

FACTSHEET

What is cognitive accessibility?

Cognitive accessibility is as basic as providing good service and useful information for all. Meaning that consumers are provided with information that they can receive and process in a safe environment. If our cognitive functions are exposed to too many impressions like unclear information, aggressive sellers, disturbing commercials or intensive music we are more likely to buy the wrong products, sign unwanted subscriptions, misinterpret the product information, not read the T&C properly or leave the store without buying anything.

Cognitive functions and cognitive impairment

Cognition is the understanding, integrating and processing of information that includes abstraction, organization of ideas, reasoning, analysis and synthesis. Cognition is dependent on specific mental functions including for example complex goal-directed behaviours such as decision-making, abstract thinking, planning and carrying out plans, mental flexibility but also memory functions, time management and executive functions. Functions that are vital to our daily management.

At some point in our life we will most likely experience a cognitive impairment. It could be due to a disease, stress, sleep deprivation, a trauma to our head, depression or grief. Regardless of the cause, and if it is temporary or permanent, all consumers benefit from accessible environments. Making consumer environments cognitively accessible is important, not just for a few but for all of us.

Achieving an accessible environment – universal design

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes clear that persons with disabilities are entitled to live independently in their communities, to make their own choices and to play an active role in society. Hence, barriers that restrict persons from participating in society on an equal basis with others should be erased through strategic work. Preferably by making sure the environment is accessible already from the start, if not addressed from the start, by fixing or removing existing barriers. Under some circumstances special support or adaptation is the only way to achieve independency or participation in society.

Already in the planning stages of a new product, service or built environment all potential users should be taken into consideration. This can be achieved through universal design, which is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Our recommendations for a maximized consumer experience, for as many as possible, are general and have been developed together with persons with cognitive impairments through inspections in retail and on-line stores.