supported the Customer Service Project. We believe collaboration and knowledge sharing are critical. They can open doors to further understanding, as well as research opportunities initiated by the broader community.

PSN will be using the results from the Project to inform businesses, organizations, and others on issues, barriers and needs expressed by people with disabilities. Further, PSN will use the results to help businesses and organizations develop a customer focus, implement pragmatic results-oriented strategies, reduce barriers to quality service, improve accessibility to their goods and services, and to enhance Customer Service to ALL.



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8 Clarendon Ave., Toronto, ON M4V 1H9
Phone: 416-855-7500 Fax: 416-352-7552
info@psncorp.com