VISUAL MERCHANDISING
IN THE LIBRARY

Training & Merchandising Strategies
for Public & School Library Staff

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for Massachusetts Library System
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What does merchandising mean?

- Making displays
- Turning my library into a grocery store
- Promoting reading
- Other, which I will enter into the chat box

How are books like wine?

Photos of Dandelion Wine (Greenpoint, Brooklyn)
http://dandelionwineshop.tumblr.com/
Our mission, today:

- Identify a few simple merchandising tricks that will enhance the effectiveness of any book display;
- Begin creating a set of merchandising guidelines for your library that will keep displays and shelves looking approachable and browsable; and
- Begin thinking about training your colleagues and staff on how to use these merchandising principles.

Why merchandising?

- To listen to what our statistics (and patrons) tell us
  - Do you know how many RA interactions you have?
  - How does that compare to overall circulation?
- To broaden the spectrum of RA skills at our disposal
  - Merchandising is an important part of passive/silent RA
  - New employees can contribute to RA even while being trained on other skills
- To keep books at the forefront of our libraries, visually and otherwise

Why patrons love it:

“I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the ever-changing variety of books on display. I love to read but I also have two young children and work full-time. Needless to say, I don’t have a lot of time to research what I want to read before coming to the library or casually peruse the shelves like I did back in the day… I look forward to catching a glimpse of what is on display and the recommendations make it easy to find a new selection. This is my reward for buckling down to work for a couple of hours before I rush home to the kids!”

Email from a patron, July 2014
What's merchandising?

Merchandising is everything you do to promote your collections to patrons even when you’re not there.

Merchandising vs. displays

- Display:
  - Often themed
  - Placed in high-traffic areas
  - Often require preparation and explanation
- Merchandising:
  - More general
  - Set of guidelines that make materials easier to browse
  - Can be deployed quickly and with almost any material

Part 1:

Identify a few simple merchandising tricks that will enhance the effectiveness of any book display.
Traditional library displays

Starting at top left: displays at Lawrence Public Library, Seattle Public Library, and Mid-Hudson Library System.

Displays don't just have to focus on topics—here's another approach from Fairfield Public Library.

Great displays from Jesse Henning

http://www.jessehenning.com/displays/
Other library display ideas

- Schaumburg Library presentation: Leading Readers to Water…Guerilla Marketing for RA
  - [http://schaumburglibrary.org/ala/leading-readers.pdf](http://schaumburglibrary.org/ala/leading-readers.pdf)
- Library Display Bonanza!
- Flickr book displays
  - [https://www.flickr.com/groups/bookdisplays/](https://www.flickr.com/groups/bookdisplays/)
- And of course…good ol’ Pinterest

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**Step 1:** Decide your library display should be updated.
- "I put up the Valentine’s Day display on February 13. It is now March 5."

**Step 2:** Brainstorm a new, fancy library display on something topical / socially relevant!
- "What holidays are in March? St. Patrick’s Day is in the middle…Let’s just do National Maritime Month. More time to update."

**Step 3:** Create a beautiful display.
- "When are the hand-olds because I hurt myself cutting little kines and snap pass out of green construction paper."

**Step 4:** Admire your work. You’re representing this now!
- "I need Cherie. This display does not apply to me."

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“Expectation vs. reality”

– That Blonde Librarian (ThatBlondeLibrarian.tumblr.com)

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What can be hard about displays?

- Finding new topics regularly
- Picking relevant topics that can be represented by the collection
- Patrons might not understand a display
- Hard to find topics that reach a wide number of patrons
- Can be time-consuming to create and keep up
Part 2:

Begin creating a set of merchandising guidelines for your library that will keep displays and shelves looking approachable and browsable.

Five laws of library merchandising:

1. Love your choices.
2. Keep books visible.
3. Keep it current.
4. Respect the readers’ time (and knees).
5. Keep it consistent.

1. Love your choices.

- The cornerstone of merchandising is books that you love. (And for balance, a few you can’t stand.)

- Set up a great RA conversation:
  - “Hey, have you read this? Is it any good?”
  - “What’s good on this table?”
Love like nobody’s watching:

Shelf-talkers at Darien Library and Seattle Public Library

2. Keep books visible.

- EASELS! EASELS! EASELS! EASELS! EASELS!
- Let the covers do the work wherever you can.
- Use multiples and height to create table displays.
- Face books out in blank spaces.
The power of visibility:

“Turning a book face out is an act of tremendous power...You can also show a little love to an obscure mid-list paperback you just discovered suffocating between two behemoth hardcovers--simply because it feels like the right thing to do...You can't save every life. You can't save every book. But you can at least throw lifelines now and then.”

Susan Coll, Politics & Prose Bookstore

What's more beautiful than a good cover?

Creating height on tables
3. Keep it current.

- Be ready to serve patrons who come to the library regularly to learn about the newest books.
- But remember, current is not just Tuesday’s releases!
- And sometimes books leave the field for awhile and come back.
  - Keep an eye for books like these in your regular reading, watching, and listening.

“I’ve always wanted to read that book...”

- Keep an eye on holds lists.
- Movies, TV, Bill Gates—anything can make an old book new again, so keep an eye on:
  - The Reader’s Advisor Online: [http://www.readersadvisoronline.com/](http://www.readersadvisoronline.com/)
Seattle Public Library knows this:

4. Respect the readers’ time (and knees).
   - Keep books as visible and high as possible.
   - Use easels.
   - Always have a few easy focal points in a display.
   - Don’t crowd a display.
   - Keep signs simple and visible.
     - Few words, large type, dark text
     - If possible, create a template

Easels, again!

Unimportant:
- Color
- Size
- Shape
- Import:

Having more easels than you think you need
Grab and go

End of shelf faceouts at Darien Library

Books right at hand at Elliott Bay Books

Be careful (or have fun with) signs

5. Keep it consistent (straightening).

1. Pull for displays and faceouts.
2. Shift shelves if necessary.
3. Flush front.
The life-changing magic of...

5. Keep it consistent.

- Make sure there's a little bit of everything on a display of new books.
  - Work with staff to make sure they understand why this is important!
- Make sure themes are recognizable, and broad enough that any staff member can stock it.
- If a display can't be understood without a sign—reconsider!

Consistent displays can still pop
Thinking about training your colleagues and staff on how to use these merchandising principles.

What will your colleagues think?
- With open arms
- With confusion
- With anger
- With wariness
- With something else, which I'll enter in the chat box

How to implement in your library
- Find statistics to support why it's necessary.
- Inventory your display spaces.
- Introduce the standards and rules of thumb that work for you:
  - What does "current" mean to your patrons?
  - What level of straightened should you strive for?
  - What are your collection's strengths? Weaknesses?
Training ideas

- When you can, go hands-on!
  - Work with an actual display space and real books
- Get support from administration and a few key staff members who will be working with displays.
- Make decisions as a group.
- Pick a few key elements—don’t try all at once.
- Make time in your day, every day.

If you remember nothing else:

- Simple tricks for merchandising:
  - Flush front, use easels, add height
  - Let the book covers work their magic!
- Guidelines for your library:
  - Where do you display? What? Why?
- Training your colleagues and staff:
  - Explain why it’s necessary, work hands-on
  - Make time everyday

Further reading

For more background

- *Why We Buy: The Science of Desire* by Paco Underhill

For more guidelines to consider

- *Merchandising Guidelines* by *The National Retail Federation*
Contact me!

- Feel free to follow up with any questions, disagreements, pictures, or thoughts:
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