Disabled Toilets
and Access Control

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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT IN 2004 HAS HAD A FUNDAMENTAL AND BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON ACCESS FOR THE DISABLED IN THE UK. MOST OF IT HAS BEEN EMBRACED BY BUSINESSES OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS, BUT IT HAS TO BE SAID, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF ENTHUSIASM. HOWEVER, IN ONE ASPECT LOGIC SEEMS TO HAVE STOPPED HALFWAY THROUGH THE PROCESS.

Why is it that disabled people are deemed to need an automatic door to access retail outlets, offices, schools, hospitals, etc. but, when it comes to toilets they are usually expected to be able to open the door unaided? And to make matters worse, those doors are larger and therefore heavier than standard doors in order to more readily accommodate wheelchairs.

All the handrails, low level fittings, extra space and infra-red taps are of little use if you can't get in!

Yet the solution is so simple. A product such as the Stanley Magic-Access™ operator can automate virtually any swing door; new or existing. It effortlessly provides a full range of automatic door functions to an otherwise manual door. The operating mechanism is installed on to the door frame in place of a conventional closer and works with virtually any door up to 1120mm wide! Its versatility means it can be either full or low energy in operation and is non-handed so can be used for right or left handed doors with minimal field adjustments.

So an automated door will mean a disabled person can gain easy access to the toilet. That just leaves one vital issue. You need to make sure they can lock the door so that they are not interrupted in their ablutions. Mechanical locks can present problems to some disabled people who may lack the dexterity needed to operate them. Specific access control solutions have been designed to overcome this problem, like the Axis AC type 8. This consists of internal and external touch sensors and a controller. They are used in conjunction with an electromagnetic lock or electric strike.

The control is in three stages.

Stage 1 -
The external touch entry sensor is activated and the door opens. This sensor will even work when the user is wearing gloves.

Stage 2 -
When inside the toilet the user touches the internal sensor which locks the door and disengages the external sensor so that it will not operate. A flashing red indicator on both sensors confirms the lock is engaged and the toilet is occupied. Ultra-bright LEDs are used to assist those with visual impairments.

Stage 3 -
The user touches the internal sensor once more and the door unlocks and the opener is activated. Both sensors stop flashing and the external sensor is re-engaged ready for the next user.

To prevent any accidental locking and disengaging of the entry sensor a door contact is wired in series with the internal touch switch to prevent accidental triggering on departure. A break glass and key switch can be incorporated to override the system in an emergency. As with all automatic doors, installation should be carried out by engineers qualified to BS7036:1996 (Code of Practice for safety at powered doors for pedestrian use).

It's so easy to overlook the need to think across different aspects of the DDA. The need for automatic doors on entrances and, increasingly, internal doors is so obvious. So is the need for disabled facilities wherever toilets are provided to members of the public or company staff. Why have so few organisations put the two principals together to provide truly comprehensive facilities?

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