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Date:  February 8, 2011
User Community Profile

The Plumb Memorial Library mostly serves residents of Shelton, CT, both cardholders and non-cardholders alike. Specifically, it serves those who live in the downtown area or those who wish to do research. Other residents may opt to go to the library branch, which holds more popular works and less research material. Other possibilities of users include patrons visiting from out of town, commuters to Shelton, and local college students. According to Newman (2009), in 2008 the Shelton Library System's service population was over 40,000 people, which includes roughly 15,000 registered cardholders. Respondents to the library's annual survey (Shelton Library System, 2010b) were 77% female, 23% male, and had an average age of 49. According to the statistics in the year 2000 Fact Sheet (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), Shelton has about 38,000 residents who average at 40 years old, are 94% White, and of residents 25 years and over, about 87% have a high school diploma or better.

There is only one bookstore in Shelton. There are other places to buy new books such as the grocery store and a community playhouse, but no other bookstores. There are used bookstores nearby, but Written Words Bookstore is the local spot for new books. Even though the bookstore and the library are in the same town with the same statistics on residents, those do not necessarily reflect user statistics. It is open 67 hours a week, including nights and weekends (as compared to Plumb's 61 hours, closed on Sundays). It offers free coffee and gift wrapping. Most of the books are fresh from the press and sold at the price on the inside jacket. All of these factors, when put together, paint a picture for the kind of user community the bookstore is likely to have: customers with more time and money for leisure than those who buy books online from the convenience of home and for lower cost.

Descriptions of Scenes:

Plumb Memorial Library

The parking lot was so full that many drivers were using ingenuity to find a spot. Recent
snowfall covered many parking spaces and so I counted 30 labeled parking spaces that I could see. There were 13 cars using creative parking techniques. I went up the hill and around the building in order to enter the Adult Room from the street. If you enter from the parking lot on the lower level it will bring you to the Children's Room. At first glance there is not any handicapped access to the Adult Room. When I entered the library, the circulation desk was to my left and a reading area was to my right. The staff seemed friendly enough, maybe a little busy, and so I did not receive a look or a greeting when I came in. The area to the right includes padded chairs, benches, and a table with today's newspapers on it. The bookcases in this area hold DVDs, Blu-ray discs, and new fiction. There were also some empty display cases, possibly last used for local history, as there was still a sign about the last installation.

The area across the aisle holds new magazines, two very convincing faux-leather comfy chairs, three tables with hardback chairs, and a cluster of four study carrels. Past these are all the regular circulating books along the long wall. In the center of the room are computers: two public access catalogs and five for internet use. Library staff confirmed that just about anyone can use the internet. If they have a library card, they use that to log in and if not then they can get a guest pass (K. Lanigan, personal communication, 2011). At the end of the room are two more tables with hardback chairs and a printer/copy machine. Lower bookcases in between the tables and computers display both a Christmas tree and a Valentine's Day display.

The older section of the library branches off from the far side of the circulation desk and staff area. It contains stored magazines, newspapers, VHS, the Teen area, audiobooks, local Shelton history files, and the Connecticut Room (more local history). The Teen area is home to two more internet computers, a graphic novel collection with six shelves dedicated to the purpose, and the entrance to the director's office.

The main room of the old library section has that wonderful paper smell. It is home to many
more study tables, a couple of microfilm machines, and audiobooks (both CD and MP3). Above the audiobooks is a poster for downloading audiobooks with your library card. This area has exposed wooden beams in the dome ceiling and brown tile linoleum flooring leading into the tile hallway. This old style is paired with modern black faux-leather chairs with a hassock, new area rugs, and live houseplants. The tile hallway is the original entrance to the building. It is blocked from use and there is nothing of note in the foyer except that it has a dusty shelf of Shelton memorabilia on display as well as leads to the Connecticut Room.

The way towards the stairs for the lower level is lined with community pamphlets on one side and music CDs on the other. At the bottom of the stairs, you can turn right to enter the parking lot, go straight to enter the Meeting Room, or go left for the public restrooms and Children's Room. The women's room is clean enough, but it could use some remodeling. I cannot account for the men's room. Entering the Children's Room, the Young Adult area is on the left, the Parent area is on the right, and the circulation desk is straight ahead. This level is decorated with a generic winter theme, which will get longer use than the Adult Room's holiday decorations.

The Children's Room, as it is smaller than the Adult Room, rightly has only two internet computers and two PACs. It also has a computer dedicated to Microsoft software, which is probably very useful for students after school. Unlike the Adult Room, the audiovisual materials are located together. There are also other features specifically designed with the user in mind. One bookcase houses only oversized books. Children's books are separated into sections by reading level. It is difficult to determine each section, but it looks as though they have (from easiest to hardest reading level): board books, picture books, beginner readers levels 1-3, easy chapter books, juvenile, and young adult. The nonfiction easy, juvenile, and young adult books are interfiled, regardless of level. A play rug, child-size couches, rocking chair, two houseplants, one maintenance staff and two library staff members appear to make this an enjoyable yet mildly confusing place for younger patrons.
Written Words Bookstore

Written Words Bookstore has the advantage of a spacious parking lot. It shares the parking with a grocery store, many restaurants, and other businesses, making it an ideal location for people doing errands. The large glass windows in the front of the store are very inviting and draw you in. Unlike the library, everything about this store seems pristine and organized. The windows are new, the carpet smells new, the air smells fresh, and the lights have a warm glow that is not too bright. The service counter is located just at the entrance of the store, similar to that of the position of the circulation desk if one were to enter the library from the second floor entrance. The position of the desk is ideal and logical because it is easy to greet and see customers who need help all from that spot. Actually, it is very easy see customers from any spot in the store because tall bookcases are reserved for the outer perimeter, the bookstore is only one room, and that room is not so large as to be considered cumbersome.

This bookstore has all the common areas: the section for calendars and journals, bestsellers, 50% off old or damaged books, adult books and children's books. The adult collection is broken down into the usual categories of fiction and nonfiction, which are further broken down by literature, science fiction, romance, Christian, mystery, philosophy, cooking, travel, science, and more. The children's books are broken down by age group, and the children's area has some toys with which children can play while they visit.

New additions to the bookstore include a collection of audiobooks, a section of gift ideas, and products sold by local businesses. There is a section reserved for knitting and crocheting books next to a display for locally made wool and yarn. The bookstore also sells locally made soap. This business arrangement is particularly interesting because while the bookstore helps other small businesses, it also helps the library and the library helps it in return. The smaller branch library displays some of the bookstore's books and in turn the bookstore has special sale days during which a percent of the
proceeds are donated to the library system in Shelton. This goes to show just how community-oriented
this bookstore really is.

What bookstore today is complete without coffee? This bookstore offers free coffee and tea as
well as cozy couches. The furniture has an almost victorian style and the browsing table has classic-
looking Valentine's Day cards under its glass top. It may not have as many sitting areas as the library,
but it makes the one spot count. Perhaps the most notable feature in the entire bookstore is the
bookstore mascot: a beautiful pet parrot right near the store's entrance. If it is not the parrot, then it is
the presence of the owners young children playing in the store that gives it a homey atmosphere.

**Occurrences in Scenes**

**Plumb Memorial Library**

The library has sounds of low discussion humming in the background. This is pleasantly
punctuated with a semi-constant beeping from the circulation desk as materials are scanned. The ring
of a cell phone is very startling in a situation such as that. The loudest came from a student who was
being tutored or homeschooled, but it was quickly silenced. There was not any stereotypical hushing
on the part of the staff as far as I could tell. The staff fielded phone calls about tax forms and item
renewals, but otherwise the library was relatively slow in traffic. There were only eight patrons in the
Adult Room that I could count, but I suspect this is largely due to the parking lot being full of cars from
attendees of the Garden Club. One only has to add the factors together to figure out that storytime with
eight adults and twelve children plus a Garden Club meeting equals a shortage in parking spaces for
other patrons. There were 2 Children's staff for 20 patrons downstairs and 6 Adult's staff for 8 patrons
upstairs.

**Written Words Bookstore**

The staff on a Friday night after dinner appeared to be the owner of the bookstore, Dorothy, and
her husband, Dave. During the observation there were four customers. Two other customers were already there and they were discussing signing their children up for the beginner knitting classes being offered at the bookstore. Their third customer seemed to be a local teacher or college professor looking for the literature for his class. He had a relatively extensive conversation with Dave concerning fictional works before making his purchase. Some of the titles were not in stock and Dave suggested that the bookstore could special order them. The customer set this up and seemed to leave relatively happy.

The fourth customer asked for a recommendation for a present. Dave went and got Dorothy, who seemed to find a suitable book. The bookstore offers free gift wrapping but the woman did not take advantage of this service. Dorothy and she had a long conversation about Kindles. In short, Dorothy worries that Kindles will hurt her business and ruin the potential of young minds. Close to closing time I went to the counter and made my own purchase. Dorothy excused herself to go into the stockroom for a moment. When she returned she gave me a bookplate with the author's autograph on it for me to install on the front page.

Being in Written Words Bookstore, it is easy to see that there is a big difference between its regulars and those of the Plumb library. Customers who frequent this bookstore are most likely willing to purchase books and other materials that will help them or their peers have enrichment. They understand the value of a book and are willing to pay full price in exchange for the high level of service provided by Dorothy and her dedicated staff. When online websites offer 30% off books and 2-day shipping right to your doorstep, it is the personalized service that make customers appreciate and patronize this service. Visitors to the library do not necessarily have the same appreciation for intellectual society. Some of the clientele are probably the same, but there are also those who use the library for the internet, movies and other entertainment, as well as convenience.

Identification and Explanation of Interesting and Important Topics
Each of the two libraries in Shelton have very detailed mission statements. The Shelton Library System (2010a) has an overall mission: “Cultural centers offering welcoming environments that provide a source of personal enrichment.” The Plumb Memorial Library misses the mark in three key areas: sound, furniture, and signs. These three topics will be explored in depth, followed by reflections and recommendations.

The hum of background noise was interrupted by a cell phone, which was only noticeable because the library generally tries to have a quiet noise level. The ringing was not particularly loud but appeared louder because the room was disproportionately quiet. It seems difficult to enforce quiet altogether in a non-research library because there are other distractions that cannot be regulated: the sound of the doors closing on both floors travels very far, the library's phone rings, the handicap doorbell buzzes, the bookcart's wheel's squeak. The library tries to maintain a quiet environment even amidst so much noise. Scrogham agrees that it is important on some level to support quiet in the library. He writes, “...even the stereotype of the library as a quiet place holds attraction to some users...there should be allowances made in the design of libraries to offer this kind of sanctuary” (2006, p. 8-9). This does not mean that the entire library needs to be a quiet zone.

The Plumb does not feel like a cohesive space. New furniture was purchased and added to the existing decor without considering the previous style. The library adds styles one on top of another instead of updating the entire look. The result is that the new furniture does not fit in with anything else. Very modern chairs are placed next to the microfilm machines and oriental rugs are on top of checkered linoleum tiles. The remaining pieces look dingy and uncomfortable to use. The library also does not seem to have the right furniture for the right job. It is making due with oversized bookcases for DVDs by filling in the backs with cardboard boxes. They use bookcases to create space, very interestingly, by sectioning off areas or creating walkways with the backs of the shelving.

Plumb's situation is a common one, but libraries are already taking the initiative to make
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updates. According to Childs (2006), “Old, traditional library layouts and uninspiring décor are being replaced by contemporary designs and welcoming spaces which combine comfort with practicality” (p. 151). Childs discusses the how libraries in the UK are stepping up to remain relevant in a quickly changing field. However, not all libraries can afford to have a new facility located in a high-traffic shopping center, though they can take a few tips from such a library: natural lighting, spacious, well-defined areas, and colorful areas for children. Libraries such as this Arena Park Library are very user-focused because they ask themselves what the user wants and they worked that into the plan of the library. In this case, it is convenience, a popular theme also discussed in Vondracek’s (2007) findings.

Although Scrogham has a something-for-everyone approach when it comes to noise levels, he takes a very conservative view of the place of the library in the modern world. Instead of improving library environment to meet user needs as Childs discusses, he supports promoting what libraries do best to attract users: research. Scrogham (2006) writes, “The choice is one of resistance or conversion to a model of service that has its principles grounded in the private sphere” (p. 9). While libraries do not have to offer users all the services of a bookstore and meet all the expectations the public has for a bookstore, bookstores do have some merits that libraries should share. A user need does not have to have the availability of beverages for example, but something as basic as a feeling of safety or welcome. The reason libraries should follow in the footsteps of bookstores is that bookstores are implementing suggestions made from results of extensive studies on human and consumer behaviors. Larger bookstores in particular also often have the advantage of strong financial backing, which allows them to change the look into a place that is inviting. Both bookstores and libraries can be places where people want to be, and not just a place where they have to be.

If a patron does not know the layout of the library, he might miss the entire original part of the building. The only fanfare directing someone to that section is a display of paintings along one wall. These paintings lead up to a dark metal door that is reminiscent of industrial basements. Only an 8 \( \frac{1}{2} \)
by 11 sheet of paper attached to the door describes the areas within the original building. If patrons get close enough to read it, they will be able to discover the entire Teen collection, Local History collection, and a substantial collection of audiobooks, among other things. That is not the only example of poorly chosen signage in the library. Signs for library hours, downloads, community events, and labels for areas of the library can very easily go unnoticed because they are small, crowded, and not in obvious locations.

Savolainen (2007) describes strategies for dealing with information overload. The tendencies to gloss over information or avoid too many sources of information (filtering and withdrawal, respectively) means that librarians have to work harder at making signs and displays count in the library setting. Too much information will hide the important details. Information needs to stand out if users are going to give it any consideration. This requires more thought and planning on the part of the librarian, but the benefits for users would be tremendous. It would also help the library because if something is important enough to post on the wall or a bookcase, then following these steps means that the information is more likely to reach library users.

Lessons from Research

Librarians have to constantly juggle to handle opposing requests from patrons in any aspect of the library. Should the library buy many copies of a bestseller or spread the budget to cover many titles? Do you have the convenience of E-mail notification or the personal touch of a phone call? It is the same with noise. In the example of this library, should it stay quiet to accommodate readers or allow patrons to use their phones, voice chat over the internet, let children be children (while using indoor voices, of course), and make it easier for staff to perform duties? The combination answer to all of these situations is always good judgment and compromise. Librarians should evaluate what is feasible for the library and see if there is a way to accommodate both sides. If it is difficult to make the main room quiet because of all of the background sounds, maybe the library can find a separate area to
be designated quiet.

Mostly everything about the bookstores speaks to its quality. It is wonderful that books are up-to-date, the staff is knowledgeable, and there are free perks (gift wrap and coffee, to name a couple). The only complaint I have is that they offer free coffee but they do not have free Wi-Fi access to entice people to stay longer. On the other hand, sitting in solitude while drinking coffee and surfing the internet is an image better suited to chain bookstores and coffee houses. This independent bookstore gains from not having Wi-Fi because without it there is an environment that encourages community, enrichment, and impromptu conversations. If you calculate the success of the library's mission statement based solely on atmosphere, then the bookstore is following the mission better than the library.

Another comparison to the bookstore needs to be made when discussing library signage. The bookstore uses large, bold plaques to designate areas of the books. All other signs such as library hours and holidays are posted at eye-level and on Written Words stationary. Bookstore events are posted in one area, and each shares equal space on the board. Not only do these practices draw the most attention, but they work. People expect signs to be in certain areas, just as we expect road signs to be either above us or to the right. The library's messages will be more clear and effective when they make deliberate choices about whether the public will absorb the information posted.

**Recommendations for Plumb Memorial Library and Public Libraries in General**

A cell phone ringing in a bookstore is not as noticeable because customers expect a certain level of noise out in public. If more sound were to be encouraged, such as normal level voices or maybe even some music, then these other everyday sounds would not seem so out of place. If the Plumb library needs to designate a quiet area, there is plenty of space in the reference and archival area of the library. Other libraries with different sections will find it easier to designate loud and quiet areas.

Plumb Memorial Library needs to take a page from Written Words Bookstore. Even though
budgets often do not leave room for replacement furniture and carpeting, Plumb and all libraries need
to take care of what they have. Simple maintenance such as light dusting can make a world of
difference and can be performed by volunteers if the library cannot afford to spend staff time on the
task. Spot clean carpets before stains set in or keep upholstered chairs away from windows where they
might fade or get water damage. These preventative measures will help extend the life of what
furnishings the library does have.

Currently, the furniture is eclectic and poorly arranged. Study carrels should be moved to the
new quiet area along with some of the tables. Pieces that date back to the building from 1894 should
be collected together and enjoyed in the proper setting of the reference and archive area, which will set
off a nice ambiance. All of the modern plush faux-leather couches and comfy chairs should be
gathered together to form a browsing and social area. Any future purchases should be made with
endurance, functionality, and style of furnishing in mind.

The Plumb, as well as other libraries and bookstores, should be consistent with size and color
choices for library postings. It should be clear to the audience whether a sign is for the library or part
of a community board. Pamphlets should be kept in display racks in order to keep them from spreading
out over a table. Signs that need to be read from a distance need to be large enough to reach a patron,
such as signs for different sections of the library. A staff member needs to be designated to handle the
coordination effort. Someone needs to check for expired signs and make sure that displays are well-
presented.

A little more organization and forethought can go a long way. It does not take a large budget to
revamp problem areas in a library. In many cases, all it takes is a little tweaking here and there to make
noticeable improvements. Coordinated efforts will help staff keep on top of changes that need to be
made. Whenever a library cannot see the changes that need to be made for itself, sometimes it takes
someone with a fresh perspective to identify a need for these changes. All users will appreciate the
library's efforts.

Field Notes

Adult Room of Plumb Memorial Library (left) and Written Words Bookstore (right)

References


http://sheltonlibrarysystem.org/missions_css.html

