

Shopping for Some Change

Stores may be able to match prices, but they don't match accessible design. Here are some ideas on how to make some change.

SHOPPING MAY SEEM LIKE a leisurely task to most, however some people find it is a monumental struggle every time they go to a store. Although we are more conscious of accessibility issues these days than ever before, many businesses are still unaware of the difficulties presented to people with mobility issues or other impairments. Fortunately, the city is focused on making Vancouver the most accessible place to visit for 2010, and now is the perfect time to encourage your favourite local businesses to get up to par. Here are a few tips on how:

1. Prepare your message

Business owners may not have considered that improving access to their store will improve their revenues in the long-run, far beyond the costs of making small changes in the short-run.

Explain that they are losing a valuable customer because you choose to go elsewhere where it is accessible for you.

Tell them they are potentially losing many customers because with an increasing aging population, many people are looking for stores that are accessible. In addition, over 1,000 para-athletes and many more spectators will visit Vancouver in 2010 for the Paralympic games and will choose to make their purchases where they are welcomed.

2. Contact the store manager or owner

Contact the store manager/owner directly by speaking with them, writing a letter, or writing an e-mail. Direct contact allows the store manager/owner to understand their customer base more personally, which could encourage them to make the necessary changes.

3. Contact your local MLA and City Council

City Councils and the Government of British Columbia have the power to establish by-laws that could require businesses to provide standardized levels of accessibility. Writing to your MLA and City Council about your concerns will help them to understand the importance of an accessible city. The City of Vancouver has an advisory committee on Disability Issues, and other regions may have similar committees you can contact directly.

4. Alert the larger public

The more people who come to understand accessibility issues the more this will help put pressure on businesses and governments to make cities accessible for everyone. One way to communicate with the larger public is through the news. CBC News has a monthly column called Disability Matters. Try contacting your local paper by writing letters to the editor or pitching a story idea on a news tip line. ■