

Can a hairdresser grow your library patronage?

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One of the aims of a library is to attract new patrons whilst building a relationship with existing patrons.

This means you need to look at an array of marketing tools to grow the library service. As library budgets are being squeezed, cost-effective marketing is becoming more important.

Think of the library as a ladder — with your objective being to get as many people as possible onto the top rung, as library advocates.

Below your ladder are the 'suspects'. On average, two per cent of the population are classified as suspects. Whatever you do, they will never walk into the library. There is no point even approaching them. You will waste time, money and energy.

The first rung of your ladder is the 'prospect' level. This is the level on which you have a group of people who do not even know that you exist. If they did, they might come into your library. I know librarians often say that everyone knows that there is a library in town, but you need to test this theory. For example, during a recent roadshow where the state librarian and I held a series of workshops, we arrived in a town with a population of 12 000. In the evening, during a meal at the local pub, my state librarian colleague asked me how many people in the bar used the library. We went and asked. The drinkers assured us that this town did not have a library. A room full of prospects with a library only one block away.

'Shoppers' use your library, but also purchase books at bookshops. This is why some libraries have started partnering with bookshops and introducing a bookshop franchise into the library. I have other clients who partner with bookshops when a famous author comes to town.

'Clients' are loyal to your library, but do not promote your library to anyone else. 'Advocates' (on the top rung) praise you and encourage their friends to use the library service.

Interruption marketing

When marketing to prospects and shoppers, you need to interrupt their chain of thought to get your message across. This is where bus shelter billboards, television commercials, radio and newspaper advertising come into their own. This is expensive, as you have to keep 'dripping' your message to try and get your message across. You will compete with thousands of other businesses that are also targeting the same customers. If you do not believe me, add up the newspaper, radio and television advertisements you experience in a typical day and then add all the promotional posters that you see to and from work, and then add the promotions that you see in your shopping centre and supermarket.

Permission marketing

This is far more effective, as you are selling yourself to the top end of your ladder — the people who already believe in you and what you do.

The most effective permission marketing is word-of-mouth — getting existing patrons to do your marketing for you. Loyalty clubs have been designed with this in mind.

Where do hairdressers fit into your marketing campaign?

Every industry has 'tipsters'. Tipsters are members of the public who have nothing to do with what you do, but influence prospects and shoppers on your loyalty ladder.

Let me give you an example from outside the industry. I travel extensively in business, and I often end up at new towns at the end of the day. I often rely on the taxi driver to recommend what restaurants and hotels that I should use. In the food and accommodation industries, taxi drivers are key tipsters.

The library industry equivalent to a taxi driver is, among other, the hairdresser. Hairdressers have time with your customers and they might equally promote the library instead of shops or restaurants.

This might sound 'off the wall', but try it. Ask your local hairdressers if you could supply reading material in their salon and promotional literature for the library. I believe the goodwill and marketing opportunity would outweigh any theft or damage to books.

Why not invite hairdressers to a library evening where you show them around the library and offer them a cup of coffee while you talk of the benefits of the library?

Other tipsters might include bookshops. I have clients who network with bookshops. If library members show their library card at a local bookshop, they get ten per cent off the purchase of a new book. Bookshop patrons who do not have library membership are encouraged to join the library to get the bookshop discount.

Look at your own community and identify who are the key tipsters, and who could make a marketing difference. It is a lot more fun than putting an advertisement in a newspaper.

John Stanley is a conference speaker and retail consultant with over 20 years experience in 15 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.