

Marketing: ban those notice-boards!

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My business partner, Fiona Emberton, and I work with libraries around the globe developing retail and marketing strategies. We talk about image, the role of the library and how important the 'moment of truth' is when a patron enters the library.

I was working with a library recently and came across one of those nightmare visions: the community notice-board, strategically placed at the entrance.

Before we tackle the notice-board scenario, let us walk the library journey from a consumer's point of view. They park their car in the parking lot, walk to the entrance, take four steps inside an area called the transition zone and then start looking around the library. They want this to be a positive, enjoyable experience. They would like to be able to park their car in a clean, well-landscaped parking lot, be able to see a 'Welcome to the library' sign at the entrance and then walk through a pleasing transition zone and enjoy the ambience of the library prior to meeting a friendly-faced librarian.

Unfortunately they are often confronted by a confusing transition zone area, covered in book posters, and a badly-positioned and managed community notice-board.

Should there be notice-boards in a library?

A number of my clients would argue that a community notice-board has no role in a modern library and have banned them altogether. I believe this is an extreme solution, but it has solved the problem for these libraries.

I do not believe that the transition zone is the right location for a notice-board. As the word says, it is a transition zone, an adjustment area between the outside and the inside of the building and it should be kept clean and simply decorated to promote a positive transition.

If you do have a notice-board, I believe that it should be within the body of the library where consumers can browse in comfort without feeling harassed by other patrons.

One of my clients has split the community board up — garden community notices are placed next to the gardening books; historical society notices next to the history books and so on. This ensures that the notices are targeted to specific people — and it seems to work well for them.

Manage that notice-board

As in any situation, the notice-board needs to be managed. Alas, in my experience, they are often mis-managed.

I do believe that there are some criteria that need to be introduced if you are to have a well-managed community board. I offer the following as a suggestion:

1. Only the librarian is allowed to manage the board — consumers are not allowed to place notices. Notices must be handed to that librarian.
2. The board can only be used for non-profit-making local community-based activities. Commercial businesses should not be able to use the community board as a free marketing tool.
3. Prior to putting a notice on the board, date it. The date should be the date that the notice should be removed from the notice-board.
4. Notices are only allowed on the notice-board. When the board is full, it is full. Do not allow notices to be taped onto the wall around the board. This will spoil your image.
5. Local government notices should be placed on a separate notice-board to private-sector notices.
6. Provide a framework for the maximum size of a notice that can be placed on the notice-board. Provide guidelines on suitable styles

of notices to help you maintain a standard.

2004 — the era of the virtual notice-board

As I mentioned previously, many libraries have removed their notice-boards and replaced them with 'Virtual notice-boards'. Virtual notice-boards rely on a computer and software program, and the notices are then transmitted to patrons via monitors.

The librarian has control over the content of the notice, how long it stays on the screen, when the notice will be released, and when it will be removed. All of this is controlled by putting the relevant data into a data-base.

Notices can be positioned in one location using one monitor, or scattered around the library at key locations, including at the checkout desk.

If you think that this sounds expensive, the reverse is true.

Such technology can be leased by the week, and I have library clients who permit clubs to finance the program with an agreement that their notices are included on screen on a regular basis.

The best program that I am aware of is Multivision Australia, [events@multivision.com.au, <http://www.multivision.com.au>].

This company is based in South Australia, but has agencies worldwide. They have worked with a number of our clients, all of whom have been happy with the end-result.

Hence, my thoughts about banning notice-boards. In a high-tech society, we can provide high touch using new technology. Not only is this effective, but it also provides a more professional image for your library.

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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, including 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 newsletter@johnstanley.cc.

RAILS Research Seminar September 20th, Brisbane

- A seminar on Research Applications in Library and Information Studies will be held at the Gardens Point campus of QUT on the day prior to the ALIA Biennial Conference on the Gold Coast.
- Academic speakers will present a number of papers describing research projects and methods, and there will be commentary on these by library practitioners.
- Details and registration information are at <http://www.citi.qut.edu.au/news/rails.jsp>

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