

traveler segment, accessible travel will become more and more of an issue. Although seniors the world over are likely to continue their interest in travel and new sights and experiences, they will begin to have special needs owing to changing health.¹³

Some forward-thinking organizations are already stepping up to better serve those with special physical needs. By 2005, Avis had introduced Avis Access in its top 100 markets. This program featured a variety of specially equipped cars and vans that make renting a car a possibility for many who have not been able to rent in the past. These special cars offer such useful additions as swivel entry seats and hand (as opposed to foot) controls. Microtel Inns and Suites started a new training program called Opening Doors to enhance service to those with disabilities. Most cruise ships, either by their new designs or through retrofitting, now afford the use of mobility scooters so that those with limitations can easily traverse the huge decks.

As tourism promoters and service suppliers develop visitor opportunities, marketing plans, and operational strategies to serve this growing market; they will grapple with issues of accessibility and accommodation. These issues will center on understanding differences between the concepts of handicapped accessible and handicapped friendly. It is obvious to disabled and special needs travelers that many organizations have utilized able-bodied individuals to plan their service offerings.

The Internet will be an excellent way for those with special needs to find suppliers who will accommodate them. Sites such as wheelchairsonthego.com (which includes a list of accessible fun places in Florida) will become more common in the future. Hotels, attractions, and other suppliers will feature virtual tours of accessible areas to convince the physically challenged that they too are welcome to enjoy the services of the tourism operator. In addition, and possibly the most important thing that tourism service suppliers will do is to rely on persons with specific movement disorders to help design their services. For example, when hotel operators see that a person who is actually disabled and using a wheelchair rather than someone who is not disabled and simply sitting in a wheelchair to see how it feels when testing rooms will soon realize that it is very difficult if not impossible to transfer from a wheelchair into a bed that is higher than 24 inches or use bathroom facilities with only one grab bar.

Changes in Business, Professional, and Conference Travel

What will happen to the ever-important business and professional travel segment of the tourism market? That is where our crystal ball becomes particularly cloudy: Current trends support the possibility of a decrease or an increase in business and professional travel. Trends in communications, such as computer networking and satellite video image transmission, seem to indicate that business travel will become less necessary. Technological advances allow businesspeople to see each other and share information as if they were in the same room, but will virtual contact replace face-to-face meetings?

For example, technological improvements in **virtual conferencing** could slow the rate of growth in business and professional travel. Improvements now make virtual conferencing (as simple as Skype and Facetime) just as convenient and easy as a telephone conference call. Since it is now possible to link participants at multiple sites with high resolution audio and video quality (creating the sensation that they are present), the need for some travel has been reduced, but this easy familiarity is creating the need for other types of travel.

Think about the potential for an international media company such as Pearson, the publisher of this textbook. Sales representatives from each of its geographic regions within the United States, for example, can meet regularly at a designated virtual conferencing center within their region for product updates, and meet virtually with members of other regions or countries on a quarterly basis for marketing updates and training. Travel may