

# Hunters and gatherers

## Are you serving both their needs?

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The University of Exeter in the United Kingdom recently published research financed by Barclays Bank, which has implications for everyone who is serving the general population.

This research shows that consumers shop establishments based on one of two personal profiles.

Approximately fifty per cent of the population is defined as hunters when they go out into the public arena. They know what they want, they are focused on the task in front of them and they do not want anyone or anything to stand in their way. If you make their library experience too complicated, they will abort the mission and go somewhere else that addresses their needs more easily. As you would expect, a larger proportion of men than women fall into this category of consumers.

The other half of the population is defined as gatherers: they enjoy the library experience and like to browse around and discover new books. They enjoy a conversation with your team members and look on the library experience as one of the joys of life. Approximately sixty per cent of female consumers fit into this category.

The skill of retailing is to set up an establishment that services the needs of both types of consumers. Often you discover establishments that service one group exceptionally well, but fail for the other half of the population.

### **Serving hunters successfully**

Hunters require your library to be laid out so they can navigate it easily. They expect the key categories to be signed, and those signs to be easily seen as they navigate your library.

They will rarely be enticed by promotional activities, and may not notice them within your library. When it comes to service, they will often ask direct questions and expect direct answers; the last thing they are looking for is relationship conversation with one of your team.

### **Serving gatherers successfully**

Gatherers love discovering new books within your library. They enjoy browsing and often do not read signs as they are enjoying discovering books as they explore your library.

They will enjoy and get involved in your promotional activities.

When it comes to service, they want the full experience. They expect your team members to have a conversation, to know

about the books on offer and have high level social skills.

If they are ignored by your team members, or believe the team member is only providing basic information, they will often leave your library disappointed.

### **We are all different**

Hunters and gatherers browsing together can be a nightmare for both parties. How often have you seen a hunter get bored and try to abort the experience while the gatherer is enjoying themselves?

Is there anything you can do as a librarian? This is one area where a coffee or refreshment offer can be a huge advantage. Picture this: the hunter has completed their journey to their satisfaction and is relaxing with a cup of coffee, while the gatherer carries on enjoying themselves discovering new books.

'Think and drink' coffee tokens in some establishments have proved to be highly effective in this situation.

A well 'tuned' librarian can identify a hunter and gatherer shopping together. They will offer the hunter a complimentary cup of coffee to allow the hunter to relax, while the gatherer keeps on gathering.

As consumers we also change our habits. From a personal point of view, I will become a gatherer when browsing books on business management or gardening, or buying fruit and vegetables, but become a hunter when buying Christmas presents. A lot of our shopping habits revolve around our initial interests.

### **Have a hunter and gatherer strategy**

Successful businesses know that there are two distinctive consumer profiles; they lay-out their library to meet the needs of both groups. More importantly, they train their team to identify the two different characteristics in consumers and to provide the appropriate service.

Two important factors can determine your success.

Firstly, your signage strategy. Hunters need a clear, concise signage strategy that allows them to navigate your library without getting stressed or asking one of your team members. The airports of the world do this very successfully; their signs can get you from parking lot to your seat on the plane, often with no human contact.

Secondly, your team's approach to patrons can make a huge difference to your success.

Hunters will ask specific questions,

such as 'Where is the...?' They want a specific answer. If you can answer this quickly and successfully they are impressed with your customer service.

Gatherers on the other hand will often take a conversational approach such as 'You have a lovely library, I was looking for ...'. To provide a direct response in this situation would be considered rude and you may lose the customer.

In this situation the customer expects a conversation. They still expect you to have a high degree of product knowledge, but they also expect you to know stories about the books on display and other interesting facts. They also want your team member to be a caring person and show interest in them as a person.

Remember, your team will also be made up of a mixture of gatherers and hunters.

Gatherers will need to be trained in the skills required to identify hunters and to communicate effectively with this group. Hunters will need to be trained in gatherer identification and how to effectively communicate to this group.

This is not an easy task; gatherers often feel uncomfortable communicating with hunters as they feel they are being abrupt, whilst hunters may argue they feel they are wasting both their time and the patron's time.

### **What next?**

Take a look at your library; has it been designed to service the needs of both groups?

Does your signage provide for the needs of both groups?

Do your team members know how to communicate with both market sectors?

Many libraries are designed with gatherers in mind and hunters are often neglected. Hunters are users as well and if they enjoy their experience they can contribute to the growth of your organisation.

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