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Are Libraries Still Uncool to Teens?

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What do teens really think about the library? Is your library a cool or uncool place for them to be at and use? Four years ago, in 1999, E. Meyers published an article for American Libraries asking the same question (<http://www.urbanlibraries.org/coolnessfactor.html>). It was entitled, *The coolness factor: Ten libraries listen to Youth*. This article examined the facets of the library that would deem it cool or uncool: technology, customer service, library space, books and materials, rules and regulations. The conclusion drawn was this: "Teens are not finding what they seek in our very uncool settings. However, they are optimistic about their ability to reform our nerdy ways and create a cool new library environment for themselves and friends."

Is my library uncool? Is your library uncool? Since this article is almost five years old, I wanted to know if my teens would agree with the conclusions drawn. I know there are areas in YA that need improvement, but to meet the demands of the kids in this article, I feel it would mostly depend on a large amount of capital outlay. Teens like pizzazz and flash and that type of enhancement always seems to take some cash. But I also thought, why not find out what some teens actually think of our library and their YA space? This required no capital outlay and would presumably give me some good ideas about where to work on enhancements. Using a simple survey based on this article, I surveyed a few random teens regarding some of the aspects listed above, hoping to gain more insight into cool vs. uncool. Here's what a few Washington County teens are saying about libraries and their experiences there:

I have adequate access to computers and software at your library.

Yes 6.5
No 1.5

Is there anything you'd like to see the library add to make it more technologically savvy?

Yes 1
No 7
No answer 3

Does the library staff seem approachable for help?

Yes 8
No 0

Librarians always have something better to do then help a student.

Yes 2
Rarely 4
No 2

When thinking of the library environment, describe the images or colors associated with it.

- Black and white, needs warmer colors though
- White, peaceful
- Warm and friendly; it helps that it's relatively small
- Beige, quiet
- Neutral colors

How would you update the library to make it more appealing to teens?

- larger YA section
- more books
- I like it the way it is
- As long as it has books, I find it very appealing
- More books
- Bigger YA section
- It's very appealing, there is a section and lots of research tools

Do you find the library carries current materials?

Yes 7
No 1



What materials are lacking for teens in the library?

- BOTs
- Nothing
- Nothing I can think of
- More YA reference
- Newer teen books

What materials do you most often check out? (Please number 1 through 5 with number 1 being the item you most often take home.)

Books 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2
 CDs NA, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4
 Movies/DVDs 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4
 Magazines NA, 2, 3, 3, 5, 5, 5, 5
 Books on tape NA, 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 5, 5

If you have an outstanding fine on your card, are you still able to use it to check out materials on your next visit?

- No
- Never tried
- Yes
- Yes, family shares cards so we get around this easily
- Yes, you can continue to check out materials
- Not sure, but I doubt it
- I always pay my fine when I'm told I have one
- Don't know

Is the library too restrictive in terms of noise level? Too quiet? Too loud? (Boy, does this result differ from what adults say!)

- Fine
- Perfect
- Just right
- Fine
- I think it's fine
- Perfect
- Just right

Would you like it if libraries allowed food and drink in them?

- Yes, in certain areas only
- No
- As long as they had enclosed containers to prevent spilling
- I don't really care either way
- No, it would make a mess
- No
- Yes, but I'd feel bad for the books
- No! Someone would definitely wreck something!

So, my library is doing pretty well, but it was a very small, in-house survey, and there's always room for improvement. Teens need comfortable places, big spaces and good materials. As Frasier Crane likes to say, "I'm listening," and hopefully you will begin, or continue to, as well. Taking action is probably the coolest thing you could do for your YA population, anyway. And truly, if you begin to address just one of the many aspects of teen service, you will definitely be on your way to becoming a cooler place. 🌿

