

'Know your customer'

Improving the customer experience at the University of Manchester Library

The brief

Whilst developing their new strategic plan (following the introduction of a new University strategy) the University of Manchester Library commissioned Alterline to help them gain a better understanding of who their customers are and how they are using Library services. Taking a project-based approach, the Library strategy covers a range of topics including physical space, digital services, PhD researchers and course reading. The research explored students behaviour, perceptions and experiences, to help the Library prioritise action and shape future direction.

"The Alterline team delivered an innovative approach to our brief. They took the time to get to know us and delivered everything in a way we could understand and respond to."

Penny Hicks
Head of Strategic Marketing & Communications
The University of Manchester Library

The Project**Review of existing research**

Alterline reviewed existing Library research, including data from NSS, Libqual, exit surveys and mystery shops to inform the project and avoid duplication.

Collaborative workshop

A collaborative workshop, bringing together Library managers, frontline staff and students, explored the current situation and future aspirations.

Quantitative survey

A quantitative survey captured the views, experiences and perceptions of a range of customers and was distributed via Library and wider University marketing channels.

Focus groups

Focus groups explored emerging themes from the survey in more depth. Groups were run with regular Library customers and also students who had never set foot in the Library.

"The robust quant, eye-opening video, and focus groups, together with professional guidance and analyses provided us with convincing evidence to drive improvements for our students including immediate tactical actions and longer-term strategic changes."

Penny Hicks
Head of Strategic Marketing & Communications
The University of Manchester Library

Video ethnography

As part of the project, the Library wanted to understand the physical customer journey and the way students use different Library spaces.

Ethnographic observation

We used ethnographic observation and informal interviews across different Library sites to develop a touchpoint and customer motivation map.

Collaborative results workshop

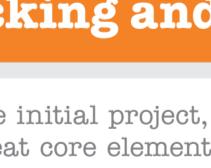
The second workshop brought together the Library's strategy project groups to hear the results of the research and began to unpick what the findings meant for their projects.

Video journeys

Using the touchpoint and journey map as a guide, we intercepted students when entering the Library and observed their Library experiences and behaviours, capturing this on video.

Report & recommendations

The findings were written up into a full report, including video clips from the ethnography to bring the journey to life.



A 'retail-host model' of on-site support is being implemented, with staff roaming the Library proactively helping customers.



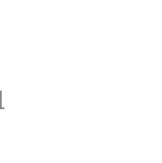
Another initiative will see the online 'Library Chat' support service embedded across the website.

Improving the customer journey

As a result of the ethnography in particular, key barriers to the customer journey were identified and action has been taken.

Driving the strategy projects

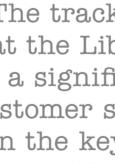
The research is being used to drive the Library strategy projects forward; putting customer perceptions and experiences at the heart of this change. The work is feeding into improvements in areas such as these:



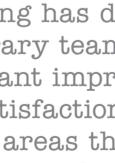
Physical building



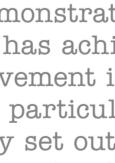
Digital offer



Course reading packages



Enquiries process



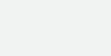
PhD research support

and much more

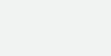


Twelve months on from the start of the initial project, the Library commissioned Alterline to repeat core elements of the research to measure progress.

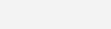
The process involved:

**Online and street survey**

A trimmed-down online and street survey to track key quantitative performance indicators

**Focus groups**

Focus groups to capture students' views on where improvements had or had not been made

**Mystery shopping**

Mystery shops to test key areas of the customer journey which had been identified as in need of intervention

Customer experiences have improved

The tracking has demonstrated that the Library team has achieved a significant improvement in customer satisfaction, particularly in the key areas they set out to tackle – a real example of 'research into action'.