



improving deaf and disabled
people's access to live music

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State of Access Report

Executive Summary

Surveying UK Live Music Accessibility for Deaf and Disabled People

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Foreword

“ 2013 has been a year of change for us, Ground Control has had to adapt and develop and we feel all the better for it. By working with Attitude is Everything we learnt how everything from the festival site to the website could be designed in a way to make them more accessible, without having an impact on their functionality and feel, and for little or no cost.

It's clear from the findings in the State of Access Report that ticketing is a big issue for disabled customers, which is why it was so valuable to be able to work with Attitude is Everything to fine-tune our ticketing policies to ensure they were as inclusive as possible. ”

Jon Drape,
Managing Director, Ground Control



Purpose and methodology

The State of Access Report allows Attitude is Everything to publicly examine the detailed feedback that we receive from our Deaf and disabled Mystery Shoppers about live music events. By analysing the mystery shopping reports, we can identify trends and issues that Deaf and disabled people are facing when trying to access gigs at UK music venues and festivals.

The State of Access Report is based on 228 mystery shopping reports, 159 from venues and 69 from festivals, 40 questionnaires, and 13 interviews collated between April 2011 and March 2013.

Key findings

Accessible ticketing

The most commonly reported issue from the Mystery Shoppers was the inequality of booking systems, by not allowing Deaf and disabled customers to purchase tickets in the same way as non-disabled people.

- 95% had experienced disability-related issues when booking tickets.
- 88% felt discriminated against due to an inaccessible booking system.
- 83% had been put off buying tickets after finding it inaccessible.
- 47% considered taking legal action as a result.

When we surveyed 10 of the leading UK music venues to check on their accessible ticket buying policies, the majority of them were providing different services to their disabled and non-disabled customers. Only 2 allowed online purchasing of tickets, one of the options available to all of the non-disabled customers and the preferred option for 75% of our Mystery Shoppers, with the rest providing a telephone number with limited opening hours.

“ There is no freedom, flexibility or choice to buy tickets how and when I want. I work full time and am unable to spend what can often be two hours on the phone to book tickets. If I was able to book tickets online just like everybody else this would make my life a lot easier and there would be less chance of the tickets being sold out. ”

Policy

There is a clear correlation between the capacity of the event and whether or not they offer free Personal Assistant tickets.

- 38% of small venues, compared with 61% of large venues.
- 75% of small festivals, compared with 88% of large festivals.

Gaining entry to the event

Mystery Shoppers reported that 66% of the venues they attended had a step-free entrance, but just 44% of the venues visited had all three key components of physical access: a step-free entrance, step-free routes to all areas of the venue, and at least one functional accessible toilet.

Access around the event

There is a clear correlation between the capacity of the event and the likelihood of finding an accessible toilet.

- 89% of large venues and 88% of large festivals provided accessible toilets compared to just 62% and 82% of small venues and festivals.

Accessing the performance

The viewing platform is probably the key factor that influences both the accessibility ratings from our Mystery Shoppers, and overall enjoyment of the event.

- 42% of venues and 67% of festivals had viewing platforms or areas.
- The average access rating for venues with a viewing platform is 7.1 out of 10, compared to 5.1 without.
- The average access rating at festivals falls from 6.2 out of 10, to 4.3 when there is no platform present.

“ The accessible area (at O2 Academy Brixton) was so well located. I felt like I was part of the mosh pit but I didn't have the stress of being surrounded and jostled. I had a really clear view of the stage. Thanks to this experience, I shall look for more live concerts to go to. I hadn't been to live music concerts in several years, because of the perceived accessibility problems. ”

Facilities for people with sensory impairments

According to an Action on Hearing Loss, 10 million people in the UK have some form of hearing loss, of which only 2 million have hearing aids and therefore benefit from loop systems. British Sign Language interpretation is featured at Glastonbury, Latitude and Attitude is Everything events, but captioning would open up live music to many more.

“ As someone with hearing loss but not great at BSL, I would have loved subtitles or a copy of the lyrics, or even been able to get closer to the band so I can read their lips. ”

Charter of Best Practice

Charter venues outperformed those who haven't signed up in 95% of the mystery shopping criteria, demonstrating that Charter status highlights best practice access facilities and policies.

“ The (Gold Charter awarded) O2 Arena seems now to be a venue that people with disabilities can visit with confidence that their needs will be appreciated and looked after. ”

Conclusions

Attitude is Everything's ethos is to positively encourage the music industry to improve their accessibility to Deaf and disabled customers, to go beyond the Equality Act and strive for best practice. The State of Access Report highlights a number of issues that Deaf and disabled audiences are facing when trying to access live music events, but it also helps us to suggest practical solutions and effect change in the live music sector.

The majority of the barriers that Deaf and disabled people encounter in the live music sector are easily removed by improving disability awareness within staff teams and implementing accessible policies throughout the customer experience. This includes ticketing, free access for Personal Assistants, information available in advance, providing access to the event space and the performance, as well as providing accessible concessions for all customers.

It's clear from our analysis that the current ticketing systems in place are often inaccessible and result in fewer sales to the Deaf and disabled customers who are unable to purchase tickets. There is a strong business case for improving accessibility and opening up live music to an audience that represents one sixth of the UK population. The venues and festivals that we work with improve their access facilities year-on-year and benefit from the additional demand that this creates.

The number of Deaf and disabled people buying tickets to Reading Festival increased 111% in 2013, with 358 attending compared to 170 in 2012. With friends and family accompanying disabled customers to accessible festivals, there were over 700 people in the accessible campsite, in addition to 78 day tickets sold. Even after providing free access to Personal Assistants, ticket sales relating to disabled customers are in excess of £115,000 before taking into account additional revenue from bars, stalls and concessions.

The State of Access Report clearly conveys the benefits of Disability Equality Training and signing up to the Charter of Best Practice, with the venues and festivals that have profited from our help and guidance outperforming those that haven't in all areas. Awareness of the barriers that Deaf and disabled people face and understanding of the facilities and policies that remove these barriers is key to enhancing the customer experience for all visitors.

The way forward

Attitude is Everything will use the State of Access Report to launch a campaign for accessible ticketing systems to be adopted across the live music industry. We believe that it's possible to improve the current systems in order to provide a fair and equal service to both disabled and non-disabled music fans.

We will work in partnership with venues, festivals and ticketing agencies to achieve three specific objectives that will vastly improve the ticket buying process for Deaf and disabled customers:

1. Clear access information available in advance of tickets going on sale
2. Ticket buying options are identical to those offered to non-disabled customers
3. Create a system for a universal proof of disability

About Attitude is Everything

Attitude is Everything improves Deaf and disabled people's access to live music by working in partnership with audiences, artists and the music industry to implement a Charter of Best Practice across the UK.

Having begun as a pilot project in 2000, we are now a fully independent charity and part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio of Organisations. We encourage events producers to go beyond the legal obligations set out in the Equality Act and implement best practice, providing a fair and equal service to their Deaf and disabled customers.

We support the music industry to understand Deaf and disabled people's access requirements at music venues and festivals by building equality into the strategic process. The ethos of the Charter is that Deaf and disabled people should be as independent as they want to be at live music events.

The Charter is a bespoke service offered exclusively to the live music industry and the award is in 3 stages - Bronze, Silver and Gold. Each stage details the criteria for improvements and advises on how to achieve them. We support music venues and festivals to create a realistic action plan in order to work through each level of the Charter and aim for the Gold award, by demonstrating an on-going commitment to improving accessibility and achieving best practice.

Over 70 venues and festivals have already signed up to the Charter of Best Practice, adopting it as an industry standard for accessibility at live music events and agreeing to be mystery shopped by our team of Deaf and disabled volunteers. Their detailed feedback on accessibility is then passed onto management, so that any potential issues are identified and practical solutions are suggested. We also offer Disability Equality Training and undertake Access Audits to advise on changes that may be required.

The Mystery Shopping project is the keystone of our work. Our dedicated team of Mystery Shoppers are Deaf and disabled music fans who report back on the accessibility and overall experience at UK music venues, clubs and festivals, in return for free tickets and travel. This is vital for identifying each venue's strengths and areas for improvement.

Our many successes to date include working with Festival Republic and Ground Control on all of their UK festivals, supporting Academy Music Group and National Arena Association venues to sign up to our Charter, and working with London Borough of Tower Hamlets to use the Charter of Best Practice as an event standard for all festivals taking place in Victoria Park.

Our 'Access Toolkit: Making Outdoor Arts Events Accessible to All' was awarded the London 2012 Inspire Mark, and we worked in partnership with Greater London Authority and London Legacy Development Corporation to make the Cultural-Olympiad and the legacy of the Games as accessible as possible.