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# Marketing our collections

Brunel Library Book Stop

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What can libraries learn from bookshops? With current pressures on library budgets, the promotion of existing collections and services becomes increasingly important. Looking beyond traditional university library approaches to marketing towards the techniques of other sectors can bring creative and flexible solutions to raise awareness of our stock, underline the value of the library and engage with users. At Brunel we have been exploring the ways in which we can adopt and adapt some of the methods that might be more commonly found in the retail sector. Used in conjunction with our existing social media channels to promote our collections, we have seen increased borrowing of our stock and a further boost to the visibility of the library around campus and online.

## **USING RETAIL TECHNIQUES IN THE LIBRARY**

Our Book Stop display was born when a new member of staff with a background in the commercial sector instigated a review of the ways we market our collections. As may be expected, core texts from reading lists are in high demand and in regular circulation. Yet high usage of this small group of titles can mask hidden collections on the



shelves that are rarely used, but still might hold an appeal for other readers.

The aim of the Book Stop was therefore to promote such texts to a wider audience, such as students from other courses, staff and other borrowers. This also supported our ongoing development of the role of the library on campus, reaching out to staff and students and changing the tone of our relationship with them. The Book Stop has provided a different way of connecting with this audience, presenting collections in a more light-hearted way, using a topical approach that fits with engagement on social media.

#### **THE BOOK STOP**

Since the end of November 2013 we have sited a regular series of stock displays on two locations on the ground floor which users are encouraged to borrow. Called the Brunel Library Book Stop, this is a fortnightly exhibition of materials that are grouped together under themes either relevant to the life of the university, responding to the collections, or to what is going on in the wider world. Previous topics have included study skills during our Study Well week, Oscar-nominated films or world fiction. The choice of titles and presenta-

tion of these collections is similar to that of a local library or bookshop, with an emphasis on titles to be read for pleasure, and not including items on reading lists.

The programme has also helped to get more library staff involved in our social media activities. Staff are encouraged to provide ideas for themes, and to suggest materials for inclusion. Each display is accompanied by a blog post and a Pinterest board, and staff have been actively participating in putting these together.

Using Pinterest for these displays enables the provision of an online visual display, with narrative and commentary for each title to link it to the theme of the display, and direct links through to the library catalogue. It is frustrating that there is no facility in Pinterest for tracking usage, but this initiative has provided us with another use for this still emerging channel. For the minimal amount of time involved in setting up a board, an additional layer is added to our displays, and makes online promotion through other channels such as Twitter much easier. We have also experimented with creating reading lists for displays and these have generated click-throughs.

Once established successfully, our next step was to expand our potential audience by taking the Book Stop on tour as a pop-up library, using the newly mobile version of our library management system to lend books from an iPad. This March (2014) we took displays promoting our study skills collection to the main lecture theatre lobby, reaching students and staff who told us they rarely came into the library. This event was accompanied by live tweeting on the library Twitter stream.

#### **IMPACT ON BORROWING**

The Book Stop has been a fairly low maintenance platform to showcase our collections. To capture usage we collected statistics on the numbers of items borrowed from the displays, which could also be compared to previous usage over the academic year and the lifetime of the material.

In our primary position in the main lobby the display resulted in at least half of the books on offer being borrowed, although the displays in the secondary location near our main printers have proved less popular. While we did not specifically target overlooked books, the outcome has sometimes been that some books are borrowed for the first time. In the aforementioned world fiction display, 10% of books borrowed had no usage history in the last two years, and 30% had been borrowed three times or less in their lifetime. Overall, 92 books have been borrowed from a total of 171 on display. One more nebulous benefit has been the reaction of the library staff to the display, with positive responses to taking part and becoming more aware of what is actually available to borrow.

#### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

As a pilot project, the Book Stop has given us plenty of ideas for future development, and some insights into how it can be used. We have already found that some sites are better than others for attracting passing interest, and this in turn is helping us to understand better how people interact with the building layout. The ability to provide mobile borrowing is likely to be particularly beneficial to our subject liaison librarians, who will be able to build on the idea of the pop-up library to take relevant resources out of the building when teaching or providing drop-in services around campus.

The ability to track usage and impact may enable us to link the displays with collection manage-

ment, and gives us another angle on understanding our collections and our customers. In particular we will look more deeply into the user groups borrowing the materials to understand whether we are reaching different communities of readers.

Our adoption of a more commercial approach to marketing the collection has meant we have looked again at our stock and viewed it a new light. We have explored more creative ways of displaying items and brought to light viable parts of our collection that may have been ignored. It has also provided a fruitful platform to allow us to interact and engage with users through social media. We plan to continue building on our discoveries in the future by expanding the use of the pop-up library function and improving on the effectiveness of our Book Stop displays.

<http://bookmarkdaily.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.pinterest.com/brunellibrary/>