

NEARLY HALF OF OLDER CONSUMERS FEEL OVERLOOKED

Age UK calls on retailers and other businesses to become more age-friendly

Four in every 10 of those over 65 believe that retailers and other businesses have little interest in the consumer needs of older people,^[i] according to new research by Age UK^[ii] – this despite older households spending an estimated total of £145 billion each year on goods and services.^[iii]

Published today in the Charity's new report '*Age-friendly business: Valuing and including older consumers*',^[iv] the research provides an interesting insight into what consumers look for from their shopping environment. In a wake-up call to many businesses, the research shows that the top three priorities for the over-65s – parking facilities, manned checkouts and staff politeness – also top the wish-list of younger consumers, showing that if businesses can get it right for older customers, they can get it right for everyone. Additional focus groups for the Charity^[v] highlighted the importance of the provision of seats and toilets in stores.

Research highlights:

- In focus groups for the Charity, older people across the board voiced **the provision of seats in stores, accessible toilets and staff politeness** as their key priorities for a decent shopping experience.
- **When polled, a quarter of all those over 65 ranked parking as their number one priority.** This compares to 23% in the 16-24 year age bracket (rising to 35% for those aged 35-44 years).
- **15% of over-65s wanted an adequate number of manned checkouts.** This compares to 10% of 16-24 year olds (rising to 22% in the 25-34 year age bracket).

Highlighting some of the difficulties that people in later life can face, together with examples of positive experiences and advice on how to support older customers, the report carries a clear message for businesses that aspire to cater to the growing population of older consumers.

The report shows that a lack of adequate toilets and seating is a major issue for many older people, affecting their confidence to leave home and proving a significant barrier for some to even enter a shop. Having decent, accessible and clearly-signed toilets gives many older people the confidence to go into a shop, and providing at least some chairs on shop floors – or even stacked away with staff trained to offer them to customers if needed – creates a far more hospitable and welcoming environment for many older shoppers.

In its report the Charity argues that the exclusion of older customers creates frustration and resentment for them as well as wasted opportunities for businesses. Those businesses that fully understand the diverse range of older people's interests, preferences and challenges, without stereotyping or making assumptions, will be better-placed to win them – and the friends, relatives and carers who shop with them – as valuable and loyal customers.

Age UK is urging companies to use the report to help ensure their stores and services are age-friendly.

Age UK's TOP TIPS for creating an age-friendly business:

Toilets and seats – provide these essential facilities to give people the confidence to come into your store and linger for longer.

Online – ensure websites are well-designed and user-friendly for everyone.

Paying – support people with dementia-friendly, manned checkouts.

Telephone – ensure call-handlers speak clearly, with patience and respect.

Don't Ignore – do not ignore older shoppers or make assumptions about what they need.

Point out – design a safe and easy to navigate environment and help older people find what they need as required.

Service – provide excellent customer service, including polite, helpful and patient staff.

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said: *“We have a growing population of discerning older consumers who know what they want, and retailers and other businesses who understand that and respond well can look forward to a really successful future.*

“Clearly there is no single ‘older consumer’ – people in later life are incredibly diverse in terms of their interests, income and health. That’s why it’s vital that shops and companies do not stereotype their older customers, whilst also being aware of the ways in which some might need a bit of practical support. Offering seats and decent customer toilets, and training staff to be polite and considerate, creates the kind of shopping environment that will make older customers feel comfortable and want to keep coming back.

“Being able to park nearby or at the store is hugely important to those older people who drive so retailers, planners and councils need to factor that into their thinking too.

“Many older and younger people are essentially looking for the same things in their shopping experience, meaning if businesses get it right for older customers, they get it right for all. After all, it isn’t only older people who value seats, toilets and easy parking – these things are extremely helpful to families with children, among many others, as well.”

-Ends-

^[i] Polling commissioned by Age UK, conducted by TNS, June 2016. Base sample: 1014 adults (16 years +), GB

^[ii] Supported by Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution and UK Power Networks who funded the report

^[iii] 2013 figures – these are the latest reliable stats available and show a 13% increase on the previous year.
Family Spending 2011–2014, ONS, 2014

^[iv] Available to download online: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Policy/consumer-issues/age-friendly-business.pdf?dtrk=true>

^[v] In 2015, Age UK held three workshops with 10-15 older people in each. They told us about the good and the bad when going into shops, phoning their energy company, purchasing goods online and making complaints. They gave ideas on how businesses can improve their service to older people. The workshops were held in Derby, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Norfolk.