

'Unlocking the potential of The John Rylands Library'

Visitor perceptions and experiences

The brief

The John Rylands Library is an important part of the University of Manchester Library's portfolio bringing together unique collections, a research institute, study space and a visitor attraction all under one roof.

The Library's strategy for John Rylands is to make the collections housed there as accessible as possible – both to the scholarly community and the wider public. The attraction has been successful in recent years with visitor numbers increasing. However the team were keen to understand much more about visitors' motivations and experiences and use this evidence to re-focus future strategic direction around visitors' relationship and interaction with their rich and unique collections. Alterline were commissioned to support the development of this new strategy, through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research.



About The John Rylands Library

The John Rylands Library forms part of The University of Manchester Library and contains some of the country's most significant printed books and manuscripts alongside archive collections and visual resources documenting a wealth of cultural, literary, historical and religious traditions from around the world.

Together these rich resources form a research library of global significance, the majority of which is housed in the neo-gothic splendour of The John Rylands Library, one of Manchester's finest public buildings. The building is a much-visited, free public attraction in Manchester city centre.

The Project

Collaborative workshop

An interactive workshop brought together staff from the collections, public engagement and marketing teams to explore the opportunities ahead and inform the design of the research.

Quantitative visitor survey

An online quantitative questionnaire captured evidence about the motivations, perceptions and experiences of visitors, students and researchers.

Street team

Our team surveyed visitors face-to-face to broaden the online sample. We also took our video camera and captured vox-pops to bring the findings to life.



Focus groups

Focus groups (with visitors and non-visitors) explored emerging themes from the quantitative surveys in more depth.



Analysis & reporting

The detailed report identified the key issues and themes for the Library in a manner that made them directly applicable to the formulation of a new strategy.



The findings

Amongst the many research findings identified were:



People love John Rylands

Existing visitors are extremely positive about the Library and the experience; the team are building on strong foundations and a passionate existing customer base.



Learn, explore and be inspired

Visitors want to come away from the Library having learned something new each time. They want the experience to allow them to explore, be curious and feel



Interaction and storytelling

Visitors want to interact more with the collections; this is partly a desire to handle them, but also to connect more with the stories behind the objects.

The action



Collaborative workshop

The Library team came back together to hear the findings from the research and to begin to unpick what they meant for the strategy in an action-packed workshop.

Strategy

The Library team are now developing the strategy based on the research findings that will guide their decision-making and key projects for the next few years.

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