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Would you trust a librarian?

A recent survey in the USA asked Americans what satisfied them and hence dissatisfied them when they went shopping. The results were:

Store conditions	52%
Selection of product	49%
Quality of product	47%
Service	44%
Price	41%
Trust	35%

This highlighted that only thirty-five per cent of retailers were trusted by consumers. At the same time in this age of uncertainty consumers were saying the key thing they were looking for was trust.

Trust is the 'in vogue' issue with consumers, why?

First there is growth in the importance of safety and a concern for personal and family welfare. Second, with such a low level of trust we are starting to search out businesses we can trust and then doing more business with them.

Trust is a powerful tool. It can put twenty-five per cent on a retailers bottomline with the same number of customers.

Where does this leave libraries

Libraries are perceived as some of the most trusted institutions in the community, this is a wonderful marketing opportunity.

Consumers trust the advice and integrity of librarians and this should be promoted by the library industry.

Libraries have an opportunity to increase their market if they provide a proactive marketing campaign. One leading Australian library recently launched a campaign to get more children into libraries. They contacted a group of children via their school and found only one out of sixty was a library member. After a proactive campaign they picked up another fifty-nine members.

Libraries have an opportunity to promote themselves as a trusted institution. You don't have to say in words, trust can be implied via marketing campaigns. Consider the following research carried out in Australia last year by Eye on Australia:

- 96% of adults like humour in advertising
- 80% notice advertisements on situations they have experienced.

- 85% like advertisements that show that people are not perfect.
- 81% like advertisements that are in touch with everyday life.

Libraries have an opportunity to develop their patronage via interruption marketing (obtaining new patrons) and permission marketing (getting existing patrons to borrow more and pass on the word).

But prior to any marketing campaign it is important to first get the internal dynamics and ambience of the library right.

This means having the right customer flow, merchandise and display strategies and a proactive team who can communicate effectively with patrons.

Perhaps the following advice will help...

Know when to approach a patron

Not all patrons want to be approached. The experienced librarian is able to read the signals that indicate a patron wants to be approached. The signs include:

- looking lost,
- looking confused,
- back tracking to a book,
- approaching the counter,
- making eye contact with you,
- looking impatient,
- walking towards you.

The real skill is reading the customer and deciding which is most appropriate way of approaching, and opening up a conversation. Three approaches might be considered...

Try the greeting approach

This is the friendly approach used to greet people in a positive way. It relies on you using positive body language as you greet the patron. Language used could include: *Hi, how are you today?* The important message is that the greeting must be sincere, otherwise patrons could regard you as being 'pushy'.

Try the merchandise approach

This approach is used when the patron is looking at, or handling the products. The key is to give a short piece of information on the books as you approach the patron. Examples include:

- *Hi, let me tell you that author is excellent.*
- *Hi, I have just read that one, and it is wonderful.*

Australian
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STUDY GRANT AWARD 2002

There are funds available to ALIA members wishing to undertake a study project. Study Grants are offered to provide an opportunity for librarians or library technicians to undertake projects that they would otherwise be unable to do because of the time and costs involved. Study Grants are open to practising librarian or library technician members who have been personal members for at least two years and have a minimum of three years experience.

The number of awards in any year will depend upon the funds available and the estimated costs of proposals received.

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URL <http://www.alia.org.au/awards/>

Applications close
1 September 2002

ALIA

Try the service approach

This is the most common and most misused approach. A service approach should be friendly, non aggressive and offer service. Service approaches used come in a number of different styles.

Closed: This style of communication, when used to start a conversation, actually closes down selling. The common closed approaches are: *Can I help you? Are you all right there?*

Over seventy per cent of customers answer *No* to the first question and *Yes* to the second, since you have given the patron the opportunity to close down the conversation.

Open: This should be the most used approach. Open conversation starts with how, what, when, where, why, who. This encourages the person you are talking to, to 'open' up. An example in retailing is: *Good morning, how can I help you?*

Leading: this style is used to encourage a person to agree with you. This is okay if you do both sincerely agree with each other. It is dangerous when you consciously manipulate the conversation. When leading we end sentences with *isn't it, didn't it, aren't they, wasn't it and hasn't it.* Example: *Great book isn't it?*

If you are not being sincere when using leading statements the customer will soon become very suspicious. The approach can prove futile if you consciously manipulate the conversation.

Become emotionally involved

Top librarians are emotional sales people and, generally, women are better at this skill than men. An emotional person finds something attractive about the person they are talking to and then compliments them on it. For example: *I do like your dress. That colour really suits you. What a lovely selection of*

books you have chosen.

The important thing is to be sincere if you use the emotional approach. Emotional people quickly become friends with the customer and have a far higher average sale per customer.

Be aware of the importance of listening

Your listening skills are probably more important than your verbal skills. A good listener can establish the needs and wants of the customer and then recommend the most suitable book.

Listeners also give the impression that they are genuinely interested and care about the patron.

Remember the basics

Finally Chris Newton (Results Corporation) summarises:

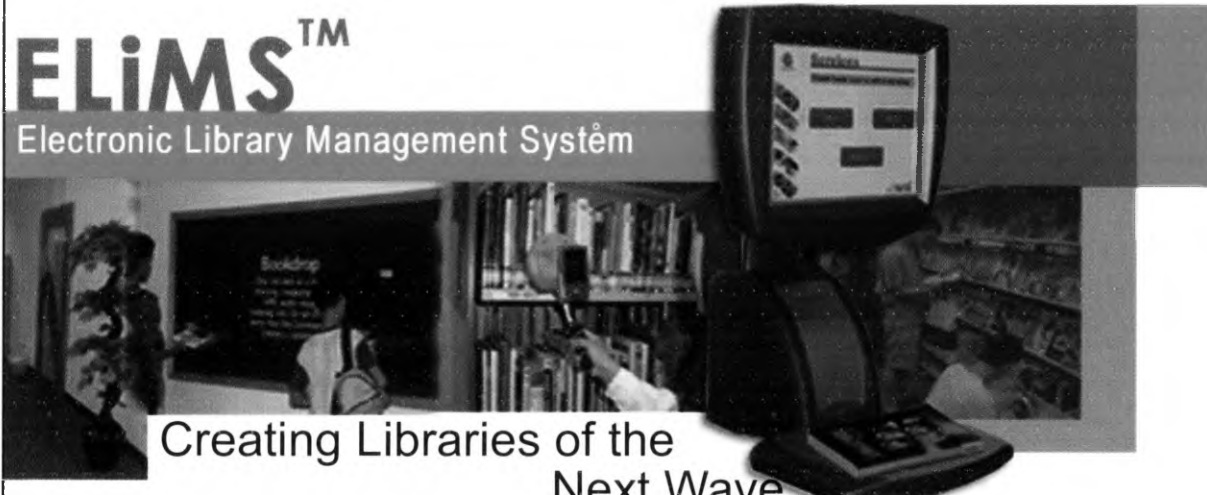
'To be a successful communicator...

- make your customers feel welcome.
- enquire about their needs and wants.
- talk in their language.
- ask questions constantly.
- invite them to browse.
- leave them on a high.'

John Stanley is a conference speaker and retail consultant with more than twenty years experience in fifteen countries. John works with libraries around the world assisting them with their merchandising, staff and management training, customer flow, customer service and image. John Stanley Associates produce an e-newsletter specific to library retail, this includes innovative ideas and advice to help you grow your library. If you would like to receive a regular copy please visit <http://www.jstanley.com.au> or e-mail us on newsletter@johnstanley.cc.

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