

Reader Service Skills

Definition: Developing and maintaining a system for exchanging information in a non-judgmental environment for the purpose of suggesting reading materials that support the reading interests of our customers.

This involves:

1. Developing and maintaining an understanding of the needs of our customers, and potential customers, through a variety of tools;
2. Developing the appropriate skills and motivations in staff at all levels, so that staff are able to deliver consistently high quality reader services;
3. Ensuring that reader services and resources are promoted through a variety of mechanisms to raise readers' awareness of what is available to them.

Included in the Reader Service section of the toolkit are suggestions for developing a reader service by means of:

Developing and maintaining an understanding of the needs of customers and potential customers:

1. [General user and collection data](#)

Developing staff skills and motivation:

2. [Creating a reading culture](#)
3. [Booktalking and hand selling](#)
4. [Annotations: writing for print and Web](#)

Ensuring reader services and resources are promoted:

5. [Programming](#)
6. [Outreach and partnerships](#)
7. [Traditional media](#)
8. [Indirect marketing](#)

[Appendix B – Bibliography and learning resources](#)

What are the overall benefits of developing Reader Service Skills?

Libraries are successful in Canada because they are regularly evolving to meet changing needs. Librarians need always to be looking for ways to improve and update our methods. The overall benefits of this can be numerous, but generally include the following:

1. A revitalized approach to readers' advisory and customer services.
2. A well-trained staff, who are more confident in interacting with customers and delivering readers' advisory services.
3. A strong team of reader advocates in the community.
4. An enhanced profile in your community for the library and the value of reading, which may potentially lead to improved funding.
5. An increased awareness, appreciation, and usage of your library's services, resources and programs.
6. Increased job satisfaction and greater staff retention.

This toolkit will expand upon these benefits and reinforce them with practical examples and recommended reading.

1 - General user and collection data

Why use demographics?

Demographic information can help you understand your community, and who your potential readers are. For the purposes of these readers' advisory competencies, we will refer to adult users, but you could equally apply this information to the evaluation of other populations such as children or teens, or to specific segments of the adult population such as seniors, younger adults, or Boomers.

While we should never generalize about populations based on statistics alone, demographics provide a starting point in understanding your community, as well as allow you to determine, through further evaluation of the user data available from your Integrated Library System (ILS), whether there are gaps in the user base that you would like to try to address.

What demographics might you consider, and where would you get this information? What questions might this information be used to address?

Note: the examples cited throughout this section are not intended to provide an exhaustive list.

From Statistics Canada:

Age – Are there high proportions of people of any certain age group? What does the literature say about this age group in terms of their preferences in leisure activities, interests, etc.? What communication tools would each age group be most responsive to? Where in your community do people of various age groups congregate?

Gender – Once we know this, what does the literature tell us about differences in reading interests and habits among men and women?

Length of time in Canada and language spoken at home – Are the people in your community new to Canada, or have they been here for some time? What might this say about their understanding of library services, and particularly about their knowledge of readers' advisory services? How can we best communicate with this user group if it comprises a significant part of our community? What kind of readers' advisory services might such a group require that would be different from that of longer-established populations? How do we address readers' advisory services for those who read material in languages other than English?

Education and literacy levels – This data may inform your need to create readers' advisory related programs and collections that are accessible to a certain range of readers, or speak specifically to the need, for example, for a literacy program that would have its own specific readers' advisory knowledge base and techniques.

Employment – What are the levels of employment and unemployment in your community? How many people work part-time vs. full-time? What is the age of your work force? This information may inform your conclusions about the amount of free time people have available, or the best time of day to schedule activities for different populations.

Time spent on activities (no local breakdown) – This data can be used to develop a general understanding of activities that compete for people’s leisure time, and where reading fits into this.

What other library user data could you consider?

From your ILS system:

- Age
- Gender
- Language
- Postal code – Do people use branches near their homes or offices, or do they go to the branch that has the items or services that interest them? You may want to do some cross-variable examinations of your data, for example by looking at the borrowing habits of men and women, or of people in different age groups.

Note: It might be interesting to determine if the age and gender of your library users reflect the broader community, or if some segments of the population are smaller or missing among library users.

From program evaluations:

- Who attends the programs – men or women?
- How do they hear about programs?
- Which programs work best -- author visits, book clubs, booktalks, etc. “Best” may be reflected not only in numbers of people attending but also in satisfaction with the program.
- What other kinds of programs do people ask for, or express interest in, on program evaluations?

From other information you may already be collecting:

- Purchase requests – Who are the people placing purchase requests and how do they do this (e.g. electronically, or in-person requests at a branch)
- eNewsletter registration – Who has registered to receive information from the library electronically?
- Reference questions – What are people asking about?
- How do people use your branch – Do you ever do studies that track where people go in your branch – e.g. do they go to displays (first, last), do they browse, or do they go to the catalogue or shelves?

Community information:

- If you have a service for book clubs, how well-used is it? Which titles are used/requested the most? How many book clubs are you aware of in your community? Do you have contact information for them?
- What other kind of literary events are held in your community? Talk to the organizers of these events to see if you can find out more about their audience base.
- Social tagging – If your system allows online rating of items or social tagging, what is the uptake on this? Which items are getting rated by whom? Are user-created lists being accessed by others? Is this a popular service? How is your staff interacting with the community online?

Other user data collection:

- Do you conduct surveys, hold focus groups, or have advisory groups (e.g. seniors' advisory group)? If so, do you ever ask readers' advisory related questions? If not, consider doing this.

Collection Data:

Why study statistics about your collection and its use?

Not only will statistics about your collection indicate what is moving and well-used and what is sitting on the shelf, they can also be useful for readers' advisory. Information regarding the popularity of specific collections (e.g. fiction/non-fiction, genres, formats) provides valuable data confirming if what you are purchasing is of interest to your community. These statistics, coupled with user data, can assist you in building collections that are relevant to your user base.

They may also raise issues to be explored such as:

- how do we promote fiction that is not on the bestsellers list
- how often should we change our displays of library material
- does the location of the display have an impact on the use of the items in it
- are people increasingly using different formats of material?

All of this information will assist in the development of your readers' advisory service.

Consult the Collection Knowledge section of these Readers' Advisory Competencies for non-statistical ways to analyse and develop your understanding of collections.

What statistics might you consider and where would you get this information?

Collection use:

- Turnover rates in various parts of your collection (e.g. genres).
- Use of items by popular/bestselling authors compared with those who are not as well-known.
- Holds placed – What items do people put on hold; how long do they have to wait for items?
- Use of items on display – How many times do your staff have to refill a display – in a day, in a week; how often are displays changed?
- Purchase requests - What type of material do users ask the library to buy that is not already on order or in the collection?
- Interlibrary loan – What kind of items are requested through this service?
- Use of book club sets – internally and externally.
- Use of collection items/holds on collection items that have appeared on library recommended reading lists (either hard copy or online).

Cross tabulations of: e.g. users' ages and genders, and the type of material being borrowed – fiction, non-fiction, genres, etc.

What other information about your collection do you have?

- Use of library-created print resources – If you print booklists or bookmarks with suggested “good reads,” do you run out or do you have stacks that end up in recycling bins? If so, why? (e.g. lack of promotion or lack of interest among customers)
- Do you have readers’ advisory tools available on or through your website? How many hits do pages with lists of recommended reading get? If you have tools like *Novelist* online, are they well-used? If not, what are some of the barriers to their use?
- Social media tools – Do you have a readers’ advisory blog? How many hits does this get? How many entries have comments on them?
- Does your catalogue allow users to rate items, add reviews, or create lists that they can share? Is this feature well-used? What information does it provide you about items in your collection?

REMEMBER: Whatever statistical information you use, whether it is related to the demographics of your community, or to library users or collection use data, ask questions about what the statistics seem to indicate in order to ensure you are drawing appropriate conclusions.

Making use of statistical data is not a once-only project. The frequency of collection of this data is largely dependent on other activities in your system. Review the data often enough to ensure you are keeping abreast of trends, targeting your initiatives to customer needs, and making effective use of your resources.

How do you know if you have been successful?

Measuring the successful use of user data and statistics about collection use is never totally clear-cut. But if you make decisions, for example, about reading-related programming based on user data, and you have better turnouts at programs, this may validate the direction in which the statistics guided you.

Of course, in addition to using statistics to make decisions about programming or collections, you may, at the same time, improve publicity, or the vehicles through which you promote these aspects of library service. So it may be hard to isolate which factor had more impact.

However, the type of information discussed in this section can help library staff make informed decisions about the directions to take. Statistical information can also be useful in compiling proposals for funding, or informing the library board about the rationale for a change in practices.

Just don’t forget: it is not all about numbers. Anecdotal user data is very valuable in developing a picture of your user group, assessing their satisfaction with library services, and providing the types of testimonials that funders and politicians need to hear.

2 - Creating a reading culture

What is a reading culture?

In simple terms, a reading culture supports the act of reading. Research indicates that “reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, and advanced grammatical competence, and...become good spellers” (Krashen, 2004). Acknowledging the importance of reading in any form is the first step in fostering an environment where reading is a valued activity.

Libraries can further support reading by encouraging staff to read, ensuring that all readers have a wide variety of material to read, and advocating for the importance of reading within the community. Staff who are engaged readers can model behaviours for customers, and share in the pleasure and learning that reading affords. Evidence suggests that “light reading can serve as a conduit to heavier reading” (Krashen, 2004). Therefore, customers should have access to a broad range of materials from simple to complex. Readers need advocates in their community to ensure that reading is viewed as a valued activity, and that funding is made available to support this pursuit.

How do you hire staff who support a reading culture?

Libraries have not focussed on reading aptitude and enjoyment as much as they should when hiring staff. Although important, proficiency in providing reference and information services has often been overvalued in the hiring process. As the mandate of libraries evolves, it is becoming increasingly important to support customers as they read and grow their knowledge and interest. In order to provide supportive environments for readers, staffing decisions should value readers and reading.

The interview process needs to include a means to diagnose the candidates' interest in reading, understanding of its importance, and willingness to advocate for readers. Candidates for a position in fiction services should be asked to reveal a personal reading interest, as well as be able to identify trends in the market, and promote books and reading to others.

What are some examples of interview questions?

- “Tell us about a book you enjoy and why I might enjoy it,” is a question that illuminates personal reading interests and indicates the candidates' ability to inspire other readers.
- “Name five books on the bestsellers list,” will certainly test the candidates' knowledge of the marketplace, and whether they can respond competently to typical inquiries from your customers.
- “What change might you suggest that would better serve readers at our library?” will afford the interviewer an opportunity to determine the candidates' commitment to readers' advocacy.

Library staff, at every level and serving every customer, need to be able to support reading interest and development. While it is common to assume that most readers are

only interested in finding their next great fiction read, in fact they have interests in many areas, and may pursue non-fiction selections as often as fiction. In addition, library staff must be able to provide support for readers of all ages. The above questions can be adapted for every situation, from children's services to specialized collections.

What should a job description include?

An expectation of reading interest or skills is rarely included in library job descriptions. Generally, a commitment to reading is implied, rather than explicitly stated. It can be difficult to measure an employee's reading performance without clear standards, and this can be a barrier to discussing the employee's commitment to reading.

Library job descriptions should include some measure for knowledge of books and evidence of reading. All library staff need to support the act of reading, understand its importance, and be able to help readers expand their lists.

- Job descriptions for professionals should require an ability to maintain a current awareness of reading interests, and understand the importance of reading for the community. As a main source for reading outside the formal educational context, libraries and librarians need to appreciate the pivotal role they play in their community's success.
- Non-professional staff should be able to participate in reading activities and support reading in the community.

Yearly appraisals or periodic (monthly or quarterly) meetings are good opportunities to discuss an employee's commitment to reading, and potential reading goals for the coming year. Most professional staff are directly assessed on their ability to maintain a current awareness of social trends. They should be able to evidence interest in, and a commitment to, books and reading. The same expectations may not apply to non-professional staff. However, with clear direction, all staff should be able to evidence interest in books and reading, as well as knowledge of the importance of reading. Staff should be commended for reading growth and challenged to expand their reading lists.

How do you foster a reading culture in existing staff?

Staff members were most likely hired into their present position without emphasis on their reading skills or interest. The development of a reading culture can often be seen as something new or different. If this is the case, library managers need to acknowledge a shift in expectations, and provide staff with the opportunity to adapt to the new environment.

Celebrating the rewards of reading, and encouraging staff to pursue their own reading, emphasize the positive aspects of a reading culture, and create an environment where staff feel supported in making the necessary changes.

At minimum, all staff should be encouraged to READ. Avid readers will automatically do this at their leisure, but reluctant staff may not be reading very much at all. Articulating the importance reading can play in their own professional development can motivate staff to read more often. While language development and comprehension will occur at a faster rate with more complex reading materials, all reading is shown to have an effect on these variables. Therefore any reading that staff engage in is positive and should be

encouraged. Reading the newspaper, magazines, or online information can contribute to staff reading growth and interest.

Should staff be reading at work?

While not appropriate in all situations, reading should be encouraged at work. Past practice has discouraged actively engaging in reading while at work, especially for pleasure reading. However, for staff who do not include reading in their personal pursuits, permitting reading at work emphasizes the importance of the activity, and will likely increase the amount of reading they do overall. Managers and senior staff can further aid in this process by modelling this behaviour, and by talking about the importance reading has had in the development of their own job competence. As always, staff need to balance reading with the tasks they have been assigned and their service to library customers.

How do you ensure that staff maintain a commitment to reading?

By setting a clear mandate, and modelling good reading behaviour, managers can impress upon staff the importance of reading and knowledge of fiction to customer service. The manager's commitment to reading needs to be consistent and long-term, so that all staff (present and future) are clear about expectations for performance excellence. Managers need to ensure that reading objectives are included in annual reviews, thus championing the importance of reading within the library system. Managers should include discussions about books and reading at all opportunities, including staff meetings.

How do you further support reading interest and growth among staff members?

Staff need to be continually supported in reading and growing their reading interests. Simple and consistent encouragement—as outlined in the above sections—is one of the most effective tools to maintain an individual's commitment to reading regularly.

Training can also play a key role in showcasing the importance of reading. Conference attendance can foster a sense of shared passion, and employees greatly benefit from hearing what other library staff are doing to support reading. Publishers' representatives can spark interest and enthusiasm, hyping new materials for staff and customers. Independent learning tools can help staff grow at their own pace. This OLA Reader's Advisory Committee Core Competencies document is also designed to provide a primer for developing RA skills and supporting reading interest in staff. Online tools such as databases, blogs and websites can further staff's knowledge of current trends. Teleconferences and webinars also provide staff with the opportunity to connect with others.

How do you know if you have been successful?

Staff should feel comfortable and engaged talking about books and reading. Staff meetings should regularly include book sharing and discussions. All staff members should be expected to share the latest books they have read, and discussions can focus on new materials and customer demand. The ultimate goal is to have every staff member knowledgeable enough about the collection that each feels comfortable dealing

with customer inquiries, rather than forwarding RA requests to the branch or department's acknowledged "reader."

Customers should feel supported in reading pursuits, and be encouraged to consider the library a destination for guidance about books and reading. Customers should be able to discuss books with all staff members comfortably, confident that staff are aware of current trends and old favourites. Libraries should be a haven for readers, providing a well-stocked collection and an inviting space to indulge in their reading passion. Libraries and library staff need to respect the act of reading and work hard to ensure that customers are satisfied with their experiences.

Libraries, managers, and staff need to be the strongest advocates for the value of reading in the community. As noted above, there is no single act more important to language development than reading. Literacy is significantly associated with successful communities, and libraries should ensure that everyone has equal access to reading material.

Within library services, readers need to be the focus, and organizational decisions need to support further reading development. Libraries should advocate on behalf of the reader to library boards and city councils, stressing the critical role that reading plays in the development of the community. Libraries must also ensure that they partner with other organizations that support reading – e.g. schools, literacy groups, and other community services – to ensure that provincial and federal governments appreciate the impact that reading has on the success of its citizens.

3 - Booktalking and hand selling

What is booktalking?

A booktalk is a presentation intended to convince listeners to read a book by giving them a glimpse of the various appeal factors the book has—such as setting, characters, pace, and plot—without giving too much away. A long booktalk is usually about five to seven minutes in duration while a short booktalk is generally thirty seconds to two minutes long.

Material covered can include both fiction and non-fiction, and can be geared to audiences from school children to seniors.

Who hears booktalks?

Booktalks can occur in various settings, both formal and informal. Formal booktalks are more commonly done for children or teens in a structured school visit, library tour, etc. Library staff use the booktalk to promote reading selections to the audience in a structured way, often opting for some reading and a longer booktalk. The same principles can be applied to booktalking for all ages in a more formal setting. The selections should be suitable for, and enjoyable to, the audience.

Library staff can also engage in short booktalks with customers while offering readers' advisory services. Customers may ask questions like, "Is this any good?" or "Tell me about this book." After conducting an RA interview, staff can promote the particular book by speaking to appeal factors and addressing specific reading tastes identified by the customer.

Do I have to read the whole book?

For a long booktalk you would need to have read the whole book, but for a brief talk you can gather from the book jacket or reviews a strong enough sense of the appeal factors to make a presentation.

How do I start?

Get ready: Look for books that interest you or that people are asking for. Think about the books' appeal factors and what you might say to grab people's attention.

Check reviews: See what others have said about the book and research the author's background.

Look for connections: Think about how books relate to each other and how you can guide a customer from one title to another—e.g. authors who write like Dan Brown, or books that focus on recovering from loss.

Approach customers: Ask if they are finding what they want, or if they would like you to suggest a title. Ask what they have read recently that they enjoyed, and look for connections. Try to suggest at least three books.

How do I plan a longer booktalk?

It is important to prepare in advance for more formal booktalks. You should select the titles to booktalk in advance and should have copies of the book on hand, or visuals that enable the audience to connect with the book. You should be confident to talk about all aspects of the book and answer questions about it. It is easier to sell a book that you have enjoyed. However, you should be able to speak to appeal factors in a wide variety of selections. As you prepare for the booktalk and read the selection, make notes on appeal factors, main characters, or excerpts you might read aloud.

It is important not to prejudge your audience, so you should bring a variety of books to the event. However, tailoring selections to your audience is also important since it is then more likely that your audience will read the books you talk about. You might be fascinated by fly fishing, but a group of young mothers in an urban drop-in probably are not. You should offer a varied selection of titles, and make sure that you are knowledgeable about other related titles, in order to meet the reading needs of your audience.

Having a theme gives focus to your talk and can be fun to develop. However, if you have a theme you must ensure variety in your presentation in other ways—e.g.: “Out of Africa,” “Murder and Mayhem” or “Food for Thought.”

What kind of books work best?

In addition to fiction, works of literary non-fiction about topics such as travel, biography, humour, memoirs, cooking, and music are popular. Although different, illustrated coffee table books, some children’s books, and seasonal books are also popular. Don’t forget materials in other formats, such as books on CDs, or e-books, or large-print titles. Depending on the content, audiences can be sensitive about books that address religion or politics.

How long should a booktalk be?

For a booktalk of between eight to 10 books, about 45 minutes of speaking time is a good average. Certainly never exceed more than an hour. Be sensitive to your audience. If you feel you are losing them, cut out titles, or shorten the talk. Talk about each individual book for about two to seven minutes.

What do you say about the books?

The primary goal is to entertain and sell. In general, you want to outline the appeal factors and tell a bit of the plot. You might also read interesting anecdotes, excerpts, or humorous passages, or talk about the author’s life and why s/he wrote this book. Be sure to talk about why this book appealed to you.

If you are doing a longer talk involving several titles, look for connections and how books can lead from one to another. For example, a book about travel in France might lead to a book on French painting, which might lead to an account of art theft during World War II.

You are giving a performance. You need to use pacing and variety to hold the audience’s attention. In general, you want a strong start, so begin with the book you

liked the best, and can talk about most comfortably and enthusiastically. Try to vary the mood, mixing books that are happy and sad, fast-paced and lyrical. Always try to include some humour.

If you want to read excerpts, make sure they are short, only read two or three, and spread them throughout your talk. It takes longer than you think to read aloud, and you lose eye contact with your audience while doing it, and so may lose their attention. Use excerpts as padding that you may or may not include depending on your time.

If possible, practice your talk aloud, on fellow staff, family members, or pets. Make sure it flows. Get a sense of how long it is — and cut if necessary. The more often you do a talk, the better and more natural you become. So once you have developed a booktalk, look for multiple chances to use it.

Pick a strong book for your closing comments, since this is the title people will go away with freshest in their minds.

How will people remember what I have booktalked?

Make an annotated booklist: People love to have a list of books to take away and will often take extras for friends. As well as author and title, include on the booklist the call number and a short annotation, both as a memory aid for the customer and as an ad for the book.

These lists are useful as a record of what you talked about to a group in case you are invited back. It also helps other staff when someone comes in and says “The librarian came to my friend’s church and talked about book about a dysfunctional family. Do you have it?”

How do you know if you have been successful?

The main purpose of booktalking is to promote the library’s collection; the more books that are checked out by participants, the greater the success of the booktalk. All RA activities should aim to increase discussion about reading between staff and customers, and among customers themselves. Booktalking is also effective when it solicits more discussion about reading among participants in the booktalk. Even if the participants do not end up borrowing more books, further invitations to speak to groups indicates that the program was enjoyable and that participants were grateful for future opportunities for booktalks.

Hand selling

What is hand selling?

Hand selling is recommending books to customers in a way that responds to their individual interests. It is a value-added service that helps fulfill customer expectations — “I want something to read”— and encourages them to come back for more. Ideally, it is a one-on-one interaction between the staff and a customer, but it also includes displays, newsletters, reading groups, blogs, shelf talkers, Facebook, tweets, and videos embedded in the library website — any way the library can make a connection between a recommended book and a reader.

Hand selling is also a fundamental part of roving — of making an effort to connect with customers and build a relationship. In the world of sales, interaction with people increases profitability. In libraries, it increases circulation. However, it is important always to be mindful of people who are not interested in your help and be careful not to intrude.

How do you develop your hand selling skills? See section 8 below for further suggestions for developing shelf talkers, displays, booklists, and staff picks.

- *Read books:* You can't read every book in the library, and you can recommend a book without having read it, but you need to read widely and in-depth to really understand the materials out there. Try to read at least a few titles in the various genres to get a feel for their potential appeal factors.
- *Make lists:* It is valuable to make a list of your favourites, old and new, to help you remember titles. There's nothing worse than knowing there was a book you read that would be great for a customer but its title escapes you at the crucial moment. You might find it helpful to keep a reading journal of some kind, be it just in a notebook, on file cards, or in an electronic database such as *Goodreads*, *LibraryThing* or *Shelfari*.
- *Stay current:* You need to be aware of what books are popular, or have won awards, or are being made into films. All of these factors will translate into more holds on these titles in your library. By reading reviews, book trade periodicals, and websites, you should be able to suggest titles with confidence.
- *Display your favourites:* Create a display area for recommended titles. Add shelf talkers, i.e. notes tucked into a book explaining why a staff member liked it. Browse the display shelves (and refill them) when you start your shift so you know what's in. Nothing is more frustrating for a customer than being lead around by a staff member desperately looking for a book that s/he recognizes.

Place staff picks in every section of the library — e.g. on end shelves. This helps both customers—to narrow their selection—and staff members—to suggest books in categories with which they are unfamiliar.

- *Staff meetings:* An excellent staff development opportunity is to include hand selling book titles at staff meetings, so staff can familiarize each other with as many titles as possible.

Does the customer want help or are they happy browsing?

It is sometimes hard to determine if customers will be receptive to your offer of assistance. Body language can often indicate their willingness to be approached, as well as making eye contact. When approaching, try asking: "Are you finding what you are looking for, or would you like me to recommend something for you to read?"

If they do want help, how will you determine what they like?

If they're regular readers, introductory questions could include:

- "What have you read recently that you enjoyed? Tell me about it."
- "Are there any kinds of books you really don't like?"

If they haven't read anything in a long time, you can ask: "What kind of movies or TV shows do you like?" It is likely that the same appeal factors that draw them to their viewing choices will also work equally well in drawing them to reading choices. Remember that good salesmanship is good listening.

It is also important never to disparage what a customer reads. All reading is good reading, and it is our job to encourage people and find them something that would appeal to them, not try to push something that we think they "should" read.

What if they've already found what they want?

For that added bit of service, you could offer them a little more by suggesting something similar—e.g. "I brought the black ballet flats you asked for, but we just got in these espadrilles for the summer. Aren't they cute?"

Go for multiple sales. Suggest three or four titles not just one. But don't push. No one wants the shoe sales person following her around saying "I see you're looking at lace-up librarian shoes. How about these great red stilettos? Or some gold gladiator sandals?"

What if you don't have what they want?

Find a worthy substitute. Try not to send them away empty-handed. You can offer them something else that they might enjoy—e.g. "I'm sorry *The Da Vinci Code* is out. I can place a hold on it for you, but while you're waiting, here's *The Amber Room* by Steve Berry. It's about two art collectors seeking one of the world's greatest lost treasures...."

How do you seal the deal?

- *Give them the book to hold:* Select a book and put it in their hands so they can look at it while you talk about it. That's why stores have displays. The tactile experience is part of shopping, and people are more likely to buy something they can touch.
- *Make them comfortable:* Invite the customer to sit at a table to look over the books. If the table is close, bring over a few extra titles. Check in with the customers periodically as they peruse their choices.
- *Follow up:* After a few minutes, check back and see if the books you recommended are what they had in mind. Ask if they would like more suggestions.
- *Follow through:* Remind them: "Let me know how you liked those books." Or: "Any time you want any other suggestions, I'd be pleased to help."

How do you know if you have been successful?

Be sure to track statistics on your RA interactions, and monitor the stock levels of your displays and handouts. If you find you are filling these more often, you must be doing something right!

If you find that people are returning to you and giving you feedback on the suggestions you've made, you're well on your way to developing your readers' advisory skills and establishing a base of loyal customers.

4 – Annotations: writing for print and Web

What is an annotation?

An annotation is a brief summary of a type of material (book, audiobook, etc). It should focus on the storyline and appeal to the reader, highlighting only one or two points of appeal. It should be informative and inviting but should not give away the ending or be overly complimentary. It should be written in the active not passive voice and include strong verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Annotations can also include a caution line—e.g. explicit sex, graphic violence, and coarse language.

Annotations may not be grammatically correct but must flow. Annotations can include read-alikes from across genres (Saricks, 2009) or from across the collection (Wyatt, 2007). It is not necessary to repeat the title or information implied in the title. Your goal is to capture, in 50 to 100 words, the essence of the book, using a maximum of three sentences. Your aim is to make the reader want to pull the item off the shelf or place a hold on the title. Annotations are used in thematic and read-alike booklists, bibliographies, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and in public catalogues such as *Bibliocommons*.

How does an annotation differ from a review?

Saricks (2005, 149-152) notes that reviews are most often critical evaluations of a work. They are meant to point out flaws as well as strengths in order that the selector can make an informed purchase for the library. Reviews come from a variety of sources including *Library Journal*, *Booklist*, *Quill and Quire*, etc. These reviews provide inadequate bases for our annotations. Annotations must focus on parts of the work that will appeal to the reader. Therefore, even if you did not enjoy the title, there should be aspects of the material overall that will appeal to your customer. Of course, it is easier to write an annotation of a book that you have enjoyed. But by emphasizing appeal factors in our annotations, we can highlight the best aspects of the work. Opinions on appeal factors and writing styles can differ from writer to writer, so annotations can be quite different even within your own library environment.

Writing an annotation? (included: appeal language and worksheet)

Writing an annotation is more difficult than writing a book review because you only have a limited amount of space in an annotation to convince the customer to check out the material. Included in this section is Saricks' vocabulary of appeal (Fig. 3.5) and annotation worksheet (Fig. 5.2) to help you in creating exceptional annotations, using strong appeal language. An annotation worksheet can also be found in Moyer & Stover (2010, 47).

Annotations and writing for the Web? Making it brief, briefer and briefest.

Annotations may vary in length depending on the type of booklist in which they appear. The same material need not be highlighted in each variation of the annotation (Booth, 2007, 117).

Brief: These annotations are most helpful in booklists in which there is a wide variety of titles, or as training or study references. Usually about 100 words long, these types of annotations are needed for complex materials.

Briefer: These annotations provide enough information to give an accurate reflection of the book but are brief enough to be easily and quickly skimmed. Approximately 50 to 75 words, these are the best annotations to use in blogs, Facebook entries, and catalogue annotations.

Briefest: These annotations give clues about the content of the book without giving away the story. They can be used in long booklists, on shelf talkers, and in social media such as Twitter.

What does a good annotation look like? Examples:

Staff booklist (Booth, 2007, 111)

Bechard, Margaret. Hanging on to Max.

YA/F/BECHARD

Single teen dad faces the toughest decisions of his life when his girlfriend leaves their new baby to his care. Girl and guy appeal, 8th through 11th grades, sport element, family dynamics, strong and introspective character.

Annotated bibliography selection for book club discussion or school visit

Impulse. Ellen Hopkins

Fans of Ellen Hopkins will not be disappointed in this fast-paced, emotionally charged novel written in verse. Three teens who have attempted suicide meet in a mental hospital and reveal, in alternating chapters, the events of their lives that brought them to this point. This book is edgy, gritty, dark, and highly relatable. Even the red book cover suggests blood, death or hunger, belonging. We would suggest this read for fans of *Go Ask Alice*, and for those who like the author's previous titles.

Bibliocommons, can also be put on Facebook and blogs (Burlington Public Library)

In *The World Made By Hand*, by James Howard Kunstler, the author paints a detailed portrait of life in post-WW III upstate New York, as well as the gritty consequences that the breakdown of government and the economy would have on everyday domestic living. Highly suggested for fans of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* or Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. For your consideration: violent descriptions.

Twitter, Burlington Public Library

[BPLgoodbooks](#) Good Book psychic: What's your favourite Canadian single? Can't think of one? Check out this book: <http://bplbookpsychic.blogspot.com/2011/08/non-fiction-pick-of-week.html>

Twitter, Quill and Quire (May 13, 2011)

Review: Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter*.
<http://bit.ly/m8Nuuv>

Twitter, City Wide One Book Campaigns "One Book, One Twitter"

CBC Online. June 1, 2011. Atwood's *Blind Assassin* launches Twitter Book Club. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/offbeat/story/2011/06/01/twitter-book-club-atwood-assassin.html>

Fiction vs. non-fiction annotations?

According to Wyatt (2007), "it is a vital habit of readers' advisory work to annotate what you read." Wyatt identifies four elements to consider when writing a non-fiction annotation: narrative context, type, subject matter, and appeal elements. Narrative context refers to the narrative devices the author uses to tell the story. Narrative devices are used on a continuum from many (read like fiction) to hardly any (very fact based). Type refers to the story's classification as memoir, biography, letter, essay, or short story. Subject matter is self-explanatory, and appeal elements are discussed above. Type strongly affects appeal elements and is an aspect of non-fiction that readers read for. Wyatt (2007, Appendix C) provides a brief summary and a non-fiction annotation form. Wyatt is a proponent of whole collection readers' advisory, and as such includes annotation suggestions from any material type that fits thematically.

What about annotations for other formats such as audiobooks, graphic novels, DVDs and CDs?

Audiobooks

In addition to appeal elements, annotations can include aspects about the narration. Some examples of possible phrasing include: natural and convincing voice, authentic accent, accurate pronunciation, and unique voices for each character. Annotations can also include aspects about the technical qualities of the production—e.g. music enhanced the tone of the story, or sound effects are used to remind the reader of the setting. Annotations can include aspects about the entire production—e.g. this audio production does justice to the book, or this audio would immerse you into the story. You might also want to mention such aspects as: the book does not translate well into audio format because of the style of writing or the visuals included in the book; or: the version is abridged or unabridged.

Graphic novels

Writing annotations for graphic novels is not much different than writing annotations for traditional print materials; the same appeal elements are important. However, visual elements must be considered and incorporated into the annotation. Such phrases could include: the art and text support each other; the tone is communicated by the text and the art; or illustrations are clear and easy to understand. You may also want to comment on sex, violence, and body appearance, as well as the type of audience the book would appeal to.

DVDs

Appeal factors of genre and setting can be applied when discussing audiovisual formats as well as print (Williamson, 2011), although additional elements can be mentioned to spark a customer's interest. These include: director, writer or actors, and cinematography, which functions similar to the pace and tone of a film.

CDs

For music, the recording company is often equivalent to the publishing company in print materials, and each record label is equivalent to the publisher's imprint. By knowing the

record label, you can infer the style of music, much as you can guess the sub-genre by the publisher's imprint. Additionally, it is important to indicate the date of publication in the annotation since musical influences, styles, and lyrics are heavily influenced by the era in which they were produced (Williamson, 2011). Lastly, including the environment or activity in which customers can enjoy the music may influence their decision about checking out the title.

How do you know if you have been successful?

- Annotations become easier to write
- You are consistently using appeal language to describe a work to fellow staff members and customers
- More comments on your social media outlets (Twitter page, *Bibliocommons*, *User Profile*, Facebook, etc.)

Figure 3.5 ■ The Vocabulary of Appeal

Pacing

breakneck, compelling, deliberate, densely written, easy, engrossing, fast paced, leisurely paced, measured, relaxed, stately, unhurried

Characterization

detailed, distant, dramatic, eccentric, evocative, faithful, familiar, intriguing secondary (characters), introspective, lifelike, multiple points of view, quirky, realistic, recognizable, series (characters), vivid, well developed, well drawn

Story Line

action oriented, character centered, complex, domestic, episodic, explicit violence, family centered, folksy, gentle, inspirational, issue oriented, layered, literary references, multiple plotlines, mystical, mythic, open-ended, plot centered, plot twists, racy, resolved ending, rich and famous, romp, sexually explicit, steamy, strong language, thought-provoking, tragic

Frame and Tone

bittersweet, bleak, contemporary, darker (tone), detailed setting, details of [insert an area of specialized knowledge or skill], edgy, evocative, exotic, foreboding, gritty, hard edged, heartwarming, historical details, humorous, lush, magical, melodramatic, menacing, mystical, nightmare (tone), nostalgic, philosophical, political, psychological, romantic, rural, sensual, small town, stark, suspenseful, timeless, upbeat, urban

Style

austere, candid, classic, colorful, complex, concise, conversational, direct, dramatic, elaborate, elegant, extravagant, flamboyant, frank, graceful, homespun, jargon, metaphorical, natural, ornate, poetic, polished, prosaic, restrained, seemly, showy, simple, sophisticated, stark, thoughtful, unaffected, unembellished, unpretentious, unusual

Saricks, Joyce. *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library*, 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2005.

Figure 5.2 ■ Book Annotation Format

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

PUBLICATION DATE:

NUMBER OF PAGES:

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:

TIME PERIOD:

SERIES:

PLOT SUMMARY:

SUBJECT HEADINGS:

APPEAL:

SIMILAR AUTHORS:

NAME:

Saricks, Joyce. *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library*, 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2005.

5 - Programming

Why programming?

Programs are at the heart of all public libraries. We develop programs to draw people into our buildings, to support our collections, and to fill a need in the community. In addition to outreach and partnerships, programs are invaluable tools you can employ in informing your community of your resources, services, and the expertise of your library staff. Developing dynamic reading-related programs can be the key to reaching non-library users and making them life-long readers.

How do you start small with programs?

Even if you don't have the staff or resources to offer a lot of programs, you can always adapt what you're already doing to include readers' advisory. Not all programs developed at your library are strictly reading-related, but there should always be a component of readers' advisory in each program. This would usually involve book displays and booklists tailored to the program topic. If well-received, these could be expanded to include more formal programs.

What reading-related programs could you develop?

Library book clubs

Many have had success with this traditional library program. Book clubs can be adapted for many different audiences and interests, and can also be taken on the road to other organizations.

What kind of clubs could you offer?

- Genre/subject-centred: e.g. science fiction, mystery, biographies, award winners
- Book chat groups that discuss favourite books, not a particular title.
- Parent/teen groups: to encourage family book sharing.

What if you can't support a club with your library collection?

- Use interlibrary loan services to coordinate enough copies.
- Lease copies of multiple titles.
- Obtain funding to develop a dedicated book club set collection.
- Develop a partnership with a local bookseller to offer discounts to club members.

Community book club support programs

For every book club organized by a library, there are many more clubs offered by community residents—in their own homes, at community centres, in coffee shops, and, increasingly, online. The leaders of these groups often need guidance and support from their libraries.

What are some examples of the support needed?

- Book club leader training: in which attendees learn tips on how to run a successful book club.

- Networking sessions for book group leaders: use this opportunity to learn from these groups how your library could help them, titles you could carry, authors they like.
- Author visits coordinated with groups reading titles by that author: guaranteed attendance!

Booktalks

Booktalks offer a potential reader a glimpse of a book's appeal factors, plot, characters, and setting without giving too much away. Talks can be as short as 30 seconds and as long as eight to 10 minutes. Traditionally, these have been done in clusters, in which the staff member introduces a variety of books in a short presentation. This is an excellent outreach program – people love to get recommendations! For more details, see section 3 above, on the topic of booktalking.

What are some variations for booktalks?

- A group of library staff can all present booktalks about their favourite books.
- Tie in books with films that share appeal factors, and broaden customers' use of the library beyond the book into other media.

Genre talks/studies

In these programs, library staff research and talk about a genre, outline its development, and touch on appeal factors, popular sub-genres, and variations. This type of program allows attendees to explore a whole genre, and potentially opens the door to many more reading possibilities. Be sure to offer booklists to ensure that those who attend remember your talk.

These talks can be developed for staff training sessions and rolled out to customers if they receive positive feedback.

Author visits

A popular author can really bring people into your library. Being able to talk face-to-face with popular authors, ask specific questions, and hear first-hand about their inspiration for writing is the dream of every book lover. The key is locating the right author for your community and promoting the event well.

How do you know which authors to pursue?

- Examine circulation statistics and borrowing trends to determine which authors and genres are checked out most often.
- Seek staff and customer input:
 - Survey your staff at meetings, via email, or by library intranet/wiki.
 - Conduct a survey of customers via the library website, and through comment boxes, to determine which authors would bring people in. Online sites such as *SurveyMonkey* are a quick and free way to conduct surveys.
- Contact your publisher representatives for advice, and consult their websites and current catalogues for touring information for their authors.

- Stay informed about author events and literary awards taking place in your region. If an author is scheduled to be on tour, you may be able to benefit from this.
- Network with other libraries at conferences and online to learn which author events have been successful.
- Consult The Writers' Union of Canada website, which lists authors' websites and contact information. http://www.writersunion.ca/ww_alphalist.asp?L=D

How much should you expect to spend?

Costs vary depending on the author and the accommodations that need to be made. General expenses include author's honorarium, travel, accommodation, and meals for the duration of the trip. If you have a limited budget, you may want to choose local authors.

How can you afford bigger name authors?

- *Apply for funding from:*
 - The Writers' Union of Canada
http://www.writersunion.ca/rd_nationalreadings.asp
The National Public Readings Program funds author visits to public venues across Canada.
- The Canada Council for the Arts <http://www.canadacouncil.ca>
The Literary Readings grant program awards funds twice yearly, with deadlines in September and March.
- *Involve other libraries:* Collaborating with other libraries can distribute the costs and the work of bringing an author or performer to your community.
- *Involve your Friends of the Library:* If you have a Friends group, consider approaching them for assistance with fundraising and promotion.
- *Charge subscription fees:* You may choose to have people pay to attend. Consult with your library's board or attorney to determine whether this is permitted.
- *Schedule virtual visits:* An increasing number of authors are available to you using the Internet, and often at a much lower cost than an in-person visit. All you need is a web cam, a projector screen, and Skype—i.e. a software application that allows users to conduct phone calls and video conferences over the Internet—and you're set!

Community Reads programs

A trend in recent years has been for the library to promote a particular book, and encourage everyone in the community to read it over a designated time period. Programs are offered at multiple locations, all centred on the themes taken from the chosen book, and often including author visits, panel discussions, and performances of all kinds and for all ages. These types of “big picture” programs can be seen as community-wide celebrations of books and reading. Much coordinated effort among community partners and sponsors is needed to make these programs succeed.

Libraries that have had great success with this include:

- Toronto Public Library: Keep Toronto Reading and One Book.

- Waterloo Region: One Book, One Community

Adult Summer Reading Clubs

Summer reading clubs have traditionally been used to keep children reading while on summer vacation. Some libraries have had success adapting this concept for adults. Why should kids have all the fun? Adults who bring in their children or grandchildren for the summer reading programs may ask themselves that same question, and decide to participate.

What kind of incentives can you offer participants in adult summer reading clubs?

The draw of winning something is the same for any age group; all that needs to be determined is what the prize is and how you get it. Incentives for any reading program should be related to reading in some way. Over the span of the summer, you could offer smaller weekly incentives, and then offer a larger grand prize at the end. It might be possible to obtain funds from your Friends group to purchase items.

Prizes could include:

- Coupons for free books from library book sales
- Coupons waiving library fines (with a maximum fine limit)
- Library merchandise – e.g. book bags, mugs, pens
- Gift certificates from local merchants --e.g. restaurants, movie theaters, book or music stores, museums
- Clip-on reading lights

How do you award prizes?

Many people don't have time to read a certain number of books in order to win prizes; the more rules there are, the less likely it is they will be able to stick with it.

Keep it simple: Some libraries have discovered it is best to abandon minimum reading requirements in favour of a random drawing system. That way, even the person who reads only one book has a chance at winning. Customers who read more increase their odds of winning something because they have more entries in the random drawings.

Encourage all kinds of participation: Participants could also be encouraged to participate in other ways for which they would be entered in the prize drawing – e.g.:

- Submit reviews of books they're reading
- Submit comment cards about library programs or services
- Offer book purchase suggestions.

After all, we want their input to serve them better.

How do you know if you have been successful?

- You see increased usage of print collection, book-related databases, and interlibrary loan services.
- Attendance at programs is high: there is positive feedback and demand for similar programs.

6 - Outreach and partnerships

Public libraries enter into many arrangements with outside organizations. The scope and nature of these relationships can vary depending on the needs of both sides.

Below, we will outline what outreach and partnerships are, and offer suggestions for possible directions for these initiatives. Depending on your own unique situation, what you may consider a small outreach activity, others might view as a major partnership. Since outreach ideas tend to develop into more lasting partnerships, there may be no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins.

Why should you develop outreach activities or partnerships?

The general public often does not fully grasp the wide variety of things a library can do for them. The idea that library staff can recommend books and help readers discover new areas of interest is relatively unknown outside the library walls. There are so many things that we are doing in libraries that most people are unaware of. Outreach activities and partnerships can shine a light on otherwise unknown services and resources, and thus expose your library to an untapped customer base.

What is outreach?

Outreach activities are often smaller, less formal arrangements in which the library provides a one-sided service, with little or no reciprocation. These can be isolated events or a more regular arrangement. Outreach can be any initiative or program that aims to expand the reach of library services to locations and events outside the library walls, taking advantage of opportunities to consult with users in multiple settings.

When examined in relation to readers' advisory, outreach can involve: promotion of your services and resources at local events; attendance at community meetings; participation in public exhibits; reading-related initiatives such as book discussion groups, booktalks, and genre studies presented at other locations; and even establishing deposit collections or regular displays at community organizations, such as seniors' centres or local businesses.

More detailed examples will be provided below.

What are partnerships?

Partnerships can take years to develop, and involve many levels of staff, including administration, the library foundation, board members, and marketing and branch staff. Both parties must have confidence that their reputation will be enhanced by the partnership.

Most partnerships will develop from your outreach activities. Once you learn what organizations are out there and which ones are interested in benefiting from your resources and services, some may emerge as more than just venues for outreach activities, and may become more developed relationships. Partnerships can forge new alliances with organizations seeking to extend their profile and ally themselves with the library's reputation for excellence.

An effective partnership creates a library presence within corporations, organizations, and institutions, and exposes the employees and members of other organizations to the library's services and programs. In a time of reduced resources and rising expectations, partnerships assist with the sustainability of library programs, marketing, and promotions.

Partnerships can also provide the library with incentives that would otherwise be unaffordable, create new customers, reinvigorate programming, and create advocates.

How should you start?

You need to determine how much time you can devote to any outreach or partnership initiatives, and prioritize what you want to accomplish. Be realistic. You should set a goal to have a specific number of outreach activities each year (some recurring, some not), and evaluate them on a regular basis.

It would also be helpful to establish a staff team to help with the various stages of planning, coordination, and implementation of outreach or partnership initiatives. By having more than one person involved, you can gain different perspectives, and be able to develop a more well-rounded approach to your outreach.

What successful initiatives have you had in the past?

Your library likely already has established some outreach activity and partnerships. Determine if any existing partnerships your library has with outside organizations can be explored for new possibilities. Try to infuse every library event with a least some aspect of readers' advisory. For example, if there is a library display being organized at a mall or community event, get involved in the planning, and have staff on hand to do impromptu booktalks or give personalized reading suggestions. You could create a themed display and/or bring suggested reading lists based on popular topics or genres. If your library offers a homebound or mobile library service, this could be enhanced by an infusion of readers' advisory by way of personalized reading choices and booklists.

There is no need to re-invent the wheel. Use the framework that is already in place and build on it. You can test-drive new ideas in these early stages.

How do you identify new areas for outreach or partnerships?

- Look at different organizations and groups in your community, explore their websites, and think of ways in which you might be able to incorporate readers' advisory into what they already do.
- Become involved in your various community groups; become a regular presence there, taking time to find out what they need from you.
- Read the local paper and online community event boards to learn of upcoming events that you may be able to take part in.
- Talk to your colleagues and learn what groups they may be aware of, or members of that might have an interest in your services.

You may need to adapt your traditional methods to fit the needs of the particular group or event. For example, in setting up a reading group at a seniors' centre, you need to

consider that some members may need books in alternate formats. If you are creating suggested reading lists for a more tech-savvy demographic, such as students, be sure to note if the books are available in electronic format.

Determine what kind of services you might be able to offer, and identify groups or venues where these might be possible.

We need to see each segment of the community we serve as a potential ally, and the better we serve them, the better an ally they will be.

There's nothing like meeting people's needs before they even know they have them to make them realize that librarians are the go-to people for information.

What kinds of organizations could you target?

There are definitely some tried and true organizations, some of which are listed here as potential places to start. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity and staff time. Readers are lurking everywhere!

- Health centres/nursing homes
- Shopping centres
- Local businesses, Chambers of Commerce
- Cultural centres and events
- Arts organizations
- Educational institutions
- Group homes/correctional facilities
- Book stores
- Other libraries

What are some examples of outreach and partnerships?

Below, you will find examples of outreach and partnership ideas that might work well with these types of organizations. There are always creative ways in which you could adapt these ideas to suit your own needs.

There will certainly be some activities or initiatives that could be adapted to almost any type of outreach or partnership, e.g.:

- Tailored booklists
- Book displays
- Book discussion groups
- Genre studies/booktalks
- Library programs or services offered at remote locations
- Cross-promotion

Health centres and nursing homes

Outreach opportunities:

- Prepare displays of books and booklists on popular themes.
- Suggest “escape” reading for those who are dealing with illnesses.
- Share book donations to create mini libraries, deposit collections.

- Prepare personalized booklists for long-term residents or members.

Partnership opportunities:

- Arrange for library staff to use the facility's space to lead book clubs attended by residents/members. Hold an "open" book chat or a "library day" rather than having everyone read the same book.
- Present genre studies.
- Start an audiobook group, in which customers share a listening experience and then library staff lead a discussion about this.

Shopping centres, local businesses

Outreach opportunities:

- Be a part of street festivals, holiday shopping, and customer appreciation days by handing out promotional materials and booklists.

Partnership opportunities:

- Coordinate regular programs at these locations, establish a presence.
- Offer discounts to library card holders.
- Cross-promote events.
- Offer sponsorship of library events.

Cultural centres and events

Outreach opportunities:

- Take part in events, providing information about resources offered in the library.
- Create displays and booklists catered to group interests.

Partnership opportunities:

- Facilitate book clubs focusing on authors from different cultures and, if possible, in other languages.
- Hold focus groups to determine how the library could better serve cultural groups.

Arts organizations (e.g. galleries/museums, the symphony, botanical gardens)

Outreach opportunities:

- Attend events to increase your visibility.
- Have staff serve on advisory committees.

Partnership opportunities:

- Creating a lecture series with a museum can open the possibility for book clubs to be held at the museum.
- Establish deposit collections on selected topics.
- Share weeded or donated materials about topics relating to that group.
- Cross-promote events by:
 - sharing display materials, such as posters.
 - linking between websites.
 - social networking – posting updates about events.

Educational institutions

Outreach opportunities:

- Attend school orientation days; create information packets about library services that highlight the cost savings of borrowing books, magazines, music, and films.
- Create displays, shelf talkers, and booklists that appeal directly to campus trends and social events.

Partnership opportunities:

- Develop a “get carded” program with schools, i.e. increase membership by registering students remotely.
- Work with schools to supplement class reading lists and promote databases.
- Cross-promote reading-related events by:
 - sharing display materials, such as posters
 - linking between websites
 - social networking – posting updates about events

Group homes/correctional facilities

Outreach opportunities:

- Prepare displays and booklists catered to group interests.
- Offer book discussion groups.
- Offer booktalks/genre studies.

Partnership opportunities:

- Establish deposit collections – share donated and weeded materials.

Book stores

Outreach opportunities:

- Create shelf talkers and booklists featuring library staff recommendations.
- Attend reading-related events, author visits.

Partnership opportunities:

- Offer discounts at the store for people with library cards.
- Organize joint book clubs, in which people buy or borrow book titles and meet in either or both spaces to discuss them. This could be led jointly or alternately by bookstore and library staff. You could share resources, such as discussion questions and read-alike lists.
- Cross-promote reading-related events by:
 - sharing display materials, such as posters
 - linking between websites
 - social networking – posting updates about events

Other Libraries

Outreach opportunities:

- Share RA training opportunities. When a speaker or session is booked, ask other systems if they wish to attend, in order to save money.

- Share RA resources, e.g.: booklists, genre studies

Partnership opportunities:

- Develop a region-wide One Book program
- Pool funds and resources to bring in popular authors/speakers
- Practice reciprocal borrowing
- Use jointly developed RA resources
- Cross-promote events

How and when do you make contact?

Direct correspondence to a particular person is always most effective. Often, sending out a standard form letter or email will get you nowhere. If you can determine to whom it is best to address the inquiry, you will get a lot further.

To obtain this information, try to network at community events, and explore the organization’s website, if they have one, to learn more about them and other events they have been involved in. You can always contact the organization by phone and ask if they have anyone who is in charge of developing programs, or who would be interested in discussing further involvement with the library.

How do you explain what you can do for organizations?

Develop a short proposal, outlining some services that your library can offer. Don't use library lingo – keep it generic and easy to understand. For some organizations, this may be as simple as creating suggested reading lists or themed displays for their special events. For others, it may involve offering a recurring program, such as a book discussion group in a community centre, or establishing a service, such as a deposit collection in a seniors’ centre.

Remember that not everyone will be interested in what you have to offer. Some may be too busy to consider taking on new initiatives, or just cannot see the benefit of the library being involved in their organization. Don’t be pushy, just thank them for their time and be sure to tell them to contact you in the future if they change their minds.

What are the outcomes for the community organizations?

Remind organizations that outreach initiatives and partnerships can be mentioned on the library website and in any promotional materials, which results in increased exposure for their organization.

Organizations could also expand interest in their own services by offering the “value-added” service that libraries can provide with their outreach programs and displays.

What are the outcomes for the library?

The benefits of making your services more visible are incalculable. By reaching out to the wider community, you could:

- Entice potential library users who now rely on other resources for reading guidance.

- Build relationships with outside groups and gain ideas for potential partnerships.
- Discover new directions for library programs and collections.
- Generate buzz and gain word-of-mouth publicity.
- Increase usage of library services in general.

How do you know if you have been successful?

You receive positive feedback from your community partners and are asked to participate in future projects.

Other community organizations approach you wanting to be involved with the library, having seen what you have done with other partners.

Customers report hearing about your library and its services as a result of the partnership.

7 - Traditional media

Why use media as a readers' advisory tool?

Media is a fast and far-reaching way to promote both your collections and your reader services. Effective use of media requires extensive knowledge of what your readers and your community want. Readers need to narrow their choices; media allows you to do that by focusing on specific titles, services, or tools that will help readers isolate their choices.

What is media?

Traditional media can be categorized into three broad areas: newspapers, radio, and television. You will have to do tremendous leg work in order to organize a comprehensive approach to the media in your area.

How do you approach media outlets?

It's as easy as picking up the phone or going for a visit. Don't give up; you will get in touch with the correct person eventually. If you have read the newspaper, listened to the radio, or watched the television station, you should have a pretty good idea of the type of promotional concept that will best "fit" with the outlet. The first challenge is to convince the outlet why they need your promotion. You know you need it, but why do they? Will it attract them readers, listeners, or viewers? You will want to clarify your expectations and theirs. Be flexible, present them with ideas, but let the outlet have some control over the final product.

Work with the outlet to make sure that you continue to meet their needs, not just that they meet yours. They need to be able to see tangible results from your contribution. The outlet also has to be convinced that you are not going to cause them more work than you are worth.

Print, audio and video clips that you have created for traditional media should be linked to your website. Your overall marketing plan should be co-ordinated to include archiving of all media promotions. This should be done for two reasons:

- So the public can access your promotion at their leisure
- So that your staff has a reference point when a customer requests something they have heard about through traditional media

Who can participate?

Media promotion takes time, interest, and assessment skills. For media initiatives to succeed there has to be constant readjustment. The responsibility can be divided between people who have an aptitude for writing, or good radio voices, or a solid television presence, but solicit contributions about subject matter from everyone at the library.

How is this done?

Someone needs to take overall responsibility for each media stream. Competing media outlets probably do not want to promote the same thing. Each outlet will probably require a different concept. One might want to feature a book of the week; another might want articles about services or events. Once there is a concept, then content and ideas can be contributed by everyone at the library and funnelled through the person who has taken the lead. Make sure that every staff member is kept apprised of what is being promoted so that they are prepared for the inevitable demands for the book, service, or tool.

How do you know what to promote?

It may seem arbitrary, but the following are some places to start when promoting books:

- Books that have been nominated for, or won, awards
- Oprah's picks
- Bestsellers
- Book programs: e.g. Canada Reads, One Book, One Community (OBOC), Ontario Library Association Evergreen Reading Award™ Program.
- Anything you personally liked and can be enthusiastic about
- New materials and collections that address trends
- Extremely popular new publications. Provide "if you likes" so readers have something offered while they wait for the popular reads. You need constantly to build trust, so if you know something will be delayed, give readers something else in the meantime.
- Items that have good reader, not just publisher, reviews

Make sure you have an ample supply of the title, and that there aren't already numerous holds on the book.

When promoting services, be sure that they are accessible to the users. For example if you are promoting a book club, make sure there is room for more members, or create a new book club to meet the volume of the demand.

If you are promoting a publication such as *What Do I Read Next*, keep it non-circulating and ideally have it available at all branches. You do not want to betray the trust of the public by promoting something that they have little chance of ever being able to use.

If you are promoting online tools such as *Novelist*, give clear directions about how to access the tool, and make sure that staff are trained to handle questions about its use.

How do we know it's working?

Keep track of public and staff feedback. Does there need to be format change? Is there feedback from the media outlet?

The people taking the lead have to keep the end result in mind. They should be prepared for constructive criticism, and be able to listen to, and apply, it. The leaders need to be confident and flexible enough to respond to the needs and suggestions of the media outlet involved.

Using media for promotion should not be confused with advertising. You are not paying for this; it is free promotion, and the media outlet is doing you a favour no matter how beneficial it becomes for them.

How do you know if you have been successful? What are the measurable outcomes?

- The media outlets you are associated with ask you for more material.
- The media outlets ask you to consider different ideas and expand your role with them.
- New media outlets approach you because of your success in other places.

8 - Indirect marketing

Displays

Why build displays in the library?

Displays are a quick and easy way to market your library's collection. A display is one of the most flexible marketing tools you can use: displays can work in a small or large space, and can incorporate various collections and formats in the library. They can be changed according to a schedule that works for you, and feature a variety of themes relevant to your library's customers.

What should I know before building my first display?

Library displays usually have a theme or guiding objective. A theme could be a holiday season, a local event in the community, or a popular reading topic. An objective could be "to promote older fiction titles that are 'unjustly dusty,'" or "to educate library customers about our new adult literacy collection." Before beginning a display, you should consider your objective, your theme, the space available, and the items you wish to incorporate into the display.

How do I build a visually appealing display?

It might seem that some people just have an "eye" for these things, but here are some concrete tricks that can help anyone build a great library display. First of all, you might want to keep in mind the principles of visual merchandizing:

- Unity: everything ties together; sense of "oneness"
- Harmony: the items included in the display are associated with one another
- Focal point: there is a dominant feature or several dominant items in the display
- Proportion: sizes of items on display relate to one another

While a cluttered display might have appeal in a unique situation, a general rule for an effective visual display is that "less is more." Try to anticipate where a customer's eye will be drawn in a display. Consider grouping items by the colours in their cover art; while this sounds superficial, it's eye-catching for customers.

To prop or not to prop?

You might also want to integrate props into your display, but at the risk of another pun, a good rule of thumb is that a strong display doesn't need to be propped up by props. It's easy to get carried away with using props, and they can often make a display seem cluttered, or more suitable for a children's department. Props can also tie your hands, in that they might restrict the focus of your display, or restrict audience interest. If you do integrate props, ensure they are relevant, clean, and add something to the display. Try consulting with community partners, local hobbyists, or museums for some ideas for unique and tasteful props that can be integrated into your display (e.g. local theatre costumes, musical instruments, etc.).

Where should I put up a display?

The better question might be, where not? Most libraries have at least one clear shelf top or table that can be used for a regular display space; consistently using the same location(s) will help customers recognise the space as display space, and will help encourage them to look for new displays regularly. You can also use display cabinets, bulletin boards (with scanned book covers), slat walls on shelf ends or walls, or even a foot of empty space at the end of each row of books in the stacks. To a certain extent, the location of your display will affect its arrangement. For example, a display intended to be seen from the street through a window should look considerably different (i.e. larger, more colourful) than a display to be seen from several metres away in a children's department.

What are the cardinal sins of visual display?

A stagnant, cluttered, or disorganised display is unappealing, and will have the opposite effect on library customers, driving them away instead of drawing them in. Try to change your displays fairly regularly. Be aware of your customers' habits: do they visit the area where the display is located daily, weekly, or only on checkout (e.g. every three weeks)? This will give you clues about how often a display should be changed. Visual merchandisers call this "the diaper principle:" keep it fresh!

How should I identify the theme or objective of my display?

Many visual display experts believe that the theme of a display should be obvious to a customer without signage; use of signage for displays is at your library's discretion. If you do use a sign, be aware of the marketing world's Rule of Five: five lines, five seconds, five words. Try to be as succinct as possible.

Our library has been doing displays for a while now. What new things can we try to liven things up?

Why not consider involving your customers in your display? Solicit recommendations, and then build a display based on these; or encourage people to add items to an ongoing "X Library's Customers Recommends" display.

Shelf talkers

What are shelf talkers?

Shelf talkers are short, personalized, individual title recommendations located in the library stacks, often handwritten on index cards or post-it sized cards. Shelf talkers highlight both new and old titles in your library's collection, and are signed by an individual library staff member.

Why should I use shelf talkers?

Shelf talkers are a great way to reach browsing customers who are out in the stacks and potentially out-of-sight of a helpful library employee. They are an eye-catching, immediately recognisable tool used by retail, and therefore already familiar to some library customers. Shelf talkers are also reasonably low-maintenance: they are quick to write and easy to put up. Finally, since shelf talkers can be written for anything in your

library's collection, they, like many other indirect marketing techniques, can help generate interest in (and increase the circulation of) your library's older titles.

How long should a shelf talker be?

We've found that somewhere around 30 words is ideal, but it will depend on your handwriting and the space available.

What should I include in my shelf talker?

A one-sentence description of the book is a good start. Be sure to include read-alikes for the title, any awards it has won, a personal note (was it your favourite book as a child?), or a great review, etc. Imagine the audience you are writing for: what would grab their attention? You should also always include your name: customers will respond to a personal message. Building a connection with your customers is one of the most important activities in any indirect marketing technique. As a side note, when using employee's names in marketing (on shelf talkers, lists, or the website), be consistent across platforms with the format of the name (e.g. refer to everyone by *firstname_Library*, or use your library's abbreviated name). This way, your customers can find you wherever you are.

I am trying shelf talkers in my library. What else can I do to promote them?

You could order extra copies (i.e. three or four) of some titles to highlight them, with a mini-display in the stacks (face-out). You could also put a sample shelf talker on your library bulletin board and/or in a display case, and write a note telling customers to look for shelf talkers throughout the library. Invite your local community newspaper to include an article about your branch's new shelf talkers.

How often should I replace shelf talkers?

We recommend that you replace your shelf talkers with new ones every two or three months. Take down the old ones when you make up new ones – but you may want to keep the old ones for future reference.

Booklists

What is a booklist?

A booklist is usually a list of titles in your library's collection about a certain theme, or related to a certain interest. As readers' advisors, our booklists should take some risks, and offer some review of the content included in them. In other words, a booklist should draw together items that are linked beyond subject headings or call number areas. A booklist should be value-added, and include staff-written summaries of the titles included. A booklist could also incorporate whole collection readers' advisory, including titles from other non-book collections.

How should I arrange a booklist and what should I include in it?

There is no set format: you can use Word processing templates to create a bookmark, tri-fold brochure, flyer, or "rave card" style of document. Beyond the basics (title, author,

call number and a summary of each item on the list), you could include cover art, clipart or photographs (Microsoft's Design Gallery Live, <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/>, and Stock.xchng, <http://www.sxc.hu/>, are highly recommended), quotations from books, links to author websites, or relevant library databases – the sky is the limit! Be sure also to include your library's name, logo, and the date the booklist was published.

What do I do with our library's old booklists?

You might want to store these lists (either online, in a shared staff directory or wiki, or in paper format) for future reference, by staff and/or customers. Some lists will “age” well and can be updated by employees at a later date; others will fall out of fashion and may not be useful in the future.

Staff picks

What are staff picks?

Staff picks are selections of books made by library employees. Staff picks, excluding shelf talkers (which are a form of staff picks as well) can take many forms, including booklists or displays. Staff picks differ from a regular booklist or display, however, in that they do not have any theme linking them other than the fact that they are recommended by staff. Why not think of staff picks this way: instead of promoting a season, a hobby, or a genre, you are promoting yourself, your colleagues, and the connections you make with your library customers! Staff picks should always include the name of the employee recommending a particular item. They could also include a short review or personal message written by the employee, and/or a photograph of the employee.

Who should choose staff picks?

Consider involving all levels of staff in a “staff picks” project. This encourages a culture of reading in the workplace, and also motivates employees to make a creative contribution to their workplace, regardless of their job title. In larger libraries, you will want to designate a project lead for staff picks, so employees know who to contact regarding the initiative.

What can we do with our staff picks?

You can publish them: on a bulletin board, in the stacks, in a staff display, in a booklist or bookmark, in the community newspaper, or on the library's website. You might even put them on your employee name tags, or beside a photo of each staff member.

How do you know if you have been successful?

You may want to use circulation data to track the success of indirect marketing (taking note of circulation averages and exact numbers per title before, during and after an indirect marketing campaign). You can also save comments received from patrons about displays, shelf talkers, and staff picks for inclusion in your monthly or quarterly reports. Some other simple visual cues (titles that need to be re-shelved frequently, or booklists that need to be replenished regularly) are also worth noting as a sign of success.

Appendix B: Bibliography and learning resources

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