



What do the public want from libraries?

a practitioner guide

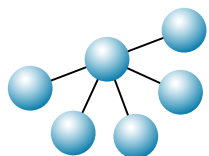




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Foreword

Libraries are the places we go to discover ourselves and the world at the same time. They allow us to find out more deeply who we are, through the range of services they offer, while at the same time encouraging us to make new connections, and to develop new skills and understandings.

It is not an exaggeration to say they exist at the heart of our lives: they make us individuals, and they make us part of our community.

This guide is born out of the results of a new landmark piece of research that explores in depth what people today really want from library services.

Our research discovered afresh that public libraries really do hold a special place in the nation's hearts. Even people who rarely use libraries themselves see them as essential for others and for society as a whole.

The research also shows the 'Public Library' brand is trusted and relevant, and valued by the public as a safe space, open to all, for education, learning and cultural enrichment.

However, we face greater challenges than ever before. Transformation in media and information is rapid, as are changes in the nature of public services and our expectations

as consumers. The full impact of spending cuts is only beginning to be understood.

The Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) is working to help library services across the country meet these challenges.

We believe that changes to services must be designed around the shifting needs of the consumers and that structural readjustment is a better response to funding cuts than heavy pruning, which is why our research into what the public think of libraries is a good starting point. How are libraries perceived? What would

attract new or former borrowers? What do the public really want from their library service?

But for most local authority managers we know the big question will be not what this research says but how it can be turned into action. So this guide attempts to do just that...

Andrew Motion

Sir Andrew Motion

MLA Chair

November 2010



Introduction

Public libraries create their own demand; people visit because they choose to. For libraries to create demand it is essential they understand what the public expects, how to keep regular users coming back, and how to attract new ones.

This guide accompanies the main report of the MLA study *What do the public want from libraries?* The research presents a number of new insights into what motivates people to use libraries, based on information collected at focus groups held across the country and a survey of 1,102 adults. The big messages are that:

- Libraries are loved and trusted and the 'Public Library' brand is strong. But - awareness of their offer is low
- The public thinks that libraries are principally about books and reading
- Libraries should concentrate on motivating people to visit instead of trying to reduce barriers
- Users are not an homogenous group - they want different things
- Coffee shops on site would appeal to both users and non-users
- Basics matter: customer service and book stock are the most important.

Libraries are great social levellers, more than any other cultural attractions. This is due not least to the neutral, highly valued public spaces they provide. They are also hugely important for children. So far,

so interesting. But those working in and managing libraries face major challenges - not least to modernise and reduce costs drastically and urgently. There are also expectations to 're-imagine' the library, by adopting new technology and through partnerships with other agencies or library services.

So for many library managers and frontline staff, the first question on reading the research will be 'how?' How can we turn the findings from this research into practical action to address the challenges we face? How can we make the most of successful practice developed in response to national and local policy agendas?

This guide attempts to do just that. It takes the key findings from the full research report, and suggests a number of ways they can be translated into practical action at the strategic, middle management, and frontline levels. The guide is organised in three sections:

- What the public wants from public libraries
- More communication is needed
- Valued public spaces: neutral, trusted, and egalitarian.

Who is this for?

This guide was written for library practitioners, to help them use our research findings about what the public want, in order to increase participation and usage. Ideally it should be read alongside the research findings themselves which are available from the MLA research website <http://research.mla.gov.uk>.

Some of the issues it raises are relevant to chief librarians, heads of service, and Executive Members; such as the need for leadership around marketing, building strategic relationships with other organisations, and investing in new communication and library system technologies.

Some are relevant to senior managers within the library service; such as increasing user and volunteer involvement in running the service, reviewing customer experience, and increasing direct communication with borrowers.

And some are designed to be acted on by frontline librarians and library assistants; such as planning

events programmes, improving the presentation of the lending stock, and managing public spaces in the library.

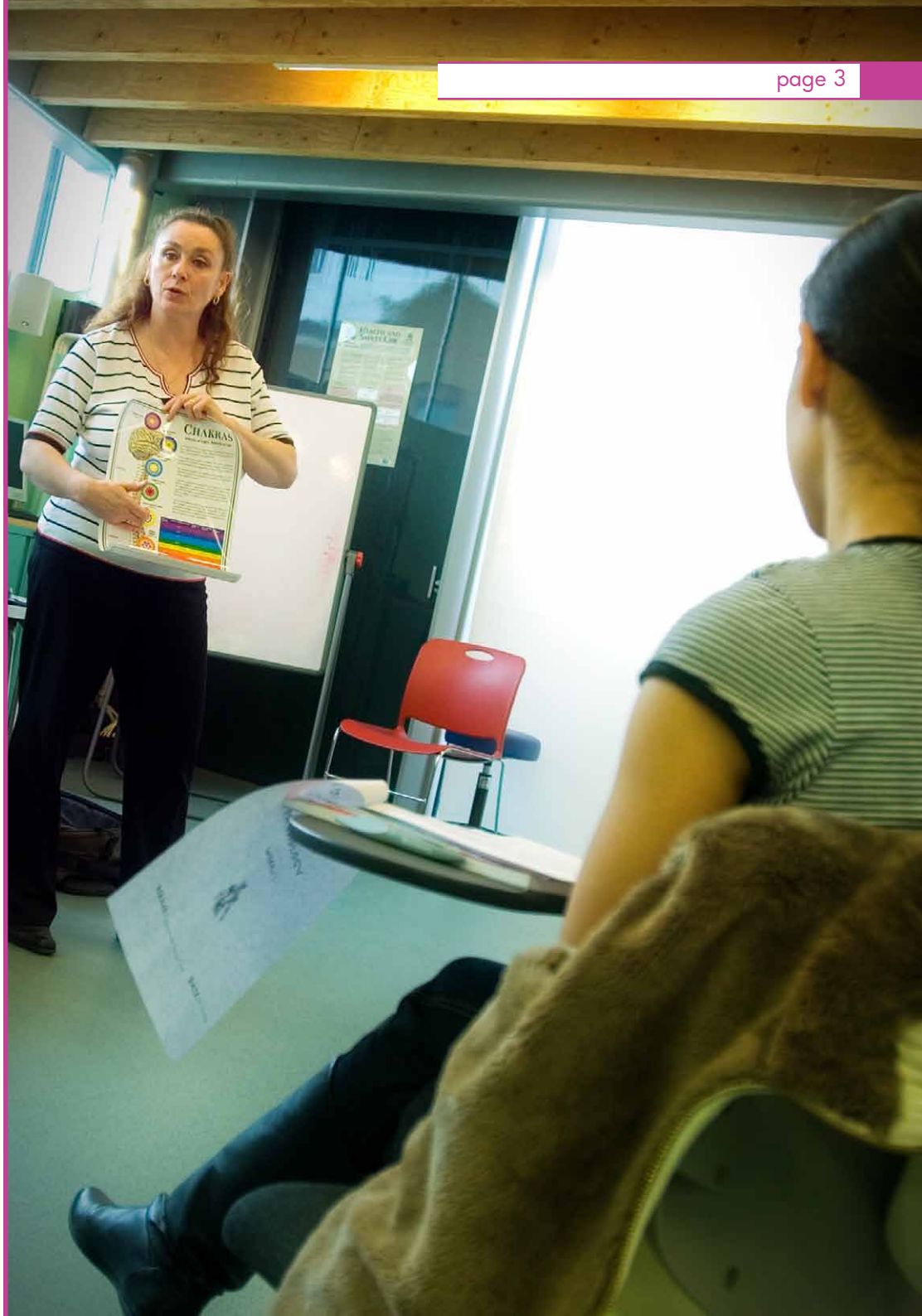
Whatever their paygrade we hope readers will find our key research findings succinctly explained alongside implications for the delivery and development of library services. We hope the case studies and resources we have referenced (many taken from the MLA's existing body of research) will provide additional guidance on how to apply the learning.

One, perhaps obvious, health warning...

The research tells us very clearly that we need to be listening to our users more and studying what motivates them to use libraries (and what fails to motivate them). This guide is written to be relevant to all public libraries. However, the actions taken locally will be only as good as the local knowledge, intelligence, insight and evidence about their own community, which each library professional also brings to the mix.

● Case Studies

Case studies are included throughout the document, a circle denotes a case study from the MLA website <http://research.mla.gov.uk>.



Section 1: What the public want from libraries



Choice of books and stock is key

What the research says:

Books are still the main reason why most people use libraries – and they are overwhelmingly seen as the core offer by users and non-users alike. Our survey found that 76% of users borrow or used books for pleasure, and 44% for study.

Alongside good customer care from staff, a good choice of books is the biggest driver of satisfaction with libraries, particularly amongst younger users. Further, current users tend to be more satisfied with the service

they get from library staff than with the range and quality of books on offer, suggesting that there is room for libraries to improve.

Although few people directly cite 'poor choice or quality of books' as their main reason for not using libraries, in qualitative research this frequently comes up as a concern for current users. It is also an important reason why some people stop using libraries or choose alternatives, such as buying instead of borrowing.

Limited stock seems to be more of a concern to current library users than to non-users. However, a significant minority of self-defined 'lapsed' users feel that improving the range or quality of books would encourage them to use libraries more often.

Notably, not everyone wants the same when they talk about a 'better book offer'. Some users want more bestsellers while others would prefer more 'quality reads'.

What this means:

It's the books that people come for

Keep management attention and focus on the choice, range and presentation of the book stock. Although customer service was also seen as important, it has to be backed up by a good choice of books and other loan stock.

Pay close attention to stock performance

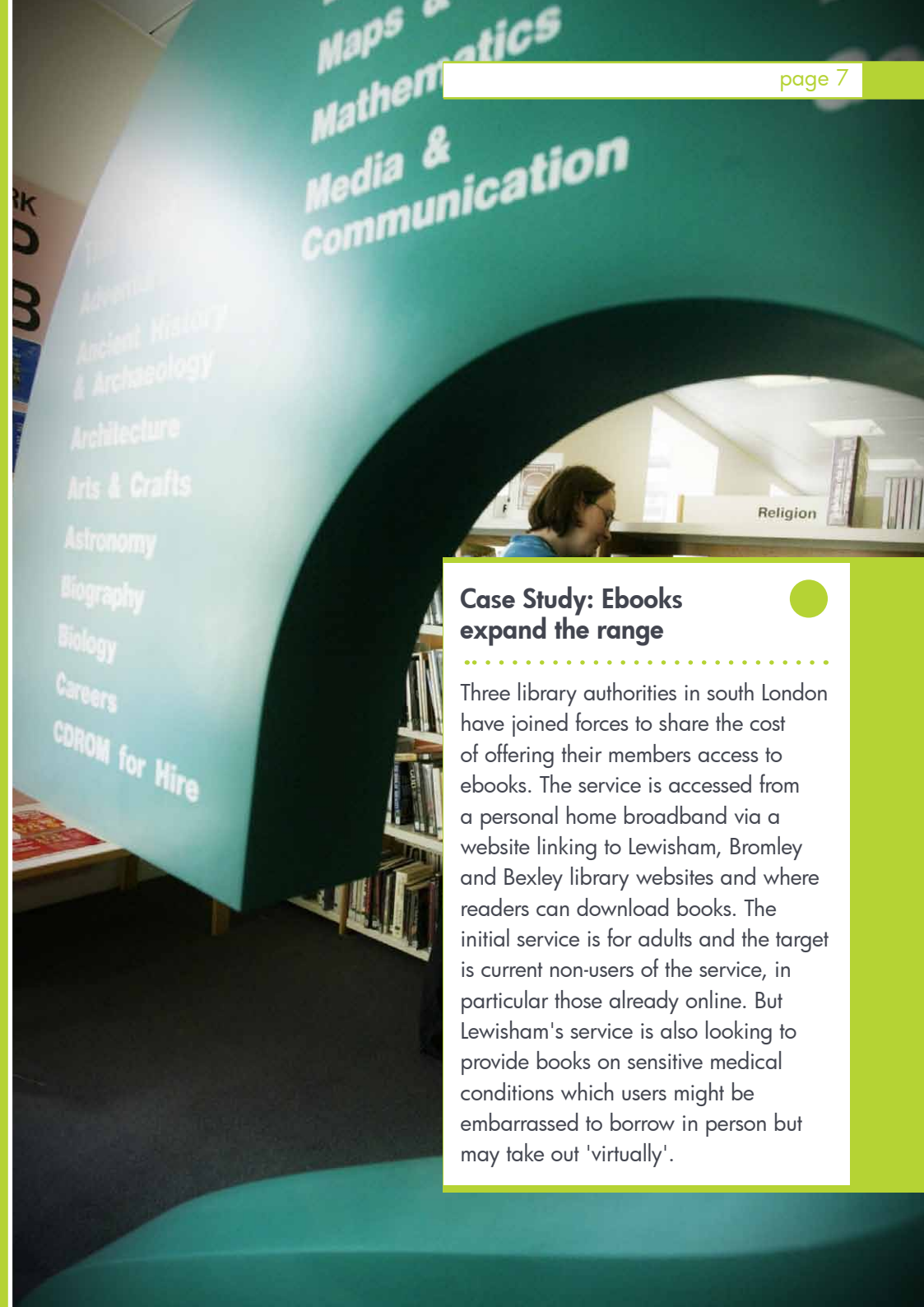
The research underlines it's not the number of books and other materials, but the relevance of the stock to local borrowers which drives success. This suggests that stock performance data – how often books and items are borrowed – is key to understanding relevance. Library authorities need to ask themselves if they are watching stock performance closely enough and acting on it.

Stock selection is arguably a library's most important set of choices

One of the biggest challenges for every high street operator is selecting stock which keeps people coming back week after week. Major high street names have run into serious trouble because they could not get this right. Libraries are no different and whether a library selects its stock itself, or pays someone else to do it, it should be treated as the task which can make or break the success of the library.

Case study: putting books upfront in Thornton Heath

The refurbished Thornton Heath library in Croydon serves a population with high levels of social need. The library includes a full ICT suite, and hosts training courses, jobseeker advice schemes, language and cookery classes. It also has a community garden, and meeting room hire. But the outward and internal design of the library plays heavily on its core offer of reading and book-lending. Although the floor space has been fairly evenly divided between book shelves and the meeting and ICT rooms, it is the book area - complete with plenty of seats for readers, which takes the prominent central area. From the high street passers-by see the metre high letters of the word 'Library' which stands out on top of the roofline.



Case Study: Ebooks expand the range

Three library authorities in south London have joined forces to share the cost of offering their members access to ebooks. The service is accessed from a personal home broadband via a website linking to Lewisham, Bromley and Bexley library websites and where readers can download books. The initial service is for adults and the target is current non-users of the service, in particular those already online. But Lewisham's service is also looking to provide books on sensitive medical conditions which users might be embarrassed to borrow in person but may take out 'virtually'.



Expanding the offer – target genuine customer needs, don't squeeze out books... just add coffee

What the research says:

Non-users are more likely than current users to support innovations in the way services are delivered. For example, two focus groups with non-user participants discussed moving libraries to 'non-traditional' locations, and expressed some support for this concept.

Some participants also suggested that libraries should share buildings, with other services such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, GPs, etc. Another

group thought that locating libraries in other buildings, for example pubs and shops, could be sensible. However they said this should be 'targeting a need, rather than creating a need that doesn't exist.'

A strong theme across our focus groups was that customer friendly service innovations would be welcome, as long as they make sense with the library 'brand' and are not 'squeezing out books'.

"They need to find out what people actually want [like what we're doing now] – that's what a business would do." Lapsed user, industrial town

Having a 'coffee shop on site' is the most commonly cited change that people say would encourage them to use the library more often. This seems to make sense to the public and fits their perceptions of what libraries are for. It is top of the list for users and non-users alike (although men, older people

and very frequent users are less likely to agree).

The next two most common factors likely to encourage current users to use libraries more often are simply extending opening hours and providing more activities for families and children. Further, a significant proportion of lapsed library users would be enticed back by better online and digital services.

What this means:

Expanded offers should make sense

Expanded offers with other information-centred services – such as tourist information, citizens advice, archives or university libraries – makes sense to users. It also means economies of scale, and could increase overall visits. Innovations which challenge perceptions of the the library brand (libraries in shops or pubs, or books on prescription, live music) need user testing to ensure they strengthen rather than muddle the brand. Above all, they should not appear to squeeze out books.

Courses and employment support work if well-planned

Although our interviewees did not mention jobseeker advice as a way to expand the offer, becoming unemployed is a common trigger for people to rediscover their local library.

Case studies show that expanding into jobseeker services does work. Libraries already hold resources jobseekers need: (free) access to the internet, local newspapers, and courses and training. They are also perceived as neutral and welcoming – perhaps more so than Jobcentre Plus offices or training suites.

Coffee – just do it

It's not a new idea (Sutton first had a coffee shop in its library in 1975) but the message is simple: coffee and books go together in the public's mind. Coffee bars should be seriously considered by all libraries who don't have one already. As well as driving up visitor numbers they can generate income and are an opportunity to build links with a local business.

...and just as coffee goes with books, **WiFi**, increasingly, goes with coffee.

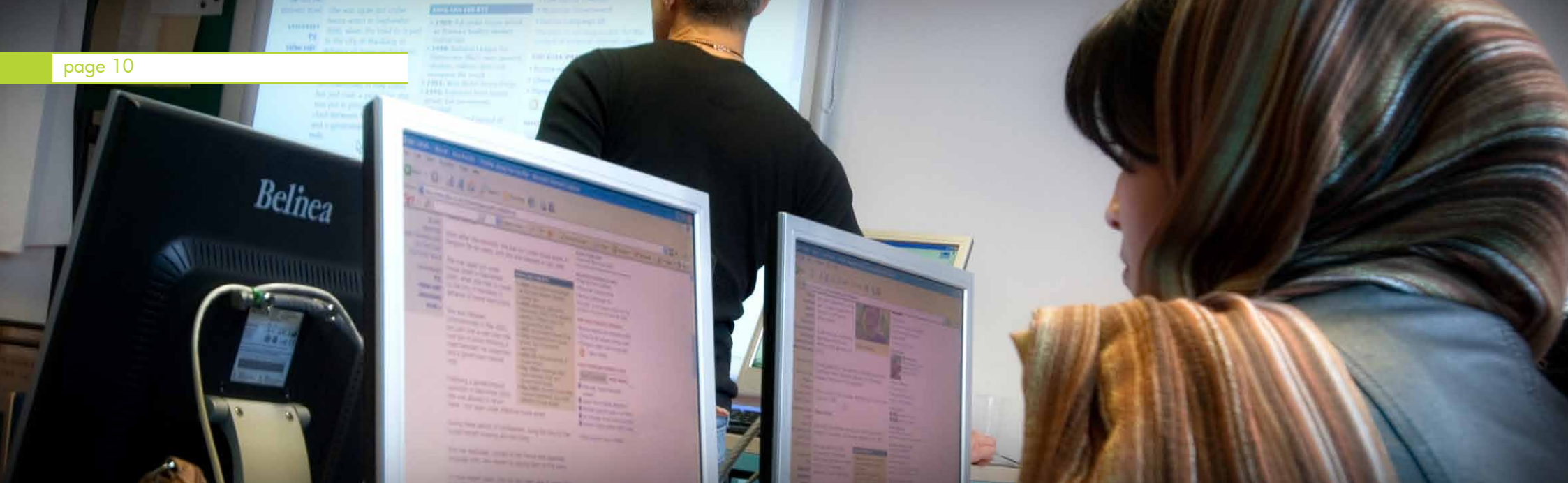
Case study: Shepherd's Bush library's Workzone

The £2m state-of-the-art Shepherd's Bush Library was paid for entirely by Westfield, the developer of the giant shopping centre in Shepherd's Bush in which the library is located. Located in an area with pockets of high unemployment, the library includes a Workzone area which provides a dedicated recruitment and retention service both for Westfield retailers and other employers to fill their jobs locally. It offers specific training and job interview techniques; financial help with initial childcare costs for unemployed residents who secure Westfield jobs; and a planned young persons' Westfield work experience service. The service is run by Ealing Hammersmith & West London College, JobCentre Plus and Hammersmith & Fulham Council.



Case study: Combining college and public libraries in Manchester

A combined public and student library service is being offered at two locations in Manchester with benefits being reaped by users and library operators alike. Manchester Library and Information Service runs both the services on behalf of Manchester College and both partners are enjoying excellent value for money in terms of stock, staff and the quality of built facilities. Meanwhile, students and residents can access a broader range of services, with the latter group benefiting from being exposed to the learning environment and easily signposted to courses for adults and school leavers. The success of the partnership so far has resulted in further discussions over the possibility of extending the arrangement to other sites across the city.



As long as the core service is free, the public would pay for extras or 'premium' subscription services

What the research says:

The vast majority of participants in our focus groups felt strongly that core public library services should be free at the point of delivery, even if they did not use libraries themselves.

Nevertheless, some users in our focus groups said that they would be willing to pay for some aspects of the library service. This was closely linked to the fact they understood the choices public services are having to make in order to cut spending. For example, many seemed happy that libraries

already charge for things like hobby groups and holiday craft sessions for children. Some people also said they would consider paying for a 'premium' services such as the ability to borrow more books at a time, or online ordering and postal delivery-and-return services. Others suggested membership or friends schemes where for a subscription fee they could attend talks, author events, and enjoy other benefits in return for supporting the library.

However, many people also want a clear caveat that where libraries do charge for parts of their service, any proceeds should be reinvested in the library.

"You would have to know any profits are going back into the library and not being swallowed up by the council." Library user

Case Study: Get it Loud in Libraries

Get It Loud In Libraries stages monthly gigs in public libraries, pulling in people who haven't been inside the library walls for years, if at all. The essence of Get It Loud is simply to give young people a fabulous time in a library and put them in the right frame of mind to use libraries again whether it's for novels, music, internet, quiet time, whatever.

What this means:

'Extras' can drive up membership while covering their costs

'Extra' offers can be used to attract new users, without incurring additional net expenditure. Tailored support and materials for book clubs, 'meet the author' events, half term craft sessions, hobby courses in genealogy – all can attract new users but cover their costs through their fees.

Premium subscription or friends packages can bring in funds and build loyalty

'Extras', if combined into subscription or friends' packages will generate income to reinvest in the service. This can also help build a sense of identity, and connection to the service among a group of committed users.

Income must be reinvested and the core offer has to remain free

Although the public will consider paying for 'extras' – there are two clear caveats. Firstly, the proceeds must be reinvested in libraries. Secondly, paid-for services must be distinct from the core offer of free lending and information services which the public expects to be free.

...and be seen to be reinvested

Experience from other public services who use customer-charging to cross subsidise core services (such as hospital car park charging) is that the public need to be told and re-assured that proceeds are being re-invested.

Case study: Extra services alongside a core offer in Kingston

Charging users a nominal fee for non-core activities in libraries is becoming increasingly common. Kingston's libraries, like many others, now offer a range of paid-for courses and events including classes in IT, quiz nights (with fish and chips), craft workshops and children's activities. Alongside this, users can pay to join the library's friends group and attend a regular programme of local history talks. These are in addition to the core offer and an impressive array of free activities including baby and toddler groups, readers' groups, classes in interview technique and CV writing skills for jobseekers, and homework clubs.





The public value good customer experiences in libraries, but are intolerant of poor service

What the research says:

Most library users say that they are highly satisfied with the service overall, but when questioned about specific aspects of the customer experience, a more mixed picture emerges. The research shows that when libraries get the following things right, they are key 'drivers of satisfaction':

- a good range of books
- helpful, knowledgeable and friendly staff
- library being close by or convenient to reach

A good experience matters: people are more sensitive to quality of experience in libraries than for many other cultural activities. Older users particularly value helpfulness of staff while for younger library visitors range of books is more important.

In terms of the trend towards greater automation of the service, views are mixed. In most cases people accept the need to move in this direction but feel that this should not be at the expense of maintaining a knowledgeable and helpful staff base.

Case study: Westminster libraries at the forefront of improved customer focus

Satisfied staff have led to more satisfied customers in Westminster libraries thanks to the Worksmart efficiency programme which has been applied across council services. Crucially, it is a process informed by staff themselves, which by improving working practices and making better use of IT, aims to help them feel more rewarded in their work. Changes included revisions to library and stock layouts and all library stock being RFID-enabled. However the focus was on staff development rather than technology, with most staff attending innovation workshops. The changes resulted in a ten percent increase in issues, improved access to stock and high levels of self-service. High levels of customer satisfaction were surpassed by an 'overwhelmingly positive' reaction from staff, who felt that more time with customers had made their jobs more interesting.

What this means:

Mystery shop yourself

Some library authorities already use mystery shopping to find weak points in customer experience, including physical layout, service design, and interaction with staff.

Review satisfaction levels regularly

Reviewing satisfaction regularly enables service managers to ask questions vital to user retention. For example, can users find the new releases they are hoping for? Are staff helpful and knowledgeable? Do the activities on the notice board sound interesting?

Use customer insight to make changes

Library services build their customer insight in many ways - through library user perception surveys, by

looking at patterns of use and stock performance, by speaking directly to users and user forums, and through customer research. It also helps to communicate back to the public the changes which have been made so they know the service has improved – for example; the ‘you said, we did’ approach.

Be a priority for corporate customer focus programmes

Many local authorities are investing in customer focus and customer care as part of corporate modernisation. Often this means staff development programmes being re-directed towards customer care skills. Libraries should make sure they are recognised as a key public face of the local authority, are seen as corporate priorities for customer skills development.

Case study: Mystery shopping in the West Country

The Peninsula authorities carried out a mystery shopping exercise on their enquiry and reference services. Mystery shoppers asked the same three questions (the correct answer to which they did not know) in phone calls to individual libraries, and to the central enquiry service line. The findings were recorded in detailed logs of each interaction. These enabled managers to learn more about customer experience in terms of consistency, quality and accuracy of information obtained, and the professionalism and courtesy displayed by staff.





Further resources for Section 1

Choice of books and stock

Information & Libraries Scotland
www.slainte.org.uk

- [Guidelines and research into stock selection, management and promotion](#)

Opening the Book Ltd
www.openingthebook.com

- [Resources to help libraries develop their collections](#)

Expanding the offer

The Reading Agency
www.readingagency.org.uk

- [Reading and Health](#)

Museums Archives and Libraries Council
www.mla.gov.uk

- [Making partnership work better in the Culture & Sport Sector](#)

Good customer experiences

Opening the Book Ltd
www.openingthebook.com

- [Branching Out](#)

CIPFA Social Research
www.cipfasocialresearch.net

- [Public Library User Surveys](#)

National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts
www.nesta.org.uk

- [Co-production Right Here Right Now](#)
- [Public Services Inside Out](#)
- [The challenge of co-production](#)

Museums Archives and Libraries Council
www.mla.gov.uk

- [MLA Visitor experience questionnaire](#)



Section 2: More communication is needed





'Public Library' is a trusted and well-loved brand - but poor marketing means awareness of the offer is low

What the research says:

"I haven't gone to my local one for a long time...[they should] advertise what they're doing - if I went past it I'd probably go in to check it out."

Lapsed user, urban area

Libraries have elements of a strong brand:

- The central proposition of 'public library' (ie free book-lending for all) is widely understood
- Libraries are trusted for the reliability and authority of information they provide

- Libraries are highly valued as a community service, even by people who don't regularly use them.

However:

- Beyond book-lending, public awareness of other library products and services varies widely, and in some cases is muddled. For example, many current users do not know books can be reserved or renewed online
- There is a lack of consistency in the way library services are delivered

which means potential users do not know what to expect in a library

- Users believe they are well informed about what libraries do) (although they are not always), but 'lapsed' users and non-users are much less likely to feel this way
- There is strong support for libraries to do more promotion and advertising about what they do.

There is evidence that libraries can change people's perceptions of them. Despite large numbers of people saying

that as children they found libraries austere, many now believe libraries are primarily for children and young people. This is likely to be at least partly due to successful marketing of activities such as Baby, Bounce and Rhyme sessions and national schemes like Bookstart and the Summer Reading Challenge.

What this means:

Build awareness of the full range of services

Although virtually everyone knows that libraries lend books, there is significant scope for raising awareness about the full range of services now offered by modern libraries. If it is well targeted, this might help attract more users.

Keep the brand in people's minds

We know there are times in our lives when we are more likely to seek out a library but at other times people need prompting. This could be as simple as a sandwich board on the street advertising new stock or events. But it could also be through strategic promotion linked to campaigns such as the Orange and Man Booker prizes, World Book Day, or Quick Reads.

Marketing needs leadership and a share of resources

Senior leadership for marketing is needed to make full use of the 'Public Library' brand. Even within smaller overall budgets, an adequate share should be reserved for marketing and publicity; strongly-led regional and national collaboration would make this go further.

Grow the offer - if it fits with the brand

Many library authorities are developing their library offer in innovative and exciting ways. However, these changes must make sense to the public and either fit with their existing expectations of the 'Public Library' brand, or be perceived as a logical extension to it.

Case study: Quick Reads

Around 90% of library services promote Quick Reads titles for less confident adult readers when they are published on World Book Day. They can reach new audiences through local partners such as FE colleges, children's centres and workplaces and has the added bonus of a national media and outreach campaign. Suffolk Libraries ran a 'Big Quick Read' with Bernardine Evaristo's Hello Mum in 2010. They used 40,000 copies of the book, author events and The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge to take the reading message to non-library users including students, adult literacy learners, young parents, council employees and young offenders.

Case Study: Marketing Norwich libraries

The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library is the busiest in the country - not just because of its city centre location but also because of its approach to marketing. The library team uses community profiling, consultation and data analysis to find out who is using or not using the library, what they want and how the library is helping support them. It then tailors its services to suit. For example its reading groups are geared to those who are identified as its target audiences such as parents with small children or people with mental health problems. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and even marketing tools such as Mosaic are used to find out more about customers.



It's not really about users and non-users - people dip in and out

What the research says:

We often talk about users, lapsed users or non-users - but these distinctions may not be that helpful. It is common for people to dip in and out of library usage over their adult lives. More individuals in younger age groups use libraries, but older people use them more frequently. Reasons for changes in library use vary. For example users may stop using libraries because:

- they can't get what they want – mostly because the range or choice of books is too limited

- their circumstances change, making it more difficult or less convenient for them to go to libraries - for example, moving home or job
- their life stage changes so that they have less 'need' for libraries - such as stopping studying or starting a full-time job.

On the other hand, common trigger points for starting to use libraries (again) include taking up study, becoming unemployed, having children or retiring.

Some people who would not consider themselves library users do go into libraries occasionally to find something specific, and some go in relatively regularly on behalf of or accompanying someone else, but think this 'doesn't count' as using a library. In our survey, only 2% said they had never used a library.

A childhood library user is more likely to become an adult library user. The majority of current users say that childhood usage was important in

getting them 'hooked' on libraries, and most support the idea of getting children into libraries at a young age.

Many non-users read and are feel positively towards libraries. However, they may be working full time, and find it easy to 'forget about' them.

"I get leaflets about pizzas come through my door...I don't get a leaflet about the library." Non-user

"It's a well kept secret where the library is." Lapsed user

What this means:

Some people simply forget about the library

The task is to keep reminding them. Marketing to members and lapsed members can include using social media; articles and adverts in the local press; visible signs outside the library about new stock, services or events; and decent signage around town pointing to 'The Library'.

Member databases are vital

Although membership of a library is free, it is similar in many ways to membership of other organisations like the National Trust, the AA, or season ticket holders of football clubs. For any such organisation, membership data is key to their success. It provides information about who members are, how active they are, and what services they use.

Keep in touch

Some libraries use their membership databases to keep in touch through newsletters and emails; but many don't. Well-managed communication with members maintains an ongoing relationship – even when they don't use or engage with the service for a period of time.

Digital marketing is cheap

Digital communication can play a much bigger role in keeping library users engaged. In most cases the main cost is creating content. Email and text messages are widely used already. Facebook, Twitter, smartphone 'Apps', and Flickr are starting to be used by individual libraries or service-wide.

Case study: Reading Detectives

The Reading Agency's Reading Detectives www.readingdetectives.org was part of the Made in England collaboration between Arts Council England and the BBC. It hooked readers in through their interest in local history and heritage. Social networking tools enabled the teams of readers to discover books featuring their local area and share their finds. Reading Detective teams, working out of libraries in Cumbria, Derbyshire, Hampshire, Lancashire and Kent, went on a mission to find writing about their local area and the people who live there. Each team blogged and mapped their finds on Google Maps, and displayed their finds in their libraries. The Reading Agency is looking at ways to continue the project.





Focus on motivations - not barriers

What the research says:

Reasons for non-use of libraries can be loosely divided into three categories:

- **Mismatch with motivations and preferences:** this is by far the main reason why people don't use libraries - instead they are 'pulled' towards alternatives. This might include preferences for more convenient options such as bookshops or online stores; environments that are seen as higher value, or completely different ways of using leisure time.
- **Disincentives:** this is a minor factor but is about service attributes which

put people off using libraries or make them unattractive.

- **Barriers:** another minor factor overall, covering personal or social issues that prevent people from using library services, for example accessibility, or fear of discrimination.

Our research suggests the first category is by far the most powerful in addressing non-usage.

By contrast, the main benefit of removing barriers is to assist people who face multiple disadvantage, but

that is separate from the question of increasing use.

Attracting more users on a significant scale requires the development of stronger motivations for people to select libraries over the alternatives. The research points to some unique selling points which could be exploited to achieve this:

- services not provided elsewhere: children's book groups, hobby groups, free internet, genealogy
- the fact the service is free or low cost - making it attainable by all;

allowing people to 'try before they buy'; providing reference books which would be costly to buy.

"I find one of the most amazing thing about libraries that you can order amazingly specialised books." Library user

However, the research finds no 'magic bullet' for increasing library usage because libraries mean different things to different people - such as quiet space for some but social space for others. Library services need to decide which groups are most important for them to engage with.

What this means:

There's no magic bullet – libraries need to segment and target

There are some people who through their life stage or lifestyle, are unlikely to be drawn to their local library now, or perhaps ever. But even those who can be won require a segmented approach tailored to who they are and their stage in life. Although no customer segmentation exists for library users, those libraries which develop segmented approaches to attracting users are likely to find their efforts are more effective.

Challenge assumptions about choice and convenience

The main reasons people give for not using their library relate to choice and convenience. For example they say they prefer to buy books from shops or online, or are too busy to go to the library. But libraries can challenge some of these assumptions. For example do people know they can browse and reserve stock online? Do they know libraries are often open outside normal work and shop opening hours? Are they aware of new e-book lending services?

Promote what the public finds attractive

The research tells us what the public finds useful and attractive in libraries – but also reveals that few people are aware of the entirety of the offer. So promote those things which (when they know about them) the public find most attractive - children's activities, free events, internet access, craft sessions, job-hunting resources, evening courses, or genealogy.

Have something new all the time – make it a programme

The challenge is to keep offering new incentives to keep people coming back week after week. Having an ongoing programme of events is a specialist task and needs a dedicated resource but can reap rewards in terms of driving up user numbers.

Exploit the zeitgeist - now it's watching the pennies

Some people saw libraries as a smart 'austerity' option, enabling them to keep reading, get hold of expensive reference books to learn new skills, and get online if they couldn't afford a computer or broadband.

Case Study: Readers for Life in the northwest

Keeping library users coming back by offering a programme of changing activities has been key to the reader development strategy in the north west. Among the activities programmed under the 'Readers for Life' banner have been hugely successful visits by authors to speak about their work, leading to a surge of interest in book groups, book quizzes and various other events. Many joint activities have been run with schools. For World Book Day, Cheshire Libraries commissioned a short story. Intended to provoke debate, it was read aloud by well known local guests at the same time on that day in around 37 branch libraries. More than 31,000 children and adults have been reached through the extensive range of regular and special one-off activity.



Further resources for Section 2

'Public Library' is a trusted and well-loved brand

Society of College, National and University Libraries

www.sconul.ac.uk

- [Bite-sized marketing: realistic solutions for the overworked librarian](#)

The Library Journal

www.libraryjournal.com

- [Build an identity that works in the age of the superstore](#)

Audiences UK

www.audiencesuk.org

- [Customer profiling and segmentation tools](#)

TBI Communications

www.tbicommunications.com

- [Marketing the library \(using technology\)](#)

Sheffield University

dis.shef.ac.uk

- [Marketing library and information services](#)

Not about users and non users

JISC TechDis Service

www.techdis.ac.uk

- [Communicating with users](#)
- [Promoting your services](#)

Coventry University

www.coventry.ac.uk

- [Lanchester Library Communications Policy](#)

Motivations not barriers

Opening the Book Ltd

www.openingthebook.com

- [Branching out reader development project](#)

The Literacy Trust

www.literacytrust.org.uk

- [Love Football Love Reading Toolkit](#)

The Man Booker Prizes

www.themanbookerprize.com

- [Man Booker reading groups and events toolkit](#)

Museums Libraries and Archives Council

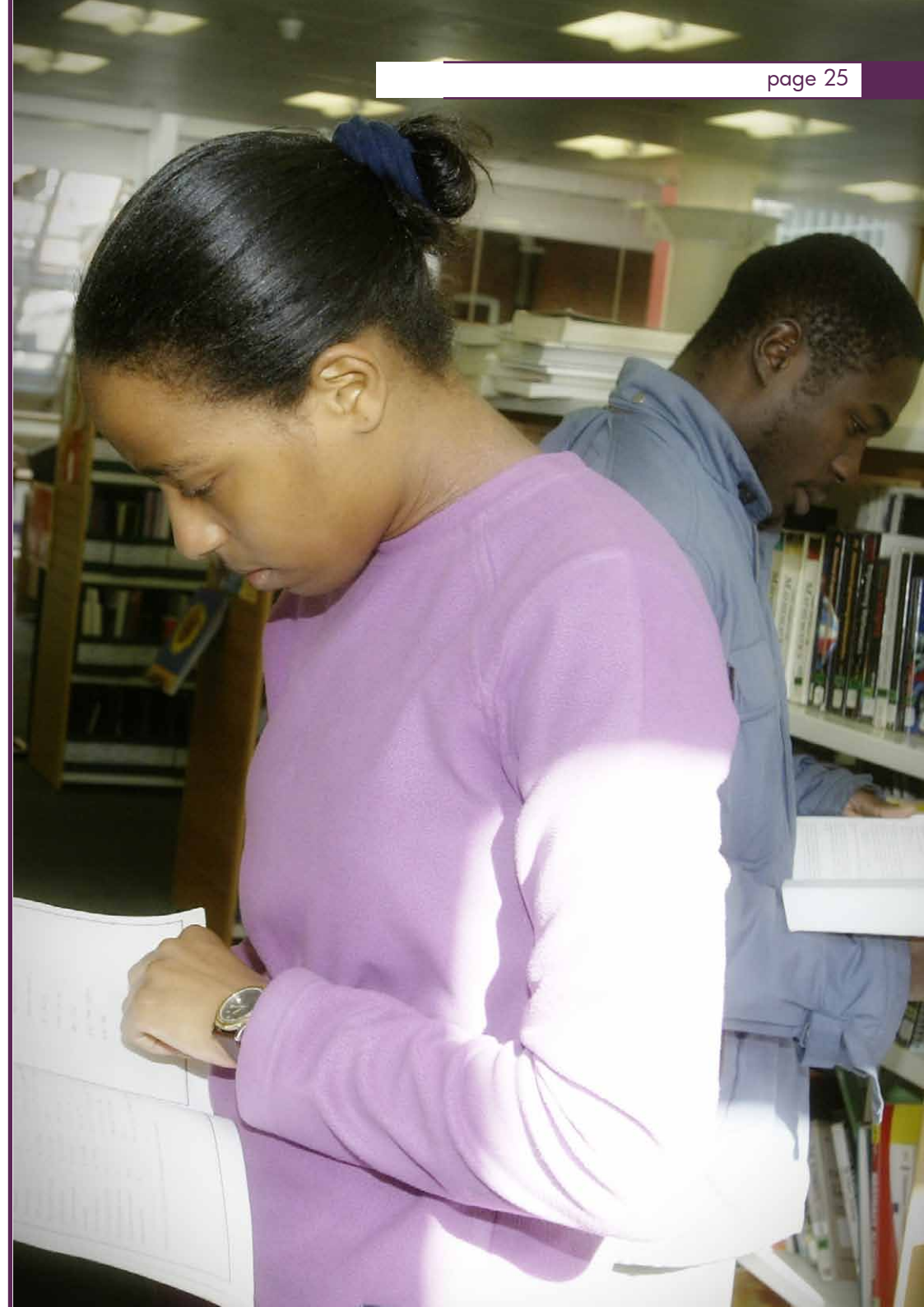
www.mla.gov.uk

- [Attracting library non-users](#)
- ['Get it Loud in Libraries' toolkit](#)
- [Increasing the attractiveness of libraries for adult learners](#)

Chatterbooks

www.chatterbooks.org.uk

- [Resources from Chatterbooks](#)



Section 3: Valued public spaces: neutral, trusted, egalitarian





Libraries are valued as public spaces

What the research says:

The library space means different things to different people. The physical library building is highly valued by many user groups for its unique features and as a neutral public space.

Libraries are often seen as quiet, without too many distractions to study or relax, a safe space where children can go on their own, and a space for some groups, particularly older people or those who might be isolated, to socialise. It's also seen as a place where it's acceptable to spend time on your own without stigma.

"At home I can't concentrate, I'll just get up and make a brew whereas in the library..." Library user

Users are sensitive to the tensions which exist in relation to how library space is arranged and allocated. For example, the balance between space for books and space for other activities and resources; and the potential for quiet spaces to be compromised due to nearby noisy uses.

Case Study: Macmillan partnership with Manchester

Evaluation of Macmillan Cancer Support's health information points in Manchester libraries shows libraries to be neutral, non-stigmatised spaces. Macmillan found library settings easier for reaching people affected by cancer including individuals from BME and deprived communities. The community setting plays a key part in normalising the view of cancer as a health issue. The community outreach expertise also enables messaging to be matched to the locality, supporting targeted health messages appropriate to the local community.

What this means:

Don't lose (quiet) seated reading space

Users value quiet reading spaces. Comfortable seating for readers, tucked away from distractions and noise is likely to encourage people to spend more time browsing and visit more often. Some users say they like to 'hide away' with a book – so single comfy chairs tucked in quiet corners could be a particularly attractive feature.

Exploit larger spaces to entice target groups

Using larger open spaces to host group and social activities is common in libraries especially for toddlers' sessions, adult learning, and hobby group meetings. But those spaces could also be used to attract new user segments a library wants to grow; for example to attract late teens with events featuring teen-market authors and music; or commuters with rush-hour talks or after work book clubs.

Managing the quality of the physical space is an important responsibility

Although all libraries have systems to ensure their spaces are safe and functional – responsibility for maintaining a vibrant and enticing space is also important. What passers-by see through the window, including internal layout and displays, all contribute to visitor numbers, satisfaction, and the success of the service.

Involve library users in managing the space

Public services are increasingly adopting user-led-design principles – especially for physical spaces. There are many good examples of this approach working well for libraries. User-led-design means seeing the service from the user perspective and adopting changes even if they challenge assumptions held by managers. It also means users themselves have a greater sense of ownership of the physical space.



Case study: Teenagers leading layout design in Birchwood

Teenagers in Birchwood, Warrington, have created a space in their local library where they can relax and read. A group of young volunteers were project managers for the redesign of the teen area, which is dual use for the school and the community. They surveyed other young people and adults to gauge opinions and involved the stock manager on layout changes. Confounding local assumptions, they did not in fact want computers, listening posts, or games consoles, but simply better furniture and books. The area has seen an increase in usage, is a popular venue for library lessons, and attracts newly-enrolled Year 7 learners.



Libraries are social levellers

What the research says:

Nearly 40% of adults visited a public library at least once during 2009/10. Compared with other types of cultural activity – such as visiting museums or galleries – libraries reach a much broader range of age groups and social background.

There is less of a divergence in usage, for example, between women and men, and higher and lower socio-economic groups, than for other cultural activities, which tend to be much more polarised.

Library usage amongst black and minority ethnic groups is higher than within the white population - in contrast with other cultural activities. Studying is a particularly important reason for users from minority ethnic backgrounds to use library services.

For people experiencing isolation, libraries are sometimes seen as a “lifeline”. From our research it was evident that this ability to bring people together is valued by library users.

“The library is essential to the community – it adds cohesion to the village.” Library user

Even among people with a long term limiting illness who are less likely to use libraries, the gap is smaller than when we look at other cultural activities.

What this means:

Libraries can offer themselves as gateways to other services

The egalitarian nature of libraries both as institutions and public spaces means they can be offered as a resource to other organisations who want to reach different user groups.

For example the police, probation, health and social services, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus are known to value the trusted and neutral nature of libraries. Often this is because their own premises are seen as less neutral, and less attractive by their target audience.

Libraries can provide an entry point to culture...

...on behalf of other cultural agencies. Library users include many people who do not take part in other cultural activities. This means libraries can support museums, galleries, and theatres in their outreach and audience development.

Libraries are a way of reaching a balanced cross-section of the public

They can help any organisation looking to recruit community board members, school governors, or get people interested in becoming a councillor.

Case study: Supporting BME mums in Tyneside

A library location has proved the ideal environment for a group of mothers from the BME community in South Tyneside to access support and skills to help them keep up with their children's development. The 'Keeping up with the Children' programme is delivered by the Ethnic Minority, Travellers, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Achievement Service. When the introduction to computers part of the programme proved particularly popular, the library developed a partnership with Groundwork to deliver five week courses covering email, scanners and searching the internet as well as using the library and its catalogue. The women emerged from the groups to use services independently and have become regular visitors to the library.





Children and teens are important for libraries today and in the future

What the research says:

"If I had stayed in my home town I'd still go to my childhood library and want my kids to go there. It's like wanting to get married in the same church as your Mum and Dad..."
from previous research, Usherwood et al 2006

Children, their parents and their carers make up a sizeable proportion of current library users. Two-thirds of adults with children under 17 say they are library users compared to around half of those without children. The 25 to 44 age group are the ones

most likely to say they use the library because it is a good place to take children.

Children are also a key reason why lapsed users and non users come back to libraries. All groups believe that having activities for children and families would attract more users. Given that most libraries already provide children's activities, this seems to be another challenge for library marketing - with people asking for something which already exists.

Childhood library usage is an important predictor of adult library usage, so encouraging children into libraries now means more users in future.

A significant proportion of people believe that a library's main purpose is education and that they have a key role to play in children's education.

"The job of the library should be to continually endeavour to get young people there - nothing can compare to holding a book - it's about getting

young people and children reading."
Non-user, older person, rural area

For parents who do take their children to the library, they see many attractions. It encourages children to enjoy reading, it creates opportunities to socialise with other children, parents can grab a few minutes' respite, or, alternatively bond over a book or activity, a trip to the library is seen as a more 'wholesome' activity, and for older children the library helps them concentrate on homework and develop good study habits.

What this means:

There's one born every day

Every day brings new people (first time parents, new grandparents) who are unaware - but would be interested in - the local library's offer for young children. So advertise constantly, not just with posters at the library but flyers and leaflets in local shops, children's centres, schools, and in What's On sections of community publications and websites.

A more consistent education message

Many people see the library offer for children as part and parcel of its educational objectives. Yet children's activities, links between libraries, schools and colleges, and adult learning, are often dealt with by different parts of a library

authority. This can lead to fragmented messages about libraries as places of learning, and uncoordinated activities. Bringing all library learning activities under a single team could enable a more coordinated approach.

Differentiate for children and teens

Children's tastes change fast as they approach their teens. Many teenagers drift away and don't come back. The challenge for libraries is to hold the attention of their young readers. They should emulate the strategy of writers and publishers who provide tiered offers to keep the attention of each young person as they quickly mature and acquire new interests, and develop more adult expectations and tastes.

Case study: Read a Million Words in Poole

More than 300 children became new library users in Poole in the year to April 2010 thanks to the 'Read a Million Words' challenge. They joined another 1,700 children in striving to become word millionaires. Given a special paper passport, children become eligible for a series of rewards as they reach stages on the journey, with the first reward reached after 8,000 words.

The libraries use a barcode system to record participants' progress. Children can also record their progress on a website. When they become 'millionaires' they are given a special RaMW gold medal and certificate and become eligible for the monthly Millionaires' Challenge. In the first year, there were well over 300 word millionaires.

"It was so fun and exciting there should be a 'Read a Billion Words' challenge"
Annalie age 12





Further Resources for Section 3

Libraries are valued as public spaces

Designing Libraries
www.designinglibraries.org.uk

- [Resources](#)

Whole Building Design Guide
www.wbdg.org

- [Public Library Design](#)
- [Library Spaces](#)

Museums Archives and Libraries Council

www.mla.gov.uk

- [Opening up Spaces](#)
- [Public library Activity in the areas of health and well-being](#)

Reading Agency

www.readingagency.org.uk

- [Headspace project](#)

Libraries are social levellers

Museums Libraries and Archives Council

www.mla.gov.uk

- [Access for All toolkit](#)
- [Community engagement in Public Libraries toolkit](#)

Opening the Book Ltd

www.openingthebook.com

- [Branching Out services to Black and Asian readers](#)

British Library

www.bl.uk

- [Social Inclusion Action Plan](#)

Reading Sight

www.readingsight.org.uk

- [Marketing libraries to people with sight loss](#)

Working Together

www.librariesincommunities.ca

- [Community Led Libraries Toolkit](#)

Children and teens

Quick Reads

www.quickreads.org.uk

- [Family Learning Breakfast planning toolkit](#)
- [Adult learners](#)

Book Trust Children's Books

www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk

- [Children's Bookweek](#)

London Borough of Camden

www.camden.gov.uk

- [Children's Guide to Libraries](#)

Liverpool City Council

www.liverpool.gov.uk

- [Book Ahead Toolkit](#)

Lancashire County Council

www.lancashire.gov.uk

- [Engaging Parents through Information and Consultation Toolkit](#)

Booktime

www.booktime.org.uk

- [Events for classes and families](#)
- [Running a successful event](#)

Chatterbooks

www.chatterbooks.org.uk

- [Resources for chatterbooks groups](#)





The last word

So there you have it. The public have a genuine deep affection for their libraries, even people who rarely use libraries themselves. The expectation is that libraries should be centred around a good choice of books, reading and learning, and should be customer friendly in their people, quality public space, services and technology.

Rapid changes in media and information (including Google and cheap books), and changing consumer preferences make these expectations even harder to meet. If libraries however fail to meet the public's expectations there is a real risk of users drifting away, and we would all be the worse off for that.

User and customer research is always full of unhelpful contradictions and ambiguities, and there is never a right answer about how to act in response. It is a matter of judgment. It is not enough to slavishly do only what the public seem to ask for.

Library leaders have to take stock of what is being said and make their own path, balancing evidence, insight, experience and instinct. We have tried to provide different examples of how that balancing act can play out, alongside case study examples which appear to work.

The message we want to leave you with is this.

Public libraries, though trusted and well-loved, must devote significantly larger proportions of their remaining resources to studying their target audiences, and creating their own demand through engaging communication and participation campaigns. But this is only a means to sell the service and attract people in. So finally, the library service the public actually experience (if and when they choose to) has to be a high quality one which meets their expectations of a 'public library'.





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