

How to  
**improve the  
customer  
experience**



Speak  
**Easy**

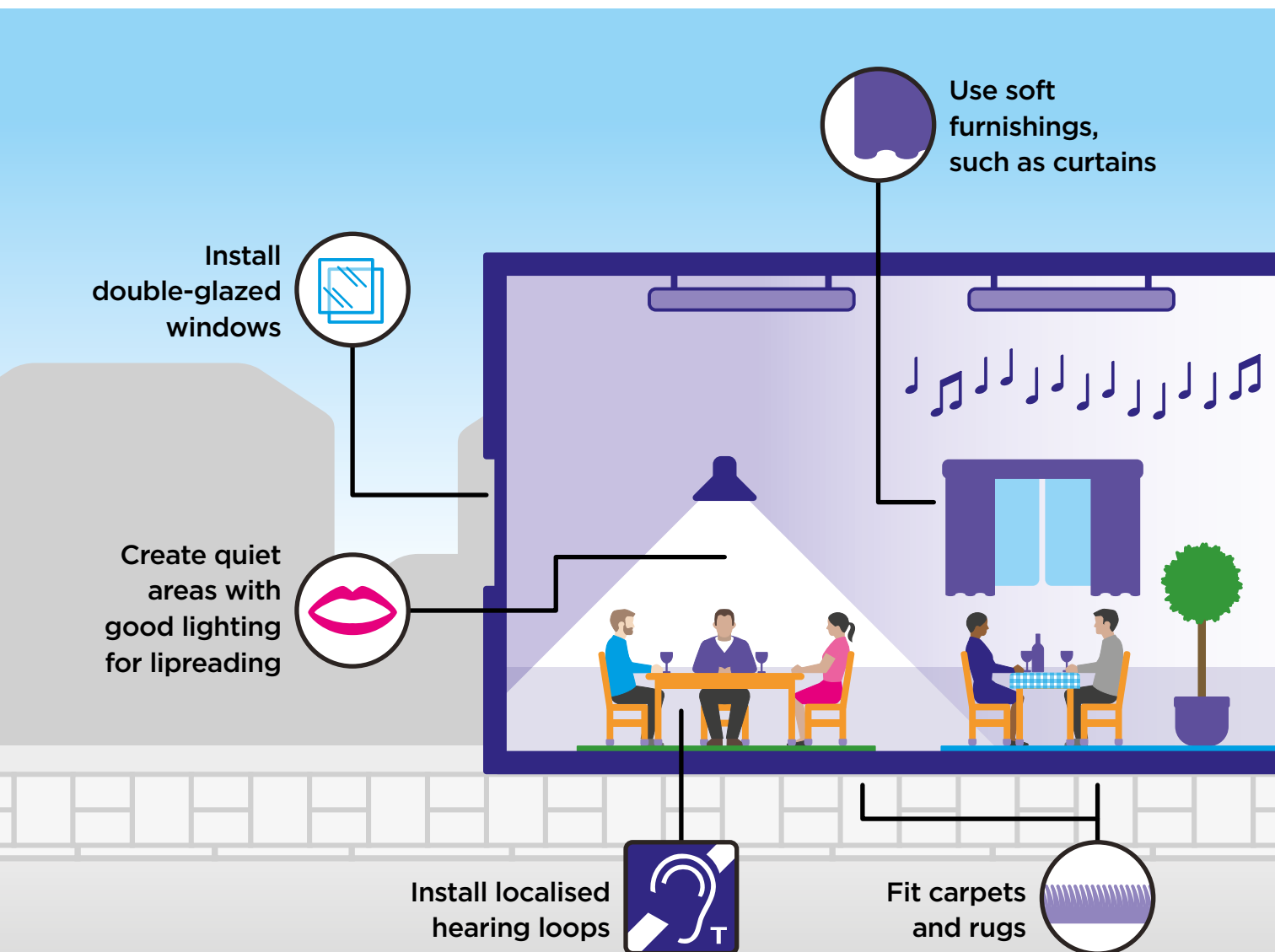


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## Eight ways to be more welcoming

In our *Speak Easy* report, we present clear evidence that restaurants, cafés and pubs that don't address high levels of background noise risk alienating huge numbers of potential customers (and have lost many already).

Four in every five respondents to our survey – with and without hearing loss – told us that many venues are far too noisy. A similar number told us that noise is a major factor when they decide where to eat out. Loud background noise makes it extremely difficult for customers to



hear and hold a conversation, and **91% of our survey respondents told us that they simply wouldn't return to a venue they found too noisy.**

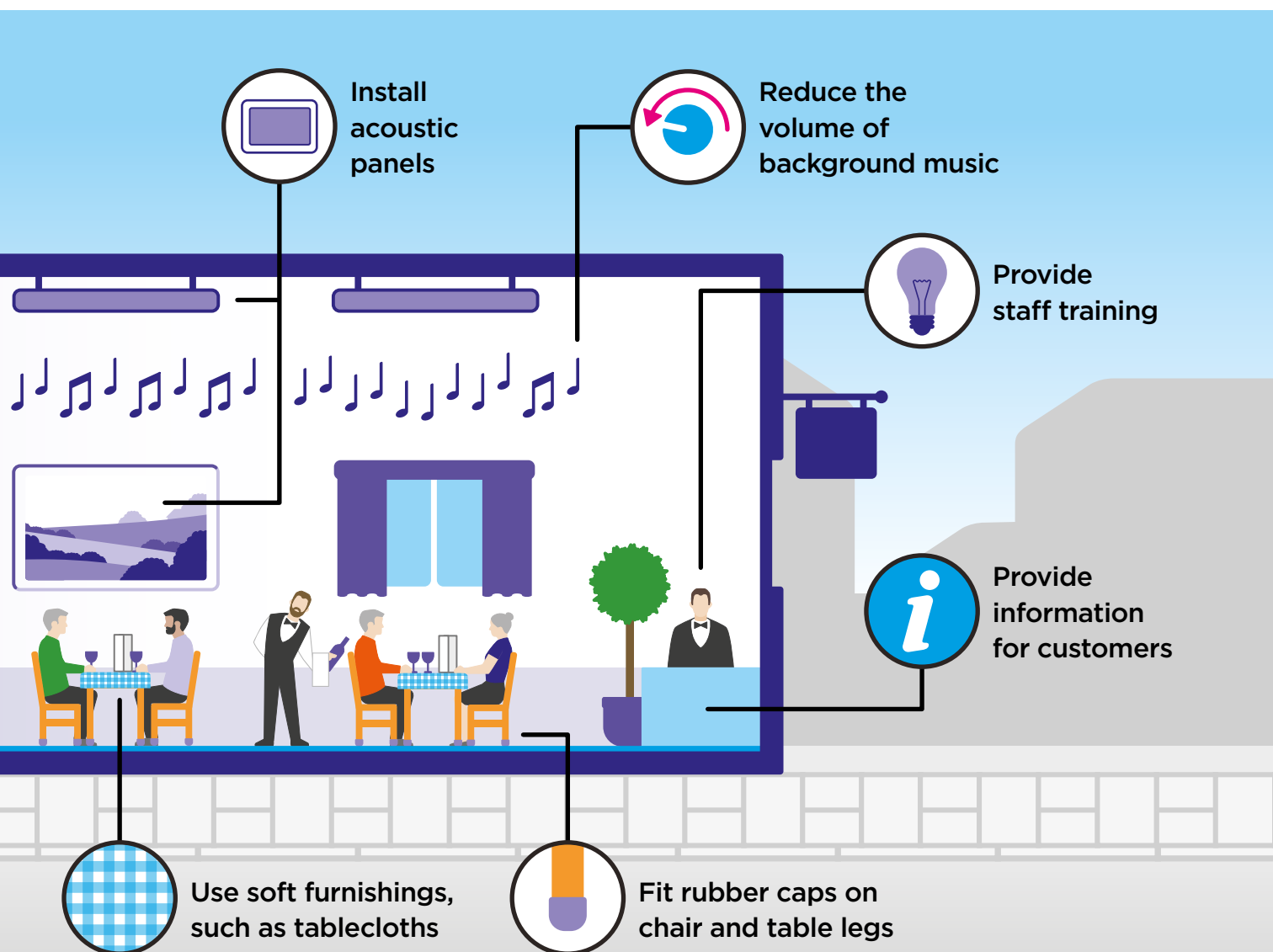
We believe that you should see this as an opportunity, not a threat. It's your chance to take a good look at your acoustic environment, and how your interior design and practices can be adapted to make your venue more accessible to people with hearing loss.

Three in every four respondents to our 2015 survey stated they'd dine out more regularly if venues were quieter. So, if your restaurant, café or pub offers a welcoming environment to the UK's

11 million people with hearing loss, they're far more likely to spend their time – and their money – with you, and abandon your noisier competitors.

## What changes can you make?

In this short guide, we outline a number of practical and cost-effective adaptations that you can make, to ensure that the enjoyable buzz created by a room full of pleasant conversations doesn't degenerate into a wall of background noise.





## 1. Make things clear

Someone who is deaf or has tinnitus or hearing loss needs to know quite a lot about a venue before they make a booking or try it for the first time.

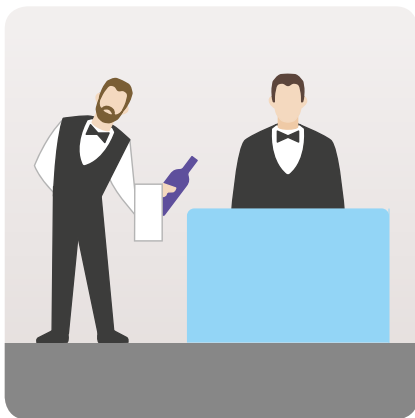
You can play a big part in making their experience fully accessible by providing all the relevant information in plain English on your website. You should specify whether:

- hearing loop systems are in place
- music is played
- a quiet area or quiet tables are available.

And, of course, people with hearing loss may prefer to contact your venue directly to clarify important details. It makes good business sense to provide a range of contact methods, including:

- an email address
- a web form
- an online-booking form
- a textphone number
- the option for customers to speak to staff before they visit.

Providing just a phone number is not enough. Many people with hearing loss cannot hear or communicate effectively over the telephone.



## 2. Staff with skills

Staff need to be aware of any measures in place to support customers with deafness, tinnitus and/or hearing loss. In particular, they should know which areas and tables are best, acoustics-wise, and that they must allow customers to bring in their hearing dogs – a legal requirement under the Equality Act.

Staff also need to have some level of deaf awareness, and make every effort to communicate clearly. We can provide further information about staff training.



## 3. Reduce the volume of background music

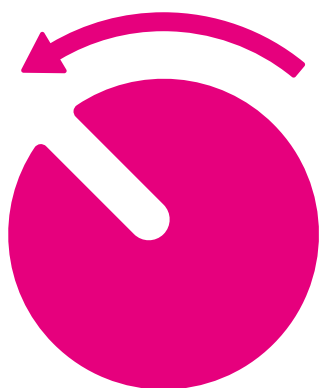
Loud background music, piped through speaker systems, makes it very difficult for people to hold a conversation. The problem becomes even worse as people raise their voices to be heard, further increasing the noise in the room.

Someone with hearing loss may find it impossible to distinguish speech in a noisy environment, even if they're using a hearing aid. Although the technology has improved immeasurably over the years, not even the most sophisticated hearing aids on the market can cut out unwanted sounds altogether – or return someone's hearing to normal levels.

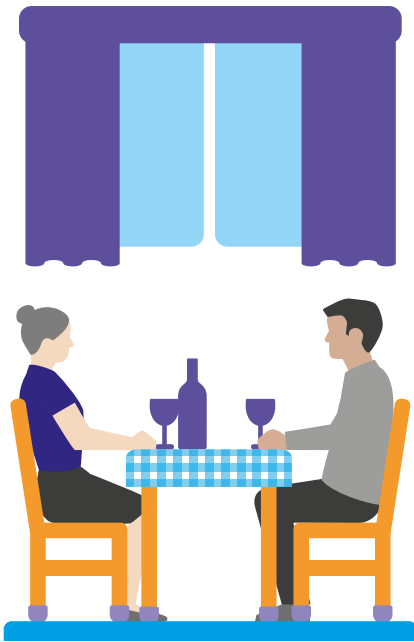
We recommend that you keep music at 50 decibels or below, so that your customers can hear and be heard without raising their voices.

Don't have speakers behind the bar or counter, as the music will prevent customers from communicating with staff.

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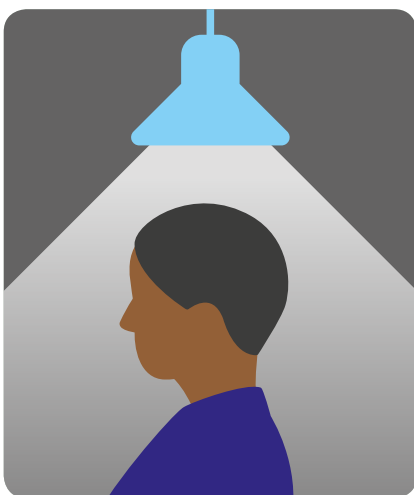


## 4. Use furnishings that absorb sound

The furnishings in your restaurant, café or pub have a significant impact on how sound travels – hard surfaces and high ceilings are big factors in increasing the level of environmental noise and making it harder to hear.

Making just a few of the following straightforward adjustments will absorb excess noise and help your customers hold a conversation:

- upholster chairs and sofas with soft materials, such as padded leather and fabrics
- use tablecloths
- lay carpets where possible
- put down rugs
- install double-glazing
- close the doors to outside seating areas
- fit rubber caps on the feet of tables and chairs.



## 5. Provide good lighting for lipreading

Lipreading is a vital communication skill for many people with hearing loss, particularly in noisier environments. Your venue needs well-lit spaces so that customers who rely on lipreading can follow conversation and communicate effectively.



“Lots could be done to reduce background noise!

Put the coffee machine well away from customers – and the service section (to stop all that crashing of plates and cutlery). Make sure tables are spaced well apart, and have a few in booths or quiet corners; everyone should be able to focus on their conversation.

Choose wall coverings and flooring that absorb sound, not echo it back. And, if you have to have background music, please make sure it's soft and quiet.”

**Colin, Stirlingshire**



## 6. Install acoustic treatments to absorb sound

An 'acoustic treatment' is anything designed to reduce noise levels within a space, either by absorbing sound or spreading it out. Acoustic treatments are used to great effect in schools and office spaces. For your venue, the most suitable treatments will be wall and ceiling panels, which use the absorption method to reduce the reverberation time of sounds in the room – significantly reducing background noise.

Art panels are types of wall or ceiling panels on which you can print an image, such as a painting or a photo. These make it easier to improve the acoustic environment without sacrificing aesthetics. They are particularly useful for restaurants, cafés and pubs, because they're discreet and hugely versatile.

The acoustic treatment industry in the UK is growing and there are a number of established suppliers. These specialists are able to 'retrofit' acoustic products within existing venues, as well as incorporating acoustic treatments within the interior design of newbuilds.

See the next page for a full list of the UK's acoustic treatment consultants.







## 7. Provide hearing loops

People who use hearing aids can benefit significantly from hearing loops in public spaces. Loops transmit sound in the form of a magnetic field that is picked up directly by hearing aids when users switch on their loop setting.

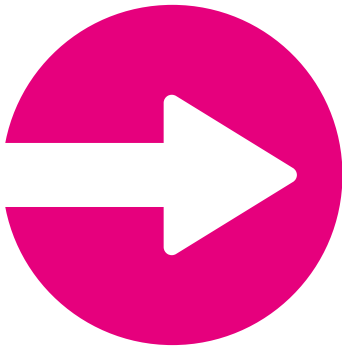
There are many different types of loop available. The most suitable option for your venue depends on factors such as the size and type of rooms. We can provide further information about hearing loop provision.



## 8. Designate a 'quiet area'

More than half of respondents to our survey said they are keen for restaurants, cafés and pubs to provide 'quiet areas' with certain tables prioritised for people with hearing loss. These could be bookable online, with staff trained to point them out to people with hearing loss when they arrive. Key features would include:

- tables spaced further apart than usual and round tables for larger groups, with all tables positioned away from doorways and the kitchen area
- table(s) fitted with localised hearing loop systems reserved for hearing aid users
- no speaker systems nearby
- lots of soft furnishings, including rubber-capped chair legs
- good lighting to support lipreading
- online booking as an alternative to telephone booking.



## Next steps

We offer tried and tested, practical advice on introducing these adjustments. Action on Hearing Loss wants to help your venue(s) to become fully accessible to customers with hearing loss – and to become even more attractive to those without hearing loss.

### Contact the Campaigns team to find out more:

✉ **Email** [campaigns@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@hearingloss.org.uk)  
☎ **Telephone** 020 7296 8248

## UK acoustic treatment specialists

### Contemporary Acoustic Solutions (CAS)

🌐 **Website** [casacoustics.co.uk](http://casacoustics.co.uk)  
☎ **Telephone** 01952 580 524

### Custom Audio Designs

🌐 **Website** [customaudiodesigns.co.uk](http://customaudiodesigns.co.uk)  
☎ **Telephone** 01730 269 572

### KP Acoustics

🌐 **Website** [kpacoustics.com](http://kpacoustics.com)  
☎ **Telephone** 020 8222 8778

### Resonics

🌐 **Website** [resonics.co.uk](http://resonics.co.uk)  
☎ **Telephone** 0844 884 4011

### Soundsorba

🌐 **Website** [soundsorba.com](http://soundsorba.com)  
☎ **Telephone** 01494 536 888

### The Woolly Shepherd

🌐 **Website** [woollyshepherd.co.uk](http://woollyshepherd.co.uk)  
☎ **Telephone** 01823 400 321

# Is your business open to the **11 million people** with hearing loss in the UK?

**Our Access Solutions team can deliver the solutions to make your restaurant, cafe or pub more accessible** to both customers and employees with hearing loss, so you can reap the benefits of increased return visits, better customer service and improved satisfaction.

## Customer experience

We strive to improve the experience of customers with hearing loss by helping you to deliver solutions across your whole business. This includes everything from awareness training for staff, to the supply and installation of hearing loops, to organisational benchmarking with a view to achieving the Louder than Words charter mark, which will showcase your success.

## Deaf awareness and sign language training

With 1 in 6 people in the UK experiencing deafness or hearing loss, awareness training for staff can really improve your customer service and help you tap into a new market. We deliver courses in deaf awareness and sign language, from introductory level to accredited British Sign Language (BSL).

## Installation and maintenance

We have more than 15 years' experience installing and maintaining hearing loop systems to the relevant British Standard (BS EN 62489-1:2010). Whatever your environment, our engineers offer expert site surveys to advise and create a solution just for you, so your customers with hearing aids can hear more clearly over background noise.

Our service includes the supply of quality equipment – such as fixed and portable counter loops, room loops and infrared systems – along with installation and annual maintenance contracts.

**To find out more or to make a booking, contact us today:**

 0333 240 5658 (charged at local rate, calls welcome via Text Relay)

 [access.solutions@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:access.solutions@hearingloss.org.uk)  [actiononhearingloss.org.uk/training](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/training)

 Action on Hearing Loss

 @ActionOnHearing

**Action on Hearing Loss** (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We enable people to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

For up-to-date information about hearing loss and tinnitus, how to hear better, and our breakthrough medical research, visit our website: **[actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk)**

For free, confidential information about anything related to hearing loss or tinnitus, you can call us on **0808 808 0123**, email us at **[information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)** or send a text message to **07800 000360**.

To find out about our events, news and services, and to share experiences and information with others, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter:

 Action on Hearing Loss

 @ActionOnHearing

**On the cover:** Colin Fraser-Malcolm, from Stirlingshire, has a cochlear implant to help manage his severe hearing loss. He finds it hard to relax when dining in a noisy venue because of the concentration required to hear conversations.

**Credit:** Simon Williams