

# Let's face it

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**L**et's face it! One of the objectives of a library is to get books, CD's and magazines into patron's hands. Who controls that, the librarian? Sixty per cent of what goes off a typical shelf is impulse. Impulse decisions are based on what we see and what we see is in the control of the person who initially displays the books.

I was recently conducting a library workshop where one delegate was saying that having a facing policy in the library was common sense. But, is it? I agree every library should have a facing policy and I do come across some excellent merchandising in libraries, but also other libraries are missing huge opportunities.

## Back to basics

Firstly, let's look at the basic principles of facing. Facing is where you display the book cover outward instead of the spine. As a rule in retailing, the width of a face, to make it work, should be at least the height of the product.

If the facing is less than this, the eye will often miss the product. The other interesting thing to note is that if the facing is too large, for example height x 12, the consumer may feel there is something wrong with the product and start resisting it.

In my workshops, I have been using retail examples to highlight how important facing is, but I was pleased to recently discover some research on facing in libraries that supports the theory.

The Library Research Service (May 2002) produced some research from Colorado State Library where they had studied the impact facing has on borrowing habits. They studied the effect of facing on the increase in loans on fiction and non-fiction book categories. In the fiction category where they introduced a facing policy, they found a massive ninety per cent increase in the borrowing rate.

Why the difference? I know in my own use of libraries, when it comes to non-fiction borrowing, I look on it as a 'purpose' borrowing decision and I come in with a specific book in mind. When it comes to fiction, I am a typical 'impulse' borrower and will select what you offer that appeals to me.

This research seems to indicate that this seems to be the case with most borrowers and shows that a facing policy on fiction books is more critical than a non-fiction.

In my supermarket days, I worked for a supermarket in the UK where it was policy to face all products. This is not practical in a library with thousands of books, but I would still have a policy of facing books in other key areas, such as:

- Stretch shelf positions (those above the customers chin) to increase lending at that height.
- Gaps on all shelves (you can't take a book from open space, it's an opportunity).
- Endcaps to book shelves.

Facing is a key merchandising strategy used to increase book borrowing and should be part of your internal marketing strategy.

*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.johnstanley.cc> or e-mail us on [newsletter@johnstanley.cc](mailto:newsletter@johnstanley.cc).*

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