Could you use more customers?

How about 1 million more?
AGE-FRIENDLY NYC was established in 2007 and is a partnership between the Office of the Mayor, the New York City Council, and The New York Academy of Medicine that works to make all aspects of city life inclusive for older adults.

The Age-friendly Local Business Initiative (AFLBI) assists businesses to identify themselves as “age-friendly” by providing educational materials on physical changes and practices they can implement to attract, serve, and retain older adults as customers. Age-friendly NYC works closely with local business-serving organizations and community partners to promote these age-friendly businesses throughout...
their neighborhood and help spread the word to older adults about their age-friendly business features. Many age-friendly businesses have received excellent press as a result of the initiative.

The older adult (50+) consumer base is diverse, fast-growing, and already controls 50% of discretionary spending in the U.S.

This age-friendly business guide is designed to provide insight into the older adult market and assist your business to attract more older adult customers by providing practical no-cost and low-cost tips on how to reach and engage this growing market.
Do you know your potential customers in NYC?

- There are nearly 1.5 million older adults 60+ currently living in NYC. This number is expected to grow to over 1.8 million by 2030, meaning one in every five New Yorkers will be an older adult.
- Nearly half of consumer spending in NYC is from adults 50+. That is $70.1 billion annually.
- Almost 40% of 50+ consumer expenditure in NYC is represented by African American, Hispanic, and Asian New Yorkers combined.
- The 50+ population controls almost 80% of U.S. aggregate net worth.
- Americans 50+ spend a lot on dependents: children, grandchildren, and even parents. Grandparents spend over $52 billion annually on their grandkids.
- There are over 700,000 adults 55+ in NYC’s workforce. That is 18.3% of the city’s total workforce.

In a time when small businesses are in need of increased sales in order to maintain growth, tapping into this expanding older consumer base can help boost profits. Becoming more age-friendly can help you expand your customer base and increase your bottom line.
Many changes that benefit older customers are good for all customers.

- Wide aisles and/or automatic doors not only help older adults with wheelchairs or walkers, but are also great for parents with young children in strollers.
- Well-lit signage with large, clear fonts allows customers of all ages to read signs easier, especially older adults.

Making age-friendly changes to your business makes your business more appealing to every potential customer.

The Age-friendly Local Business Initiative seeks to foster age-friendly environments where businesses thrive on a larger customer base and people enjoy access to a variety of goods and services regardless of their age.

What are businesses saying?

“It makes perfect business sense to offer senior discounts, smaller portion sizes, home delivery, wheelchair accessibility, and other programs and services to such a vital and vibrant group of New Yorkers.”

Howie Glickberg, Vice Chairman of Development, Fairway Markets

“Older adults are the community. They set trends when it comes to health and new changes in the community. If you target them, you target everyone else as well.”

April, General Manager, Hibiscus Day Spa

Age-friendly businesses are more likely to report increased cash receipts than non-participating businesses. Adopting age-friendly practices also fosters better overall customer service. Sensitizing staff to the needs of older adults increases attention and awareness to the needs of all customers.
We can help promote it to your potential customers!

Your business might have some of the age-friendly features listed in the checklist on the next page already.

We can help advertise them to your potential customers! By promoting your business' age-friendly features through our network of age-friendly community partners and local business-serving organizations, we can make your business more visible to older consumers and the general public.

These suggestions will help guide you to start making age-friendly changes to your business, but are by no means a definitive list of all practices. Do you have a great age-friendly practice not listed here? Send it to us at agefriendlynyc@nyam.org!
AGE-FRIENDLY CHECKLIST

MARKETING
- Promote products, services, and business features that are good for older adults.
- Make websites easy to navigate with zoom control/text resize features.
- Use large, clear fonts for signage, printed materials, and websites.
- Translate materials into different languages.

AMBIANCE
- Have adequate lighting throughout, especially entrances/exits and hallways.
- Minimize excessively loud music and noise.

DESIGN
- Keep customer safety in mind by clearly marking stairs, inclines, or drops and keeping aisles clear.
- Avoid heavy doors or install electronic doors, and make sure aisles are wide.
- Place products within reach on shelves or offer help reaching items.
- Provide publicly accessible bathrooms.
- Have a place where customers can sit and rest.

EXPERIENCE
- Train staff to provide respectful and patient human contact in person and on the phone.
- Train staff to be mindful when speaking to older adults.
- Train staff on how to assist those with physical challenges and how to handle incidents.
PROMOTION

- Promote products, services, and business features that could be of interest to older adults in printed and web advertisements.

- Create inclusive marketing materials. Include older adults in ads featuring customers using your products/services (if applicable) and make sure your print and web ads reach older adults.

- Place discounts or promoted products for older adult shoppers in places where they will be seen by the right audience.

- Provide menus/brochures both online and in print if you offer delivery services. Many people don’t have regular access to a computer.

WEBSITE

- Make key information simple to find for everyone. Repeat your business name, address, hours, and contact information on every page.

- Prominently place navigation bars on the top or side of each page and avoid complicated menus or drop/downs. Include zoom controls or text resize buttons clearly on every page.

- Design your site with older computers in mind. Be careful about using too much audio/video and limit flash elements, which are incompatible with many computers and mobile devices.
The over 50 population outspends the average consumer. Their economic activity affects all sectors of the U.S. economy. Older adults are sophisticated customers who, on average, have more time to research products/services they are interested in. When marketing products and services to older adults, remember that they are savvy shoppers, more rational and less influenced by trends and fads than their younger counterparts.

**MATERIAL DESIGN**

- Design easy-to-read materials that clearly highlight key information.
- Use simple language in your materials that can be understood by as many people as possible.
- Offer materials in multiple languages – think about what languages are spoken in your neighborhood.

**TIPS**

- Use sans serif type fonts like Helvetica and Calibri, which don’t have small features at the end of their strokes. Serif fonts like Times New Roman have decorative end strokes and can be hard to read in small sizes.
- Always use a 12 point font or higher when possible. The body of this document is set in 12 point Calibri. This is an example of 16 point Calibri.
- Leave 1-inch margins and space between lines of text.
- Use vivid colors. Avoid light shades like pastels and greys.
- Create a high contrast between text and the background of your materials. Avoid using text and a background of the same/similar color as they tend to fade together when viewed.
- Use simple and clear designs without too much decoration that can detract from key information.
SOUND

• Avoid loud music. Many customers have difficulty sorting out announcements and conversation from background noise.

• Have music-free or reduced music hours during times older customers are most likely to shop.

• Play a mix of music from different time periods and styles.

• Reserve certain quiet areas of your business (e.g., quiet tables or a private conference area).

• Use mass and space to reduce outside noise. Heavy walls and thick windows help keep traffic/outside noise to a minimum.

• Control noise by keeping doors closed or installing noise-absorption measures (e.g., from machines, production activities, or construction).
Proper lighting and sound are key components of a positive customer experience. As people age, many will experience a reduction in hearing and/or changes in vision. More than 30 million Americans and 1 in 3 older adults have a hearing impairment in both ears. Older adults also often need 3x as much light as they did when they were younger. By keeping these changes in mind when designing the ambiance of your store, you can improve the experience of all customers.

**LIGHTING**

- Cut down on glare by installing shades on lights or providing indirect/filtered lighting.
- Use greater intensities of color. As eyes age, colors will appear dull or grey.
- Provide adequate lighting throughout the business especially entrances, exits, and hallways.
- Include small direct “task” lights over areas where reading or other visually demanding tasks are necessary (LED lights can work great for this).

**TIPS**

- Research suggests people like the music they grew up listening to best. If you want to reach out to your older customers, play the music they know and love.
- To absorb sound within your space, install carpets, rugs, tapestries, acoustic ceiling tiles, soundboard walls, and partitions.
- Customers can have trouble looking at brightly lit objects. As people age, they get more sensitive to glare.
- Task lights can be used under shelves to read labels or on tables to read menus. Lighting from directly above is best since it cuts down on shadows.
SAFETY

• Clearly mark stairs, drops, inclines, or any change in floor elevation/material with brightly colored paint or reflective tape.
• Keep aisles clear as much as possible during restocking.
• Keep the sidewalk in front of your business free of leaves, snow, or other debris.
• Remove throw rugs that can catch feet and cause trips. You can also secure edges of rugs to floor with glue or tape.
• Clean up puddles and spills immediately to prevent slips.

ACCESSIBILITY

• Install lightweight or automatic doors if possible, or have staff members on hand to open them when needed.
• Make sure interior doors, halls, and aisles are wide enough to accommodate a scooter or walker.
• Ensure that some seating areas can accommodate a wheelchair.
• Install a portable ramp if your entrance is not level with the ground.

RESTROOMS

• Provide publicly accessible bathrooms for all or high-need customers if possible.
• Install toilet paper dispensers within easy reach.
• Install auto-flush controls or mount manual controls on the wide side of the toilet no higher than 44” from floor.
• Provide one sink and hand dryer low enough and one stall wide enough for someone in a wheelchair to use.
The layout and design of your store should accommodate as many customers as possible. No one likes to struggle through tight aisles or stand on shelves to reach products. Design with a range of customers in mind: older adults, families with small children/strollers, differently abled individuals, etc. Remember, age-friendly design is customer-friendly design!

CONVENIENCE

- Provide permanent seating or allow customers to request a temporary seat to rest.
- Install a bench or seating area outside of your business.
- Place products on shelves within easy reach or have staff on hand to assist.
- Offer delivery options for homebound individuals or pick-up options for those who have trouble getting around/navigating your store.
- Accept orders by phone, on your website, or at an easily accessible counter at the front of your business.

TIPS

- Visit the ADA Bathroom Guide for details: www.adabathroom.com
- Outdoor seating is a great place to encourage lingering conversations and refills.
- Place essentials, popular items and items geared towards older adults within easy reach (light bulbs, coffee, tea, cold medicine, vitamins, etc.)
- Keep a three-feet-wide accessible route throughout your business.
- Place ramps in areas with changes in floor height to minimize steps.
EXPERIENCE

CUSTOMER SERVICE

• Train staff to assist those with vision and hearing challenges.
• Encourage staff to be respectful and patient with all customers and give them the authority to provide extra customer service as they see fit.
• Teach staff not to discriminate about the tastes or preferences of a customer based on age or to demonstrate other "ageist" behavior.
• Train staff to recognize signs that someone needs physical/medical assistance or is being physically/financially abused.
• Provide training on how to handle incidents such as falls and accidents while preserving customers’ dignity as much as possible.

COMMUNICATION

• Train staff to speak clearly and slowly, but not to “elder speak” (use an exaggerated tone or overly simple words).
• Do not train staff to raise their voice above a normal level when speaking to older customers or to get their attention. Instead have staff lightly tap a customer on the shoulder or say “excuse me sir/ma’am.”
• Train staff (especially female staff) to lower the pitch of their voice when speaking to someone who has difficulty hearing. Lower pitched voices tend to be heard more clearly.
One thing that can make or break a shopping experience is customer service and communication. Recent studies show that 1 in 3 older adults aged 50+ has received inferior services or felt disrespected in shops for being older. The number is even higher for people aged 65+, at 37%. Good shopping experiences translate into better engagement with products and services, increased spending, and customer loyalty. Bad shopping experiences can lose customers.

TIPS

• Provide a personal shopping service for older adults or make staff available to help read product labels, get products down from shelves, and offer directions.

• If you don’t normally provide delivery, consider offering it on a case-by-case basis to those that need it. You can do this by partnering with a courier service.

• Staff should ALWAYS be rewarded for providing extra customer service to any customer who needs it, including older adults.

• Don’t shout or speak overly loud to customers who seem to have difficulty understanding as it can make them feel singled out and embarrassed.

• High pitches and words with F, S, K, and SH sounds can be harder for older adults to understand.

• Ageism is any type of discrimination based on age and includes drawing conclusions about someone’s preferences, ability, income, or ideas based on their age (especially older age).

• You can partner with local community or faith-based organizations to find trainings on physical/medical assistance and physical/financial abuse.

• Develop a plan for an anticipated or unforeseen disaster and consider the needs of older people your services and products might help to meet.