

# Library buildings

So what can libraries learn from supermarkets? Quite simply, creating a clever layout requires observing customer traffic flow, identifying hot spots and deciding what stock offers good 'impulse loan potential' in your hot spots.

True, some categories turn over well no matter where they are placed; however, it is unlikely that they will perform to their peak potential unless they are given sufficient exposure. In simple terms, these products have the capacity to 'pay the rent' of your high-value real estate. The idea is quite simple — give your visitors what they want. The alternative might be to promote unpopular collections by locating them in high-value real estate. It is possible that these may incur a modest increase in usage, but most likely not to the extent of popular categories. This is not to say that unpopular categories should not be promoted. Simply remember to look at the bigger picture and don't discount the idea of promoting what is already performing well if your goal is to maximise usage.

Schools might strike a balance between the 'staples' that you know students want and the titles that you would like them to pick up. Again, it's similar to the supermarket using staples to present us with impulse.

Creating a visually stimulating library requires much more than row after row of 'spine out' books. I explore every opportunity to introduce front-facing displays. Spine out allows you to hold the volume of stock necessary to meet customer's needs. Front-facing displays are used to draw attention to parts of the collection and create the visual interest necessary to engage our customers with product.

The principles of merchandising a library are not far removed from the retail principles of merchandising clothing and books or showcasing movies at a video library. Take the time to observe how visitors to a video library shop the shelves: the majority will gravitate to front-facing displays and, unless they are looking for a particular title, they will bypass the overwhelming mass of spine out movies.



Photo courtesy Lifestyle Profiles Photography

Taree City Library

Themed, constantly changing front-facing features are a low-maintenance and inexpensive way to build powerful and contemporary displays. Would the displays in your library enhance your favourite bookstore? If the answer is 'no', perhaps you need to rethink your strategy. Try to avoid putting books behind glass and avoid precariously balanced book displays which look like they can't be touched; invite visitors to enjoy all that the library has to offer.

Seasonal, major, or community events might be a good source of free professional posters and props to back up your front-facing displays. You can also access free promotional materials from retailers, publishers, galleries and museums. You don't need to spend a lot of money or time to make them look great.

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*Kevin's recent books include*  
The Victorian Public Libraries' Image Handbook  
and Re-think (with The School Library Association of Victoria)

## Australia's smallest library?



Quambone is a small village in rural NSW. Although it has a population of only 50, it boasts a library — possibly Australia's smallest library!

Photo: Courtesy of David Kilby, ABC Radio 666 Canberra.

## Web resource for planning library buildings

**Designing Libraries** is a great UK web resource on library building planning and design. The website incorporates an extensive resources section, with a gallery, news and events. It also has an inspirational database of information and images on over 230 library building projects. For more information, visit <<http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/>>.