

'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.

Street team

To help ensure we weren't just speaking to regular Library customers, a street team from Alterline interviewed 500 people across campus using the same questionnaire.





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.



Video ethnography

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



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.



Report & recommendations

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

"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



Ethnographic observation

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



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.

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.



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.

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

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