

# Accessible Customer Service Guide

Effective June 15, 2015



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## The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

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Effective **January 1, 2012**, accessible customer service comes into effect for all Ontario businesses and organizations with one or more employees.

Prodomax Automation Ltd. (Prodomax) is required to establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities and is required to train employees on:

- how to communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
- how to interact with people with disabilities who use assistive devices or require the assistance of a guide dog, other service animal or a support person;
- what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing our services;
- protocol to take if service normally available to the disabled is temporarily not available.



This booklet provides an overview of Prodomax's Customer Service Policy Statement and provide tips on how to best interact with a person with a disability to ensure we provide excellent customer service to all guests/customers at Prodomax.

## Prodomax Automation Ltd.'s Accessible Customer Service Policy Statement

Prodomax is committed to providing accessible customer service to people with disabilities.

Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure Prodomax's goods and services are provided in a way that:

- respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities;
- communicates with a person with a disability in a manner that takes his or her disability into account;
- permits people with disabilities to use assistive devices, service animals and/or support persons as is necessary to access Prodomax goods and services.

This policy applies to all persons who interact with members of the public on behalf of Prodomax, whether the person does so as an:

- employee,
- contractor
- co-op student,
- volunteer,
- all persons who participate in developing Prodomax's policies and procedures.

## Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (O. Reg. 429/07)

### Key Requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service

- Establish policies, practices and procedures for providing goods or services to people with disabilities.
- Communicate with a person with a disability in a way that takes their disability into account.
- Welcome people to use their own personal assistive devices to access Prodomax goods or services.
- Welcome people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal in Prodomax premises that are opened to the public, unless the animal is excluded by law.
- Welcome people with disabilities who use a support person to bring that person with them while accessing goods or services in premises open to the public or third parties.
- Train staff, volunteers, contractors or others who interact with the public on behalf of Prodomax on the requirements as outlined in the Customer Service Standards.
- Establish a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities.

- Provide notice when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on are unavailable.

## Understanding Disability

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Disabilities can take many forms. They may be permanent or temporary; developmental or physical; severe or mild; for the young or the old; or any combination of disabilities. A person can be born with a disability or someone could become injured resulting in a temporary or permanent disability. Some disabilities are visible and many are non-visible.

When providing goods and services, we need to consider the needs of people who:

- have a physical disability
- are Deaf or have some form of hearing loss
- are Blind or have some form of loss of vision
- are Deaf-Blind
- have a learning disability
- have a speech or language impairment
- have an intellectual or developmental disability
- have a mental illness



## What is Accessible Customer Service?

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Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly, it is an understanding that access to the goods and services Prodomax provides may at times require some modification to be accessible to some individuals. Prodomax is committed to providing customer service to people with disabilities in a manner that:

- Respects their dignity and independence.
- Provides alternative methods when possible to ensure that customers with disabilities have access to the same services, in the same place, and in a similar manner;
- Takes into account individual needs when providing goods and services; and
- Communicates in a manner that takes into account the customer's disability.



## **Examples of Accessible Customer Service**

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- A person who has low vision may need to have our health and safety sign-in information read aloud to them.
- Someone who uses a scooter may require help finding an accessible route.
- An individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down for them.
- A student on a facility tour who is unable to stand for a long period of time may benefit from seating in an area where people generally have to stand.
- A person with an intellectual disability may need assistance with and extra time to complete forms.

## **Word Choices**

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Choosing positive words can empower people. Inappropriate terms convey inaccurate information and

perpetuate negative stereotypes. The notion that people with disabilities are inspirational, brave and courageous for living successfully with their disability is a myth. The fact is a person with a disability is simply carrying out the activities of daily living when they drive to work, go to a movie, pay their bills or participate in a sporting event. They may just do it in a way that is different than you.

People with disabilities are ‘people first’ – unique individuals who also happen to have a disability. Use words that put the person first, referring to them as a “person with a disability” or “person with hearing loss.”

<b>Instead of this</b>	<b>Please say ...</b>
The Handicapped	Person with a disability
Normal	Person without a disability, non-disabled, able-bodied
The Blind	Person with vision impairment, person with a vision loss
The Deaf	Person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing, person with a hearing loss
Physically challenged	Person with a disability
Retarded	Person with an intellectual disability

## **Customer Service Tips**

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Being able to interact and communicate in an appropriate way to individuals with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service, and sometimes the best approach is to ask the person how you can best serve them.



Here are some general tips:

- Always treat a person with a disability with the same respect and courtesy that you would offer to everyone else.
- Treat and speak to adults with disabilities as adults.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to the companion, assistant or interpreter who may be with them.
- Don't shout; speak clearly and distinctly, and at a moderate pace.
- It's okay to use words like "see," "walk," or "hear." Don't avoid common expressions when they fit naturally into the conversation.
- Offer assistance to a person with a disability if it seems appropriate, but wait until the offer is accepted before you help. If you are helping and aren't sure what to do, ask.
- Let a person with a disability make their own decisions regarding what they can or cannot do.
- Do not make assumptions.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job.

## **Physical Disabilities**

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There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require use of mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or

amputations may also have difficulty with stamina, moving, standing, sitting or the ability to reach or grasp. It may be difficult to identify a person with an invisible physical disability.

### **Customer Service Tips**

- If you are having a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you are at eye level.
- Ask before you help. Offer assistance but don't insist.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Avoid touching any assistive devices unnecessarily.



## **Blindness and Vision Loss**

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There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. The majority of people living with a vision loss have some vision. Very few are totally blind. A vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read print or signs, recognize faces, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some may use a white cane or guide dog to help with orientation and movement, while others may not.

### **Customer Service Tips**

- Don't assume the individual cannot see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach a customer.
- Speak directly to the person.
- Don't leave without saying goodbye.
- Use specific directions like "behind you on your left" or "the cup is by your right hand." Avoid "over here."
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.
- Offer your elbow to provide sighted guide if needed. Identify obstacles before you come to them.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog from doing its job.

## **Deafness and Hearing Loss**

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Hearing loss ranges from mild to extreme. Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, sign language, and/or other assistive-listening and communication devices.

### **Customer Service Tips**

- Attract the person's attention before you speak. Use eye contact and a simple wave to connect visually.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter location.
- Do not cover or have anything in your mouth when speaking.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their interpreter.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Speak naturally, with normal expression and at a normal pace.
- When writing back and forth, keep sentences short.
- In group settings, talk one at a time.

## **Deaf-Blindness**

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A person who is deaf-blind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information. Many people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an "intervener", a professional who helps with communication.

### **Customer Service Tips**

- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervener.
- Ask the customer how to best communicate.
- Do not try to communicate from across the room or table.
- Don't leave without saying goodbye.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog from doing its job.

## **Speech Disabilities**

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People with speech disabilities may have problems communicating. For many reasons, people may have difficulty speaking clearly – for example, as a result of a stroke, cerebral palsy or hearing loss – which may result in difficulties with verbal communication. Some people may use communication boards or other assistive devices. A speech disability often has no impact on a person's ability to understand.

## Customer Service Tips

- Talk to people with speech disabilities as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice.
- Do not speak for the individual or complete their sentences. Be patient.
- Tell the person if you do not understand what they are trying to say. Ask the person to repeat the message, tell you in a different way, or write it down.
- Consider asking questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.
- If a customer is difficult to understand, concentrate on content not voice.
- Give your customer time to fully explain themselves. Don't interrupt.
- If your customer has a stammer, don't finish their words or sentences.

## Intellectual Disabilities

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An intellectual disability can be characterized by intellectual development and capacity that is significantly below average and involves a permanent limitation in a person's ability to learn or adapt to their environment. The effects of an intellectual disability can range from mild to profound. People with intellectual disabilities do not necessarily have a recognizable condition.

### Customer Service Tips

- Use simple words.
- Keep sentences short.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Use concrete examples.
- Maintain a polite attitude.
- Don't make assumptions about what anyone can do.
- Be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences.

## Learning Disabilities

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Learning disabilities range from mild to severe and may affect a person's ability to receive process, remember, or analyze information. Some learning disabilities can interfere with a person's ability to concentrate or focus. Other learning disabilities can make it difficult for a person to read, write, spell, or solve math problems. A learning disability is not indicative of intelligence level.

### Customer Service Tips

- Ask your customer how to best accommodate their needs.
- Minimize distractions so that full attention is on communication.
- Keep sentences short and clear.
- Use gestures or diagrams as needed.
- Avoid complex words or jargon.
- Use language that is concrete rather than abstract.



## Mental Illness

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People with mental illness look like anyone else. You won't know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you are advised, nor will you need to. Usually it will not affect your customer service at all. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.

### Customer Service Tips

- Create a climate of confidence.
- Accept the customer, do not judge.
- Do not "talk down."
- Use plain, clear language; avoid complex ideas and jargon.
- Talk to the person as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice.
- Speak in a calm manner and present one thought at a time.
- Repeat using different words if you are not understood.
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues.

## Serving People Who Use Assistive Devices

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An assistive device is a tool, technology, or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include items like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes, note taking devices, grasping tools, portable magnifiers, or assistive listening devices.

- Do not touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Allow customers to keep and use their assistive devices as needed.
- Do not move assistive devices or equipment out of your customer's reach.



## **Serving People Who Use a Service Animal**

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People who are blind or have vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Service animals can assist people with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities and can be trained to open doors, pick up items, predict seizures, or alert someone to sounds such as doorbells and telephone rings.

- Service animals are allowed to be with their owner at all times, unless otherwise prohibited by law.
- A kitchen where food is prepared is one of the few municipal environments for disallowing a service animal.
- It may be clear that an animal is a service animal if it is wearing a harness, saddle bags, a sign or has an identification card that identifies it as a service animal. It may also be clear if a person is using the animal to assist him or her in doing things, such as opening doors or retrieving items.
- If it is not clear if an animal is a service animal, ask the customer. A medical note can be requested to confirm that the animal is necessary for reasons related to that person's disability.
- Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job.
- It is not appropriate to ask the nature of the disability of the service animal handler.

## **Serving People Who Use Support Persons**

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A support person may accompany a person with a disability to help them with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs, or access to services. A support person might be a family member, friend, volunteer or paid personnel.

- Speak to your customer, not to their support person.
- Allow the customer to be accompanied by the support person.
- Do not discuss confidential matters in the presence of a support person without first getting the appropriate permission to do so.

## Disruption of Service – Reasonable Notice

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### What happens if we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that there will be disruptions in services, such as renovations of buildings or outdoor spaces or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

Customers with disabilities may go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transit or arranging for their support person to accompany them. By providing reasonable notice that a service is temporarily unavailable you can save the customer an unnecessary trip.

Notice can be provided by several methods and usually it is a good idea to use more than one method to provide notice. A notice on the Prodomax website or a temporary sign will inform customers of service disruptions.

## Disruption of Service – Unexpected Disruptions

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In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. Think about how you might offer another way to access the service when informing the customer who may be affected.

For further information, please contact:

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This guide can be found on Prodomax's website at [www.prodomax.com](http://www.prodomax.com)

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