

# A Theatre Manager's Guide to the ADA


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# I. The challenge for theatre managers

A. Theatre owners are committed to be ADA compliant and design and build theaters that are fully accessible.

B. Equipment manufacturers design and build equipment that provide theatre owners with the means for implementing accessibility requirements.



C. When a problem arises, it does not arise at the theatre owner's home office or at the plant that manufactures equipment. The problem arises at the local theatre.....it then falls on the theatre manager to deal with the problem.

## II. Most of the time the theatre manager is NOT at fault

A. Some times the problem is that neither the home office or the equipment provider has established an adequate training program

1. The training program may be theoretical not practical
2. It may be hard to find time to train part time employees especially in regions where there is rapid employee turnover
3. Some of the part time employees may be high school kids and high school kids are high school kids!



B. Some times equipment doesn't work properly when first installed

1. We have learned the hard way that new technology doesn't mean plug in turn on
2. There is often a big difference between theory and practice.



C. Some times the theatre doesn't have an effective maintenance program

1. Door hardware needs adjusting to maintain a 5 lb. pull.

2. Batteries in assistive listening headsets go bad.

3. Elevator doors don't close all the way and there is a problem for wheel chair access

4. Locks on rest room stalls break, doors need adjustment, toilet paper hardware gets loose, etc.

### III. Some people with disabilities may be hard to satisfy

- A. May be very sensitive
- B. May have unrealistic expectations
- C. May have lawyers out to make a quick buck

## IV. What should the theatre manager do?

- A. Use common sense
- B. Periodically walk through your theatre and pretend you are a wheel chair patron
- C. Train your employees to assist patrons with disabilities
- D. Take the extra steps to anticipate problems and when a problem arises, try to resolve it immediately




# V. Captioning

A. With the advent of digital movies, closed captioning is here now. Carmike, Regal , AMC, Cinemark and others have committed to install closed captioning in all of their digital auditoriums

B. You need to be sure that your staff is fully trained. Your projectionist must properly load the software for each auditorium. Your guest relations staff must understand how the individual display units work and be able to communicate that information to deaf patrons

# V. Captioning


C. Have hand out for deaf patrons to read showing how the equipment operates. Remember, you can't "tell" a deaf patron how the equipment works.



D. Explain that the preshow and the coming attractions may not be captioned

E. Every day check to see if the equipment is working

F. Be prepared for glitches




G. Make sure that the cup holder display units actually fit in the cup holders of the seats in your theatre.

H. Do you need to reprogram the system when a movie is moved from one auditorium to another.

## VI. Have an established procedure for reporting problems

- A. Make a written report all ADA-related problems even if they seem to be resolved.
- B. Get written statements from employees involved.
- C. Get written statements from other patrons who, witnessed the incident



Now - - Having listened to an overview, let's  
get practical - -

Let's take an ADA walk through a typical  
movie theatre.

# A Theatre Manager's Walk Through for ADA Compliance

Parking Lots – Must have handicap spaces, van spaces, signage, curb cuts and accessible path of travel to theatre. As a general rule, if theatre is part of a mall and the landlord controls the parking lot, landlord is responsible for parking lot ADA compliance. If theatre is a standalone, the theatre is responsible for parking lot ADA compliance.



# Theatre Entrance

- a. Must be accessible – if entrance requires going up stairs – must have a ramp or a lift
- b. Doors must be accessible. Must have 32” opening and not more than 5 lb. pull
- c. Automatic doors are fine
- d. If only one entrance door is accessible you must have signage



# Box Office

- a. Counter must have a 36" wide section not more than 36" high
- b. ALS signage
- c. Paper and pad
- d. Ticketing machines in lobby must be ADA accessible



# Concession Counter

- a. Must have a 36" wide counter section not more than 36" high
- b. If condiments, on separate counter, must be accessible
- c. Napkin dispenser must be accessible
- d. Offer help to wheelchair patrons who may not be able to carry concession items and navigate the wheelchair

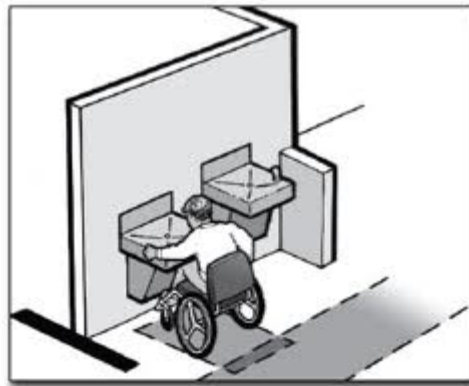
# Path of Travel

Paths of travel to auditorium from lobby must not have steps - - if there are steps, you should have a ramp or a lift.



# Water Fountains

Must be ADA accessible.



# Rest Rooms Must Be Accessible

Handicap stall must be wide enough for wheelchair, have handrails and accessible toilet paper dispenser. Door normally must open out. Door must open easily and lock must work.

If restrooms are not accessible, is there an accessible unisex restroom?

# Assistive Listening Systems and Captioning Cup Holder Display Units

- a. Must be available
- b. One page instruction sheet
- c. Ask for ID (not credit cards) when giving out equipment. Ask patron to sign for the equipment.
- d. Make sure units are functioning

# Auditoriums

- a. Must have wheelchair seating and companion seating
- b. 1% of seats in the auditorium must have moveable arm rests
- c. Wheelchair spaces, companion seats and seats with moveable arm rests should have signage

# Auditoriums

- d. In auditoriums of up to 50 seats - - you need 2 wheelchair spaces and two companion seats.

In auditoriums of 51 to 150 seats - - 4 wheelchair spaces and 4 companion seats.

In auditoriums of 151 to 300 seats - - 5 wheelchair spaces and 5 companion seats.

In auditoriums of 301 to 500 seats - - 6 wheelchair spaces and 6 companion seats.

In auditoriums of over 300 seats, you need two wheelchair locations (cannot be on the same row).



# Auditoriums

- e. In stadium style auditoriums, wheelchair seating is generally on a cross aisle in the rear 60% of the seating in the auditorium.
- f. In a slope floor theatre, wheelchair seating is generally in the rear of the auditorium or in an area where the floor is relatively flat in the middle of the auditorium.  
Avoid wheelchair spaces in the front row!

# Exits

If your auditorium uses the doors in the front of the theatre as exits after a performance, those doors must be wide enough and open easy enough to be accessible. There also has to be an accessible path of travel out of the theatre.



# Service Animals

Under the newest ADA regulations, the only animals falling under the definition of a service animal are dogs or in some cases miniature horses. For your purposes if someone brings a dog to your theatre and claims it is a service animal let them bring the dog in. If the dog is disruptive, barks or growls or if the dog is not house-broken, you can tell the person with a disability that the dog must be taken out of the theatre.



# Service Animals

Explain that the person with a disability is entitled to stay BUT without the dog. It is a good policy, but not required, to refund the price of the ticket or offer a pass for a future movie.



# Service Animals

If a person comes in with a dog and you are not sure if it is a service animal, you are entitled to ask two questions:



- 1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- 2) What is the task or type of work that the service animal has been trained to perform?

You cannot ask how the dog was trained or for documents showing that the dog is a service animal. You cannot ask to be shown what the dog can do.

# Service Animals



The best policy is if a person comes in with a well-behaved dog and tells you that it is a service animal, admit the dog.

The person is entitled to take the dog with him or her to all areas of the theatre open to theatre patrons including concession areas, auditoriums, restrooms, party rooms and food service areas.

# Personal Aides

On occasion, a person with a disability will show up with a “personal aide.” You are entitled to charge an admission fee for the “personal aide.”



# Very Large Patrons

On occasion a person who is too wide to fit in a theatre seat will come to the theatre. If you have a loveseat available, you can let that person sit in the loveseat. Sometimes such a patron will bring a folding chair and ask to set up the folding chair in a wheelchair space. Some theatre chains will let the person bring in the folding chair, other will not. The issue is whether the theatre chain is liable if the chair collapses and the person is injured.



# Service Animals in Training

The ADA is a federal law but most states have state laws similar to the ADA. Under state law, some states require that movie theatres provide access to trainers of service animals with “service dogs in training.” The service animal trainer may not be disabled but as long as the dog is housebroken and not disruptive, the best rule is to sell a ticket to the trainer and admit the dog.



# Disruptive Patrons

- a. Disability is no excuse for disruptive behavior.
- b. You can ask disruptive patrons to leave.

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For Questions, Contact:

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