

The consumer's journey, step two: journey of inspiration

John Stanley, marketing consultant

In the first article in this series (*inCite*, May 2005) we looked at the 'Journey of discovery'. Consumers need to discover that you exist. If you are innovative in your marketing and external promotions, they may just get in their car and journey to your library. Your next challenge is that you have thirty seconds to inspire them. Yes, that's right, thirty seconds!

Researchers tell us that the majority of potential customers will judge your library based on three 30-second zones. Seventy per cent of that decision will be based on what they see. Therefore, you need to create a visually-inspiring view of your library.

Within such a limited time frame, you need to create a focal point that is simple and different. Easy to put into words, but difficult to put into practice, so let's look at the three zones and at some easy methods of being visually inspirational.

1. Start in the car park — the first ten seconds

The image zone starts outside your library. Your advertisements, external landscaping, paintwork and window displays are all going to play an integral part in creating a mental picture of what the customer is going to expect from the whole experience that he or she will have within your library.

For example, I recently worked with a public library. All of the team members arrived at work via the 'back' door. As a consultant, I entered via the front door. My visit was ten days after a national holiday on which all businesses were closed. As I entered, there was a large sign across the front door informing everyone that the library would be closed next Thursday for the holiday. When I pointed out that the holiday was the previous week, it became clear that nobody in the library was walking into the building as a customer. They were all entering by the wrong door! Image can change by the moment. Litter on the floor or dirty fingerprints on windows can change your image in just seconds. It is essential that all of your team members are aware of how important the 'image zone' is and that they are empowered to take appropriate action to correct any flaw in the image immediately.

All progressive businesses must do a walk 'in the customer's shoes' every day to check their external image. In *Think for your customer* (Lizard Publishing, 2004, ISBN 0-9750118-1-2), there is a daily checklist to keep your library looking sharp.

2. What does your entrance say? — the second ten seconds

The 'transition zone' in an establishment is usually the first three steps that a potential visitor takes once he or she has crossed the threshold. They do not concentrate on products or signs in this zone — they take in the whole environment. Keep this zone uncluttered, clean and inviting.

3. Displays that dare to be different — the final ten seconds

Finally, customers focus on what I call the power position, which is the excitement/product zone. This is a focal point directly in front of them as they pass through the transition zone. This point should clearly state what is topical — it should stimulate the visitor's interest. Keep it simple; create circular, conical displays that promote key issues about your library. Dare to be different in how you get this message across!

If the team brainstorms ahead of a topical and seasonal event,



An example of a retail outlet 'daring to be different'

they have an opportunity to think through adventurous props that will catch the consumer's eye. Remember, you have to play 'unsafe' and 'dare to be different', in order to inspire. In today's business world, 'safe' displays will not be registered by the consumer's eye.

So where do you find inspiration?

To be visually inspirational, you need to be one step ahead of other businesses within your catchment area.

Consider the following:

1. Check out retailers' displays in your area, but outside the library sector, and adapt them to your sector.
2. Read 'lifestyle' magazines that consumers are reading to interpret consumer trends and adapt them to your library.
3. Subscribe to merchandising and display magazines from around the world, to obtain inspirational ideas.
4. Encourage the team to be observant wherever they go. The world is full of inspirational ideas — all you need to do is adapt them to your library.

These three zones are the most memorable part of the customer's journey! A customer may spend twenty minutes, or more, in your library, but take home a picture based on a maximum of (the initial) thirty seconds spent in your establishment.

Continue the journey in your customer's shoes in our next article and learn how to provide a rewarding experience that will have your customers promoting your organisation for you — for free!

John Stanley is a marketing consultant with over twenty years' experience working with libraries to assist them with their merchandising, training, image and customer service.

Contact John Stanley Associates at <http://www.johnstanley.cc>.

Reminder to all ALIA PD scheme members

- The new professional development (PD) year and recording period starts on 1 July 2005 and concludes on 30 June 2006.
- You are eligible to use the additional Certified Practitioner post-nominal 'CP' by accumulating a minimum of 30 points in the first year of participation in the scheme and by continuing to meet PD compliance requirements.
- PD compliance requires the accumulation of a minimum of 30 points each year and 120 points over a triennium (three years).
- You may apply for a Certified Practitioner Certificate when you accumulate 120 points over a PD triennium and may in time be able to apply for the distinction of Associate Fellow.

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