



THE USER EXPERIENCE

Earning Trust

By Aaron Schmidt

EARNING THE TRUST OF YOUR library members is crucial to delivering a great user experience. Without trust, it is impossible to connect to library members in a meaningful way.

Libraries benefit in all sorts of ways when they're trusted institutions. Trust breeds loyalty, and loyal library users are more likely to take advantage of the library. What's more, loyal patrons will also be more apt to sing the praises of the library to neighbors and colleagues. For libraries, thinking about trust highlights the importance of recognizing members as individuals. Thinking of users not as a homogenous group but rather as persons will allow your library staff to develop more empathy and build stronger relationships.

There are many ways to earn—and lose—people's trust in a library. Let's take a look at a few:

Face-to-face customer service

As we are social creatures, the human interactions that happen inside of our buildings are often a make-or-break aspect of building trust. In fact, customer service is so tightly linked to trust and the overall user experience (UX), it is often the only aspect of UX that librarians consider. Genuinely friendly and helpful interactions lead people to accomplishing their goals, demonstrate respect, and tell people, "Yes, we really do care about you as a person." Poor customer service usually diminishes even the most desirable services.

Customer service also involves follow-through. Libraries must do what they say they're going to do. This applies both to small- and large-scale claims. On the granular level, it is important that librarians carry out the tasks they promise members; reserving an item or phoning them with the answer to a reference question, for instance. On a broader level, libraries need to back up the big claims often found in mission

statements. Things like "improve the quality of life for all citizens" and "provide access to the world of social and cultural ideas" can only be demonstrated through action. Simply pasting some nice words onto a web page won't cut it. Show, don't tell.

Showing your personality

It is easier to relate to a group of people than it is to a building. I've worked with a lot of libraries' staffs over the years, and I don't think I've met a single group that didn't have at least a strong contingent of enthusiastic and fun employees. Let-

is an important way to earn their trust. Would your library be a different place if you started thinking of it as an organization that works with members to accomplish goals?

Websites

The content on your website, what people can accomplish using it, and its visual design all impact the level of trust people place both in the site and in your institution as a whole. A website with outdated information or poor legibility raises a red flag and leads people to believe the site is sloppy or ineffectual.

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ting librarians' personalities show makes it easier for individuals to relate to—and therefore trust—the library.

There are plenty of opportunities for this: displays, events, contributions in newsletters, emails, and on the web, among others. Have some fun, be yourself, and ensure that your library's brand makes it apparent that it is an organization filled with people. Remember, being fun and engaging folks doesn't necessarily mean you're dumbing the library down. Only people who take themselves too seriously think that way!

Making people successful

A great way to earn loyalty is to help patrons to be successful. When it is apparent that the library has their best interests at heart, people are likely to use the library more—and advocate for it. Remember, people's actions in a library don't exist in a vacuum. When they check out a DVD, they're hoping to be entertained. When they ask a reference question, they probably have a goal they're hoping to attain. Even if that goal is a barroom bet (maybe especially so!), helping people to reach their ends

Honesty

In "The Transparent Library: Living Out Loud" (*LJ* 6/1/07, p. 34), Michael Stephens and Michael Casey illustrate how transparent libraries set themselves up to build long-lasting relationships.

"Transparency and arrogance are like oil and water—the two simply don't mix. This is a very good reason for encouraging transparency in any organization. It's very difficult for a transparent library to lie and shy away from the truth...."

If a library isn't honest with its members, it is unlikely that a trusting relationship will form. Making it known why your organization makes the decisions it does and being forthright when it makes mistakes are effective ways to humanize your library. Engaging patrons with participatory design methods and involving them in the planning process take this idea further. The more deliberate the transparency, the better the result.

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