



UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY: MASSIVE MARKET POTENTIAL

FUNNY HOW ATTENDING TO OUR HUMANITY can increase a business's potential for profit. Look at Apartheid: by excluding black people from its amenities in the Apartheid era, the tourism industry in white South Africa reduced its market for domestic holidaymakers by - what? 85%? 90%?

So: instead of drawing on a pool of about 40 million consumers (many of whom could, granted, never afford a holiday), many white-owned businesses excluded something like 36 million non-Europeans - which left a market of only about 4 million people (many of whom couldn't afford a holiday, either).

Dumb, huh? You'd never preclude such a large chunk of the market today, would you, huh?

So why isn't your business accessible to the disabled?

One of the most interesting presentations I attended at this year's Indaba was the announcement of the launch of the Tourism Grading Council's Universal Accessibility Grading Scheme.

I learned much there, but the one sentence which resonated most clearly came from wheelchair-bound Russell Vollmer who said: "I am not disabled. I can do anything I want: it's what happens around me that disables me."

Did it ever strike you, for example, that elderly people who struggle to climb a flight of stairs are disabled when they're faced with - a flight of stairs? Or that people who cannot speak the language in a foreign country are as disabled as those who cannot hear?

Interesting, isn't it? And when you look at the statistics, it becomes a business exercise. According to its press release, the Council's „groundbreaking scheme will make travel in and around South Africa more accessible for the estimated 600 million people around the world who are challenged by mobility, hearing and visual impairments. In the USA alone, 54 million people live with some form of disability - that's 1 person in every 5 families - and 9% of them are regular travelers overseas. Combined with disabled travelers from Canada and Europe (and bearing in mind that the disabled often travel with companions), this is a market that's worth at least US\$ 61 billion.

And so the Tourism Grading Council invested in exhaustive planning that included discussions with the Quadriplegic Association of South Africa, the National Council for the Physically Disabled, the South African Council for the Blind and the Deaf Federation of South Africa.

The result - the Universal Accessibility Grading Scheme - will comprise three categories - Mobility, Hearing and Visual - each of which will have four levels of compliance. These sub-levels, M1,2,3,4; H1,2,3,4 and V1,2,3,4 have been categorised to correspond with global standards already used and understood by those living with a disability.

Assessment will be separate from Star Grading (so, for example, your property could be recognised as a 4-star Lodge with an Accessibility Grading of M1 and V2) and assessors would look for things like the slip resistance of floor surfaces, the size of door openings, the size of lettering on signage and whether telephones are fitted with flashing lights and voice amplification systems.

CapeAble

Live your dream, Live your life.

The Council announced that it had successfully instituted a pilot project with Southern Suns, Protea Hotels and a number of private guest houses and B&B's in the Portfolio Collection and that training of assessors will take place in July - just before the Scheme is launched in August (More information from Senzani Ndebele senzani@tourismgrading.co.za or visit www.tourismgrading.co.za)

In the meantime, I picked up two other press releases that dealt with the question of Accessibility: the first came from Access-SA (no e-contact details supplied), which appears to be launching a scheme very similar to the Grading Council's (it's a South African thing, I think: because we're an independent lot we've decided that things like Grading should be voluntary. But I can't help wondering which of the two - the Tourism Grading Council or Access-SA - is re-inventing the wheel).

The second, though, came from a company called CapeAble Travel, which is headed by the same Russell Vollmer (russell@postman.co.za) who spoke at the Grading Council's presentation.

"For the most part universal access appears as a huge financial investment without guarantees of any return on investment. But we seem to be overlooking the fact that about 10% of South Africans are living with disabilities and a large proportion of senior citizens also require amended facilities to move around the cities where they live.

In the Western Cape, CapeAble offers a variety of training programmes focusing on the issue of disability (training programmes you see: not another grading scheme).

Russell said that able-bodied people often don't understand what it's like to live with a disability. "We have structured our practical courses to include basic etiquette for frontline staff [and information] for management on employing persons with disabilities. He said that CapeAble also offers an introduction to disabilities and a course for venue graders on Universal Access.

This is a subject we should all be watching closely - not least because it's important to many of our fellow human beings, but also because it makes good business sense.

I mean, think about this: South Africa recently bid for - and was awarded - the 7th DPI congress (that's Disabled People International). But we lost it - to Korea - because no city in our country can accommodate 800 wheelchair users and about 3,700 people with other disabilities.

So, as long as you can see, hear and get around with ease, I,m sure you,ll

... Have a Great Tourism Week!

MARTIN HATCHUEL <<mailto:martin@barefootclients.co.za>> - 22 May 2006

Want the BarefootBenefit? Visit www.barefootclients.co.za .co.za/>
63 Wilson Street, Hunter,s Home, PO Box 2690, Knysna 6570
Telephone +27(0)44 384 1810; Cell +27(0)84 951 0574

PROUDLY BAREFOOT AND FULLY SOUTH AFRICAN
