

Hearing loops are good for business!

The Asda experience - UK

International Hearing Loop Conference, Sunday 6th - Monday 7th October 2013

Anne Stublely Black, Head of the Store Model and Specification for Asda Stores in the UK, outlines the steps Asda has taken to make supermarkets more accessible for hearing aid wearers.

As you would expect customer satisfaction is top of the agenda for supermarket giant Asda which currently has over 500 stores across the UK. 'We pride ourselves on meeting the needs of all of our customers,' says Anne. 'To make their shopping experience as enjoyable and satisfying as possible. And obviously this includes those with special requirements, the millions of people who use hearing aids and hearing loops.'

Since 2003 Asda has worked with hearing loop manufacturers, user representative organizations and individuals to make its stores more accessible for people with hearing impairment. 'We have invested heavily in hearing loop provision because we believe this is the way forward,' she explains. 'At the end of the day we have found there are benefits to all, customers like what we are doing, and it makes great business sense for Asda.'

Customer feedback:

In 2011 Asda trialed placing a fixed loop on every service point in one their flagship 'grey' stores (so called 'grey' because over 30% of customers are aged 60 or above). 'We chose our 'grey' Broadstairs branch as a guinea pig, implementing a fixed loop on every service point in the shop so every check out and till point was looped.' And the feedback from these stores? 'Our pilot worked extremely well,' explains Anne.

'One customer told us they would 'definitely shop in Asda because I can access the whole store, not just the aisles, and have a wonderful shopping experience that I want to enjoy again and again...although I was overwhelmed by the sound of people in Asda, the loop system, which is beautifully placed throughout the store, took into consideration all the shopping needs of the deaf person to heighten their shopping experience. For me, the experience was like going to heaven.' You don't get feedback like that very often!' says Anne.

Now, reports Anne, it is part of Asda's development plan, that if a store falls under the 'grey' criteria, the extended hearing loop provision is included in the scope of work for that store.

Benefits to Asda:

So what are the benefits to Asda? 'Well,' says Anne, 'There are obvious benefits to us - better customer service, improved image over our competitors, customer loyalty, brand awareness and good publicity.' But the figures add up too. 'If, according to one of the surveys we've carried out, 20,000 hearing aid users became new Asda customers, spending £22 on a weekly shop, 40 times a year, this would give us an extra £17.6 million per year, a profit of £2.6 million a year.'

Compare this to the costs to Asda to set up the standard loop arrangement in a store at between £1,000 and £2,000 and the figures speak for themselves. 'My challenge,' continues Anne 'is to keep proving that hearing loops are worth investing in and I really do hope that we can do more.'