

Is your business missing out on the **Purple Pound?**

A guide for high street shops,
cafés, restaurants and
hospitality venues.

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1. Introduction

In the UK, approximately 16 million people are disabled, which is almost one in four individuals. Along with their households, disabled people have a combined spending power of around £274 billion each year, known as the Purple Pound. However, many businesses miss out because their services, shops, or websites are not accessible.

Scope reports that nearly three in four disabled people and their families would avoid returning to a business if they received poor service or because of a lack of accessibility. In fact, UK businesses are estimated to lose around £2 billion each month from failing to meet the needs of disabled customers.

For retailers and hospitality venues, this leads to fewer customers, a lower average spend, and decreased loyalty.

However, making simple, low-cost changes can help your business:

- Attract and retain more customers.
- Enhance your reputation.
- Boost staff confidence and morale.
- Get ready for an ageing population.

Accessibility is not only the right thing to do, it makes sound business sense.

Did you know?

70% of disabled people are more likely to visit somewhere new if they feel welcomed by staff or the venue seems to care about accessibility.

2. Missed Opportunities

The UK Government reports that 72.5% of disabled people struggle or cannot visit their local shops because they are inaccessible. This figure increases in smaller towns and villages, where physical access is often worse. A survey by Congleton Town Council's Equal Access Advisory Group found that 87% of disabled residents experienced difficulties accessing the local shops in their town centre.

The extent of lost revenue in the United Kingdom is significant. According to We Are Purple (2020), lack of accessibility results in businesses losing:

- £267 million each month in high street retail.
- £163 million every month in restaurants, pubs, and clubs.
- £501 million every month in supermarkets.
- £935 million every month in banks and building societies.

For disabled customers and their families:

- 75% leave when accessibility is poor.
- 75% believe UK businesses are losing out because services are not inclusive.
- 95% check accessibility information before visiting somewhere new.
- 96% say having accessibility information available in advance would make them more likely to visit somewhere.

However, a significant number of businesses are not fully aware of the extent of this issue. According to a report from the UK Parliament:

- Only 31% of companies consider accessibility when assessing customer needs.
- Just 19% incorporate accessibility into product development.
- 81% are unaware of the value of the Purple Pound.
- 73% are unable to identify how many people in the UK have a disability.

3. Examples of physical barriers

- **Space to move (affecting at least 52% of disabled people):** Narrow aisles, crowded displays or cluttered walkways make it hard for many disabled people, especially wheelchair users or those with mobility aids, to move around comfortably.
- **Placement of items (affecting at least 47% of disabled people):** High shelves or items positioned in difficult-to-reach places can exclude individuals with limited mobility or reach.
- **Shop access (affecting at least 40% of disabled people):** Steps, uneven surfaces, and heavy or narrow doors often make entry difficult.
- **Signage and labels (affecting at least 27% of disabled people):** Small print, poor contrast, or unclear information make it difficult for people with visual impairments or cognitive disabilities to navigate and shop independently.
- **Sensory barriers:** Nearly a quarter of people find loud noise a barrier, 14% report difficulties with bright or inappropriate lighting, and many international studies report that one in three people experience adverse effects from fragranced products, such as perfumes or air fresheners.

However, poor customer service, unclear communication, and a lack of online information also tend to result in customer loss. Many disabled customers will direct their spending elsewhere if they do not feel welcomed or supported.

Did you know?

62% of disabled individuals avoid going to a venue if it has not shared its disabled access information, because they presume it is inaccessible.

4. Online Accessibility

Households with disabled members have an annual online spending power of £25 billion. However, businesses lose around £17.1 billion every year because customers abandon websites that are inaccessible.

The reality for online shoppers:

- Approximately 69% of internet users with disabilities, which is around 4.3 million individuals, leave websites that are not accessible.
- 83% stick to sites they already know are accessible.
- 86% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for a product from an accessible website rather than purchasing the same item cheaper from a less user-friendly site.

The most common barriers include:

- Images without alternative text provided.
- Lack of keyboard navigation.
- Not providing text alternatives for video content.
- Unclear forms or labels are missing.
- Low colour contrast between the text and background.

Quick wins to improve web accessibility:

- Add *alt text* to images.
- Use good colour contrast.
- Provide captions for videos.
- Make sure everything works with a keyboard (not just a mouse).
- Use clear, sans serif fonts.
- Ensure links make sense when read out of context (avoid “click here”).

5. Benefits of Being Inclusive

Did you know?

- 40% of households in the UK include at least one disabled person.
- Over 80% of disabilities develop later in life, making accessibility important for all customers.
- As the population ages, the need for inclusive services and accessible products will only increase.

Accessibility benefits everyone, not just disabled customers, but also older adults, people with temporary injuries, and those who value user-friendly designs, such as clear signage, good lighting, accessible spaces, captions, and flexible ordering options. Being accessible broadens your market and supports sustainable business growth.

Tourism data further highlights this potential:

- Trips with at least one disabled traveller make up 24% of all domestic overnight tourism expenditure and account for 18% of day-visit spending.
- These trips generate about £14.6 billion each year.
- On average, disabled visitors spend more per trip (£740 compared to £660) and have longer stays (11.6 nights versus 7.3 nights).

Accessibility offers clear returns. Accenture's research shows that prioritising disability inclusion delivers benefits such as:

- Higher revenues.
- Higher net income.
- Higher profit margins.

Accessibility is not just good business; it builds better businesses.

6. The Bigger Picture

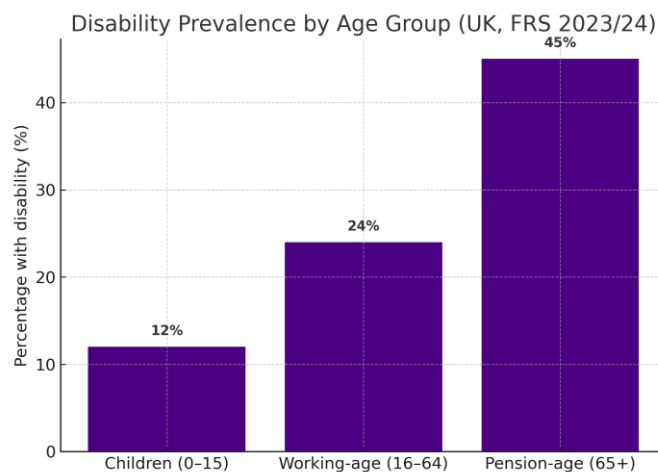
While the Equality Act 2010 outlines businesses' legal obligations and the 'reasonable adjustments' they must make, true inclusivity extends beyond mere compliance. It involves creating a company that is resilient, adaptable, and contributes to a stronger local economy.

Businesses should strive to:

- Foster an environment that embraces everyone.
- Create workplaces that value and respect every team member.
- Represent the diversity of society.

For high street businesses, the takeaway is simple: designing inclusively reduces risk, improves compliance, and opens your doors to more customers.

Disabled people are the UK's largest minority group, and that number is growing. With an ageing population, disability prevalence rises sharply after 65. By taking accessibility seriously, businesses can position themselves as leaders in their community, shaping a fairer and more sustainable future.



7. What Businesses Can Do Next

Quick wins (low cost, high impact):

- Publish clear accessibility information on your website and social media.
- Provide disability awareness training and assign a staff member to be your accessibility contact.
- Review physical access: ensure step-free routes (or provide a temporary ramp and a bell at wheelchair height), handrails, and accessible entrances. Keep aisles clear and wide, provide seating, accessible toilets, clear signage, and accessible parking.
- Offer alternatives such as quiet times, click-and-collect, or phone orders.
- Adjust sensory factors (reduce noise, harsh lighting and fragrances).
- Welcome assistance animals.
- Ensure your website uses: clear text, good colour contrast, captions on videos, keyboard navigation, and simple forms.

Medium-term changes:

- Adjust layouts for turning space and reach; Where possible, install lifts, automatic doors, widen doorways, label shelves clearly and reduce glare.
- Make sure card machines and counters are accessible. Offer large-print or digital menus.
- Invite feedback from disabled customers and value their time.

Long-term changes:

- Audit websites to WCAG 2.2 AA; include accessibility in refurb plans.
- Work with disability consultants to design improvements.
- Track and share your improvements to build trust and loyalty.

Accessibility is not an optional extra. It is essential for achieving long-term business success.

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For more resources, please visit: <https://deborah-lawson.co.uk/>