

## **Edited Transcript**

Universal Design Conference

Sydney Town Hall (Lower)

Thursday, 21 August 2014 at 9am

Day 2

### **About This Document**

This edited transcript has been taken directly from the text of live captioning provided by The Captioning Studio and, as such, it may contain errors.

The Captioning Studio accepts no liability for any event or action resulting from the draft transcript provided for this edited version.

COTA NSW accepts no liability for any event or action resulting from this edited transcript provided for the benefit of conference delegates. Only those presentations made in the Lower Town Hall are provided. There was no captioning available for the concurrent sessions held in an upstairs room.

The original draft transcript must not be published without The Captioning Studio's written permission.

## TOURSIM

### Session Chair: Ian Day

### Bill Forrester: Utilising Universal Design on "Soft Infrastructure" for Competitive Advantage and Greater Economic Returns

*Synopsis: This presentation explains the importance of customer service in tourism and that many tourist now and in the future have a disability and many more will be ageing. Gearing up as in industry in Australia has been slow and there are missed opportunities. Bill uses examples from overseas to show how we can improve the design of tourism opportunities.*

IAN DAY: I'd like to introduce Bill Forrester is an acknowledged leader in the economics of accessible tourism, universal design and social inclusion, especially the impact the retiring baby boomers will have on the tourism sector.

BILL FORRESTER: Thank you. I hope this afternoon that I'm going to change perceptions: that's what we're all about, but more importantly just indicate the degree to which this market is evolving and the impact that the baby boomers are going to have on the way we traditionally view disability.

I don't need to go through that in a great deal of detail after that superb introduction, but suffice to say that we're all about inclusion, not accessibility. As this presentation unfolds, I think you'll see there is a big difference.

Soft infrastructure is an unusual term, but it's a term we coined about 18 months ago to make a big distinction that universal design has to start from the customer, it has to start from the support services and it must be embodied in everything, from product development, customer delivery, customer service, staff training, and my two big bug bears, information, because there's a lack of it, and the way people with a disability are portrayed in mainstream advertising, especially in tourism or, rather, they're not.

The sort of image that the average tourism provider looks at is a passive, person with a disability who is non-involved and goes on holidays with someone looking after them. Disability is the only minority group that anyone can join in an instant. So what that means is that within the disability community you have people from every walk of life, every aspiration, every interest that there is and more often than not it tends to come from the more active in society, not the most passive.

We draw an arbitrary line and say everything towards the apex is disability and guess what, it's all homogenous and at that point we lose the plot because I would contend that disability is not disability; disability is just part of the continuum of ability, whether it be someone going to a National Park rock climbing, to someone going for a sedentary picnic with their family or someone going to do a nice class 1 accessible trail. There is no difference. It is catering for the level of ability that exists, not trying to say everyone with disability is the same:

*This is very cool. I was a little nervous to come up here, a little bit less of a risk taker as I age and I'm very glad I did and I'm really, really grateful for the opportunity to come up and to be able to do it in an accessible vehicle is even more exciting.*

*With every accessible traveller, there is an average of two able-bodied companions travelling with them. It's an enormous market - enormous, yet enormously underserved. We're filling a niche, not only commercially fantastic, but from a feel good it's also magnificent.*

*We feel it's very valuable and you feel valued as people because they don't have to sit on the sidelines and watch while everyone else experiences this, they get to come in, jump on and have fun themselves. I think it makes them feel part of the community, part of the group and it's very inclusive and I think it's very beneficial for all of us. We do not keep separate statistics on mobility impaired that I am aware of, but to us that really is not an important statistic. What really is important is that everybody is afforded the opportunity to experience these facilities and we're just happy that we're leaders in this field and we love seeing mobility-impaired people up on the glacier, along with everyone else.*

BILL FORRESTER: So that video was taken from the Athabasca Glacier. If anyone knows Canada well and Alberta, you'll know of the Icefield Parkway that goes from Jasper through to Calgary. Brewster's is one of the tourism operators on the Icefield Pathways. They have a corporate policy to make every one of their attractions accessible. Those snow coaches are 6 million apiece, it's not just one that is accessible, 30% of them are and every replacement will be. So it's an interesting corporate philosophy, but it's embodied into the culture.

Some quick take-aways. It was very cool to go up there, but she was nervous. 90% of people with a disability and even those who are starting to age get very nervous if they don't know what to expect before they go there. In other words, if you want to attract people with a disability to a tourism venue or a destination or a city, you have to give them the information upfront because mistakes are harder to cope with when you have some form of disability.

We'll come to this a little bit later, the market is enormous already and it is growing at a rate that most people are not yet aware of. And, finally, there's the corporate and social responsibility. It is the right thing to do to include everyone in the community. If today you operated a facility and excluded a certain racial group, you would be out of business within a week, and yet when it comes to people with a disability at the moment we seem to think that's fine. That is not going to be a sustainable position for corporate reputation as we move further forward.

There are a couple of key stats - 88% of people with a disability undertake at least one trip per annum. Guess what the statistic for the rest of the population is? 87%. Any thought that people with a disability don't travel on a par with the normal community is false, they do.

The next number is a really important number. For overnight trips the multiplier effect is 2.8. For day trips it's 3.4. So if a facility doesn't cater for someone with a disability, it doesn't lose that one piece of revenue, it loses three times the revenue, because the whole group will go somewhere else.

In 2008 in Australia the spend by people with disability on tourism was \$8 million. That was 11% of the tourism market back in 2008. That in itself is a big number. I don't know of many businesses that would deliberately just turn their back on 11% of their potential revenue.

Why is it going to be different? I think you've all seen that ageing graph. The important figure that that graph is have a look at the retirement age at 65. Extrapolate that out, 40% of people at age 65 have a disability. By 75 that goes up to 60%.

What does that have to do with tourism? McKinsey research - 60% of US net wealth is by the over 65s. 40% of spending is by the over 60s. When it comes to leisure and tourism, as the introduction stated, it goes up to 50% because that's all they're interested in doing. They've bought enough cars in their lifetime by then, let's go and have some fun.

What does that mean in terms of the extrapolation of that 11%? By the time those baby boomers start really retiring - remember they started on 1 January 2011 and it's a 20-year trend - by 2020 that number becomes 25% of the total tourism market is going to be by people with a disability. Now, that is getting a really big number.

The ageing graph says it all, and bear in mind with the exception of China, which is even worse, every western country, including Australia, has almost an identical graph, the numbers change but the curve of that graph does not.

Interesting statistic, just think about this for a minute. Of everybody since recorded history who has attained the age of 65, two-thirds of them are still alive. When you multiply it out with family and friends, you get nearly a third of the world's population have a direct connection with someone with a disability.

Most governments around the world are now committed to inclusion of people with a disability. Most companies are looking at the diversity policy seriously. For anyone who is in the conference market, the wedding market, family reunion or school reunion markets, you're going to have to take the view now that every conference is going to have a need for disability facilities and they're not necessarily going to be the assistant either, it could be the chief executive wanting ramp access up here and a lower lectern.

When it comes to tourism, though, we have a dilemma because the tourism industry continually complains that we've built all these rooms and the tourism industry says, "but it's a white elephant, it's never full". The Victorian Competition Commission looked at it and said, "yeah, but it's your own fault. If you don't tell anybody you've got it and you don't build it into your marketing, this particular group won't come".

People will not use a service they're not aware of and it's particularly important when it comes to people with a disability. If they're not sure they're able to be able to get into something and enjoy something, they're not going to come. It's not a "build it and they will come". You have to build it, you have to market it, and you have to tell people "actually, we want you to come" as you would for any other customer.

We're all familiar with the seven principles of universal design. What we haven't done is thought about it in terms of what I call that soft infrastructure. Especially this four: Equity of use - we're not talking about building add-on facilities, we're not talking about a hospital room and a ramp at the front door, we're talking about complete equitable use. Simple and intuitive - that applies to information. It has to be able to be found. It's got to be readable by people of all abilities. It's not good putting a pdf file up that lists all of the attractions if you have a website. It's not readable by Dragon or any other voice recognition piece of software. The last one I query on, what do you mean by low physical effort? Many people, many tourism bodies in particular, many destination managers have thought the answer to accessible tourism is to produce a brochure, and you put the brochure in the information office. That's actually making it harder physically for someone with a disability to get the information to anyone else, because they have to find the information, go and get into it, which half the time they're not even accessible, and get out of the car.

Let's look at some of the current issues that I'm talking about that stem from the soft infrastructure. Why do we see booking systems where, oh, you've got a disability, you can't do it here, ring our special hotline? Why do we have special areas in stadiums and other things that allow for one carer only? How many people with disability go out with only one carer only, not the rest of their family or a group of friends? Why is accessibility information hidden under frequently asked questions or, worse, under "special procedures"? It's hardly inclusive.

And why when we do have information that is often written in a language that looks like it's an audit report, so you'll go to the front page of the website, it will be in beautiful prose singing the praises and beauty of the site, you go to the accessibility information page and it says "you must book doing this procedure, you must ring first, you must park here, you must ring us in advance to get the ramp out" - inclusive? No.

The last one which I think we'll talk about a bit later, but why does every accessible room always have a lovely view of the dump master and why is it always the lowest category? Further, it always looks like a hospital suite. And why do people on reception desks and staff always talk to the companion and not the person with a disability, which in half the cases the person with the disability is still the team leader. Examples of soft infrastructure that are not having universal design applied to it.

A lot of little things make a huge difference and it's not the main expenditure that concerns me a lot; it's some of the little stuff which is so cheap, like the walking stick holders. How many people here have been to a place and watched someone elderly drop their walking stick and have to come around the counter and pick it up for them or watch them struggle to get it down. \$ 2.50 buys a holder you can screw to the reception desk. Some of this stuff is requiring us to think about universal design from a customer's point of view.

Some quick good examples - this is the Philip Island Nature Park. Their facilities physically are magnificent. So is the way they have their information centre. But look at this, accessibility is a product. Home page of a web page, accessibility is there, it immediately says you are welcome. Imagery is on the front page. The Butchart Gardens in Canada, yes, they have accessibility throughout, but every 100 feet there's a sign indicating the way, at every intersection there is a map

showing the barrier-free route through the park. These are the simple add-ones that come from a culture of thinking customer, not from thinking of accessibility. Jervis Bay Wild - that's obviously Jervis Bay at Huskisson, completely roll on, roll off, that wasn't good enough, a young girl wanted to go dolphin swimming. What did they do? They bought a \$3,000 lift. Now the whole experience is fully accessible and it's that little marginal expenditure - in an investment of 60 million it's not a lot. But she is now doing something she never dreamed she could do.

This is probably the best example of inclusion anywhere in the world. This is Alberta Parks, their corporate vision statement, "everyone belongs outside". When you have a vision like that you are at the very outset starting to think differently. Your universal design is driven by philosophy, not by compliance.

(Video played):

*Welcome to whistler British Colombia. It has been 25 years since Rick Hanson got in his wheelchair and travelled 40,000km around the globe on his man in motion world tour. He's conquered it all, from the Great Wall of China, to inaccessible washrooms in 34 countries. Well, the one thing the man in motion has never done is plunge 160 feet off a bridge into a gorge with a raging river at the bottom. Today that changes because today Rick Hanson and I go bungee jumping. Hi, Chris, this is Rick Hanson. So, Chris, walk us through bungee jumping here in Whistler?*

*Well, bungee jumping, we have a test dummy here that is going to --*

*That's a terrible thing to say.*

*Hi, Libby, this is Rick.*

*That looks very secure. Don't be nervous. You have the orange one, that's good. Safety rope.*

*Easy to find at the bottom of the river. The tour itself, how much? 26 million. The point of the tour wasn't to raise money.*

*No, it was to create awareness of the potential of people with disabilities, what was possible if barriers were removed.*

*Now people know people with disability can do all sorts of things. A lot of people said he can't do that, he's in a wheelchair.*

*There's still a big frontier.*

*The last frontier.*

*You have the upper hand.*

*You're strapped in like this so you can't change your mind.*

*The stuff we get into, you are a bad man.*

*The man in motion, except it's down this time.*

*One, two, three.*

*Rick, how are you?*

*Hey, I can't feel my legs! That was cool, man. Unbelievable.*

*It's not every day you see a guy in a wheelchair dangling over a gorge. Rick Hanson.*

BILL FORRESTER: For those who don't know 25 years ago Rick Hanson wheeled his way around the

world to raise awareness of physical barriers. We're now 26 years further on. The barriers are all about culture today. It's that perception that lingers. It's the soft infrastructure that doesn't support accessible tourism.

I hope from what I've shown you today you can see it's a valuable market. The market is huge. But the tourism industry and destination planners and managers have to understand what the needs of this new customer are and start tailoring the product.

Tourism really is all about selling dreams, it's about the experience, it has often been said you know you've been successful as a tourism operator if when someone leaves your establishment they leave changed. Ask yourself whether someone with a disability comes to an establishment and can they leave changed because they did something they never expected they'd be able to do, or you acknowledged the fact that they could.

Universal design has to start with the customer - we've talked about that. It is not building for people with a disability, and I think we've got some confusion over universal design in recent years in that we've tried to codify what was started as a human-centred movement.

Throw away your disability action plans, incorporate them into your normal plans, and start looking at how you service customer needs.

The final word goes to my business partner, Deborah Davis, and it really is important to understand that people with disability want to experience, they're not miserable cripples, to use her terminology, they are willing to come. It's up to the tourism industry to make them welcome. Thank you. (Applause).

IAN DAY: John Everden is an accredited disability access consultant and has a degree in civil engineering and a Bachelor of Science in ecotourism.

*Synopsis: John outlines some of the simple things that can make travel and touring more inclusive and convenient for everyone, and how simple things such as being able to fit the electric jug under the tap at the handbasin are important for the considerations for everyone.*