

# Summary



**Customer-Oriented Communication – What Matters Most / Tips and Tricks for Successful Communication with Users (Joana Hientz)**  
(pp. 414 – 416)

Customer-oriented communication in libraries creates a win-win situation. It ensures the satisfaction of the user and of the staff member. By taking a professional stance, the latter are able to protect themselves from stress. Those who have mastered the professional tools of communication are in less danger of getting entangled in exhausting discussions. The following maxims are thereby especially important:

Listen consciously and understand the customer's intention! Lack of attention is one of the most common sources of misunderstanding. One instrument which is too seldom employed is the explorative query. By posing follow-up questions one creates a connection, takes the person seriously and allows him or her to share equal responsibility in the communication process.

Recognize the message between the lines! Body language, facial expressions and tone of voice play an important role. Underlying the brusque tone of a student there may be anxiety about receiving a book in time to prepare for an examination. A taciturn older gentleman is perhaps merely insecure about using the new lending system and not being impolite at all. To decipher the messages between the lines and absorb them into one's own communicative behaviour contributes significantly to a successful interaction.

Speak clearly, unambiguously and in the customer's own language! Poor articulation or the use of foreign words will often ensure that the other person cannot follow the conversation. Customer-oriented communication means adjusting to my opposite's language and ability to understand me in terms of tone of voice, volume, speed of speech and choice of words.

**An Existential Crisis / The Consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic for Public Libraries in the Case of the City Library of Duisburg (Jan-Pieter Barbian)**  
(pp. 417 – 421)

At the beginning of the year 2020 the novel coronavirus seemed to be a problem limited to a very distant town in China. Only after infections were detected in northern Italy and, shortly thereafter, in Germany, did developments take on an unexpected dynamic.

Since 29 April 2020 the City Library of Duisburg is open again. Extensive hygiene measures have been implemented to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus. The number of people allowed into the library at one time is limited to 1 person per 20m<sup>2</sup>. Each visit is limited to 30 minutes. Seating is off-limits. Staff at the information desks are separated from the visitors by plexiglass barriers. Moreover, both visitors and staff members are required to wear masks covering mouth and nose. Advisory distancing of at least 1.5 meters at the entrances and within the facilities is indicated by adhesive strips on the floor. Hand disinfectant has been made available and surfaces in the library, such as door handles, handrails, elevator buttons and tabletops, are disinfected several times a day. Elevators may be used by no more than two people at the same time. Whenever cash machines are available, fee transactions are conducted on a non-cash basis.

Long queuing at the entrance to the main library has become the new normal. Staff workload has become considerably greater and, hence, more staff is now involved in direct service to the public. Thus, the reserve capacity which could have been sent out to the seven branch libraries is not available. Furthermore, the mobile library has not been able to return to its normal service schedule since the safe distancing rules cannot be maintained in the cramped space of the bus.

**Cultural Policy Committee Activities / Representing Library Interests in the German Cultural Council (Klaus Ulrich Werner)**  
(pp. 426 – 429)

The German umbrella organisation for libraries, Bibliothek und Information Deutschland (BID), is a member of the Deutsche Literaturkonferenz (German Assembly of Literary Institutions), a non-profit association that is, in turn, a section of the Deutscher Kulturrat (German Cultural Council). This top-level organisation of cultural institutions of national scope is always included in cultural-political discussions in their early stages, often even initiating them itself, and maintains close contact with political institutions and law-makers. The German Cultural Council is the most important lobbying institution for the entire spectrum of cultural activities. It is the umbrella organisation of umbrella organisations, uniting eight associations with different areas of focus. The activities of the council are financed only to a small part by the associations' membership fees, short-term project subsidies and the sale of publications. The by far greatest portion of funding for ongoing operations comes from the budget of the Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media.

From a library perspective the most important topic areas on which the German Cultural Council has taken a stand in recent years revolve around issues concerning the further development of copyright law. Another topic of controversy within the German Assembly of Literary Institutions which is a constant source of contention is the matter of ebook lending in public libraries. The issues surrounding sustainability are very likely to become a focal topic in the Cultural Council in coming years. In the current period of the Covid-19 pandemic the Cultural Council has focussed attention on setting up a support fund for Germany's cultural infrastructure to benefit free-lance creative artists and cultural institutions. Even though libraries and their employees appear to be financially secure, in times like these when the level of debt in public-sector budgets is on the rise, it is feared that public libraries, in particular, which are regarded as a "discretionary service", may face financial shortfalls.

*Translated by Martha Baker*