

It's a game – an image game

John Stanley

Today's libraries are in a changing world. Consumers are looking for places that excite them and sooth them, places where they can browse, relax, socialise and be entertained. The challenge for libraries is exciting.

In today's frantic world, libraries have to play by the same rules as everyone else looking to attract the time-pressed consumer. They have to play the image game.

Businesses are judged in ten seconds, we are not given long to make a positive first impression. It is therefore essential you have an image checklist to judge those critical seconds. The first impressions are judged in a number of locations, they are primarily:

1. The outside of your library.
2. The entrance foyer.
3. The first display of books.
4. The first librarian they meet.

Each one of these must be positive, otherwise you may not be attracting the loyalty from your community that you deserve.

Remember this is not a capital issue. Consumers judge you on the little things that can be corrected tomorrow. Alas, we tend to identify your worst traits before we acknowledge your positive traits, that's human nature.

What do we notice? Unkept landscape gardens, litter, graffiti, clutter of posters on the front door, team members without name badges, unthemed confusing displays or even the lack of power displays. The question is how do you improve your image?

Firstly, the team need to accept that you are in 'visual' competition with the supermarket, fast food outlets and convenience stores. I am not suggesting you have to copy them. I'm saying that your 'brand' is as important as theirs is and your standards have to be as consistent as those you admire in the retail world.

I would then advise that you produce standards that are acceptable to the majority. You will not please everyone, but the key is that the majority rule. Then produce a checklist of the key areas that have to be checked and make someone accountable on a rota basis. The librarian appointed to check needs to see the library through the eyes of a consumer, use the checklist below as an example:

Outside your library:

- The library has clean, distinctive entrance directions.
- The windows are clean.
- There is no litter in front of the library.
- The library windows look inviting.
- The entrance to the library is swept/mopped.

Inside your front door:

- All the lights work.
- The primary book display is in position.
- The books on display are well signed.
- There are adequate books on display.
- The floor has been swept/mopped.
- All safety issues have been addressed.

Toilet facilities:

- There is adequate toilet paper.
- There are soap and hand towels.
- The facility is clean.
- You are promoting the right books in the toilet.

The team:

- They are all in the agreed team attire.
- They are using positive body language.
- They are greeting every customer.
- They are using positive verbal language.

The checkout:

- It is clean.
- It is uncluttered.
- All the equipment is working.

Play the image game, it the first rule of success.

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 them on newsletter@johnstanley.cc.

