Case study: Barclays introduce beacon technology for disabled customers

Introduction

Business Disability Forum (BDF) Partner Barclays Bank prioritises accessibility and inclusivity. As their accessibility statement sets out:

“One of our ambitions is to become the most accessible and inclusive bank for all our customers and clients. We do this, not only because it makes good commercial sense, but because it’s the right thing to do. It’s consistent with our values and culture of helping everyone achieve their potential, and consistent with our vision of becoming the ‘Go-To’ bank.”

Whether it’s through the launch of innovative accessible debit cards and ‘talking’ cash machines to aid customers with visual impairments, or simply by installing automatic doors to assist customers with a mobility impairment, Barclays continues to reaffirm its commitment to disability best practice.

Introducing beacon technology

Launched on 3 December 2014 to mark United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD 2014), Barclays became the first bank in the UK to introduce a pioneering ‘beacon’ technology to improve the customer experience.

The service involves the use of a smart phone application that customers use to pre-log information about their disability and any specific needs they may have when visiting the branch. For example, a customer might indicate that she has a hearing impairment but does better when someone speaks close to her right ear; or members of staff will be aware with a particular customer with dyslexia, that he uses a signature rather than PIN number.

Customers have the freedom to choose exactly what information they would like to share and may upload as much or as little as they wish. The application also allows customers to upload a photo so that Barclays employees can recognise the individual when they visit the branch.

When a customer enters a branch, the beacon discretely alerts members of staff through a Bluetooth connection and informs them of the customer’s disability and their requirements.

The initiative was developed after a customer in Sheffield suggested that services could be improved for disabled people – particularly by reducing the need for customers to have to explain their accessibility needs each time they enter the branch. Soon after, beacon technology was introduced at Sheffield’s Pinstone Street as part of a first-phase ‘test and learn’.

Now in March 2015, Barclays will be increasing the pilot to a further nine branches across the UK. These include Chelmsford, Liverpool Lord Street, Ipswich, Luton, Islington, York, Warrington, Eastbourne and Cheltenham, with the aim of a full rollout in the future.
The benefits

This use of beacon technology provides a variety of benefits both for disabled customers and for Barclays’ employees. For the customer, it means they can have a more personalised service that caters to their specific requirements and the nuisance is removed of continually repeating sensitive conversations about their disability each time they enter the branch.

For Barclays’ in-branch employees, the implementation of beacon technology allows staff to assist customers with a disability more effectively and to do so in a way that promotes inclusion. The application notifies staff positioned at the front of the branch via an iPad, meaning they can quickly respond appropriately; and can also through their iPad, access additional information that might be relevant to addressing the individual customer’s requirements.

Conclusion

As noted, Barclays strongly prioritises improving accessibility and inclusivity.

Elaine Draper, Director of Accessibility and Inclusion at Barclays said:

“The work that we have already carried out around accessibility has raised awareness of the issues that people with disabilities face when entering bank branches.

Beacons are the latest in a long line of innovative initiatives from Barclays designed to make our customers lives easier, particularly important for people with non-visible disabilities – something our customers have told us is an issue”.

For more information on Barclays’ Beacon service, or to be part of the pilot please visit: www.barclays.co.uk/beacons

For more information on Business Disability Forum, visit: http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/