

Merchandising the Collection from the Small Branch Perspective

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Merchandising does move books! I learned about this concept at a Cumberland County Public Library staff training session in the spring of 1983. The program was informative, and displays were set up to reinforce the information presented. I was encouraged to select any of the materials used in the displays. These items included posters, wooden cubes, record covers, and boxes of various shapes and sizes.

Later that afternoon, I delivered the display materials I had chosen for my branch. My car looked like an early Christmas promotion with the brightly colored boxes and posters in the back seat. Once inside the library I was anxious to try my creativity with the displays. Time flew by as I spent the entire afternoon assembling the exhibits. Being creative did not seem like work.

I set up my first display on the floor in the juvenile section under the window. I used several boxes of different shapes and sizes, covering them with muted tones of different colored wallpaper. I put new fiction and popular paperbacks on and around this cubicle of boxes. This lay-out looked very appealing. But I *was* curious to see how long it would hold up under the three- to five-year-old inspection teams. Much to my surprise and delight, this display was never knocked down. I used this particular display for at least twelve months. The only thing that ever needed replacing was books!

My merchandising ideas overflowed into the juvenile section with another display. I used paperback dumps from a local book store on which I stapled a large cardboard poster of Judy Blume. After removing some of the dividing sections from the top, I displayed hardback Judy Blume books and paperbacks in the remaining slots. This display is currently being used and has often answered the inquiries as to the location of the Judy Blume books. Merchandising is truly effective in this area.

In the following weeks, I expanded on my ideas for the juvenile section with a small red bookcase placed at an eye-catching angle. Choose

Your Own Adventure, *Return of the Jedi* and Beverly Cleary paperbacks were displayed on the shelves. On top of the bookcase, I put new juvenile fiction and a large shallow basket, which held the *Charlie Brown* and *Heathcliff* cartoon soft copies. To complete the scene, a Raggedy Ann doll with legs crossed, reading a Beatrix Potter book, occupied the window sill nearby. Raggedy Ann has not had a chance to finish the book yet as it is so often borrowed by patrons.

The success of one particular display was aided by a friendly ghost. I constructed the ghost using a balloon for the head and a scrap piece of sheeting for the body. The ghost was suspended from the ceiling with fishing line. Black adhesive letters spelling "Ghost Stories" were stuck on the front of the ghost. Ghost stories, fiction and non-



Sea adventure or pirate books are displayed on both sides of a metal ship in the J 900 section.

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fiction, juvenile and adult, were placed on a display underneath the ghost. Books had to be borrowed from the main library and other branches to keep this display filled. Ghost tales are so popular that this could be used any time of the year.

A seasonal idea was introduced at Easter using baskets and colored eggs. In a small basket, there were small plastic eggs and a small stuffed bunny. In a larger basket, I used various colors of "Leggs" eggs. Books about spring, rabbits, and Easter, both fiction and non-fiction, were set up next to the baskets.

Encouraging interest through the use of "eye-catching" materials makes a very effective promotion. Displaying fiction and non-fiction books on the top shelves has also proved successful. What really completes the appeal is the addition of other imaginative objects. For instance, a metal ship is placed over the J 900s. Sea adventure or pirate books are shown on both sides of the ship. Two puppet insects are also used along with a bright red plastic apple on some other shelving units. I have included an 8"x10" framed autumn scene on yet another shelf as well as a small framed clown picture to create a bright area. Last



The wooden spools that wire comes on are stacked to hold a lot of books.

February, I did a black history display. A commemorative tray of Martin Luther King added just the right touch to this exhibit.

One of the best ideas I have incorporated uses the wooden spools that wire comes on. They were a contribution from an electrical supply company. I used various sizes in stacks of three and four spools. Although I chose not to paint mine, the idea of doing so would be a worthy extra. These spools hold a lot of books! On occasion I drape the spools with some type of fabric. I have beige velour on one of mine. Red satin or velvet would be nice during the months of December through February. Green material could be used March to May.

The eye-catching materials in merchandising are enhanced with easy-to-read signs. Such signs are regularly displayed on the "Best Seller" shelf, the "Classics" shelf, the "Mystery" location, the "Family Saga" exhibit and the ever-popular "Historical Romance" area.

Realizing the significance of the location of displays to the overall effect of merchandising, my branch relocated the paperbacks. I moved the rack closer to the front entrance in order to encourage the interest of the arriving patron. I included categories on romance, western and war adventure, horror, science fiction, and mystery. One of the most favored racks is a small wire one placed next to the charge-out machine. This rack contains the newest and most attractive paperback copies.

The ideas presented here are some of the most successful at our library. The effectiveness of these ideas is confirmed by patrons. More than one has made the comment "Your books seem to say, 'Take Me!'" I am convinced. Merchandising moves books.



This eye-catching display highlights the historical romance section.