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# 'IS for you week' at the University of Brighton

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'Inspiration services – that's what your department should be called.' So proclaimed professor of poetics Mike Tucker, describing information services (IS) at the University of Brighton (UoB) during a talk he gave at our February initiative 'IS for you week'.

What better accolade from an academic! Admittedly, you'd expect Mike to be an ally – he's the husband of the information services manager (ISM) at our art, design and humanities library, St Peter's House (SPH), one of our site libraries – but this was exactly the result we'd hoped for when we dreamed up the idea for 'IS for you week' – five days of events and activities to promote our department and raise our profile across the university.

IS is one of the largest departments in the university, consisting of libraries, media, computing and reprographics, and it is scattered across several sites from Brighton to Hastings. As a result, we need to work especially hard to ensure that students and staff see our role as crucial to the learning and teaching in the institution and that, though we are called a 'support department', we are perceived to be central to the university's aims and functions. Sometimes we struggle, like most large groupings, to give our department a coherence. Even communications between ourselves are sometimes less than perfect.

Presenting our department to the rest of the university was going to prove challenging and to do this it was essential we had our (relatively new) Director of IS enthusiastically behind us. It was also crucial that we engaged all sections, sites and levels of staff in the initiative. The idea was discussed initially by our marketing action group and an 'IS for you week' planning group was established six months before the event, made up of a variety of enthusiastic staff with me as chair. The name of the project, 'IS for you week', was

agreed upon – or, more informally, ‘IS4U week’. One of our first tasks was to design a logo and we were lucky to have a learning technologies adviser with artistic gifts who worked on several drafts before we agreed upon a final design in a contemporary, eye-catching orange.

The programme of events and activities took us longer to firm up than we’d envisaged. We did some serious thinking (and some not-so-serious thinking) and between us came up with a variety of workable and unworkable ideas. We soon abandoned the weirder, wackier or impractical ideas – such as trolley-pushing marathons or the Vice Chancellor shadowing a member of staff for a couple of hours, and concentrated on activities that in the main were integral to our role, had maximum impact and were free or cheap to implement.

Our Grand-Parade-based IS staff have a tradition of holding drop-in ‘showcase’ events, highlighting the services and facilities we offer, and we decided this was a good model to roll out to other sites. As a key activity during ‘IS for you week’, each site held at least one of these showcases. Some took place within the library but most were sited at a more strategic venue and, though they differed slightly, they mostly spanned the lunch hour to attract custom (one site offering refreshments). We tried to ensure the presence of the Director of IS, the site ISM, the information advisers (IAs) and assistant IAs (AIAs), the learning technologies advisers, the training officers and media centre and reprographics staff – and the combination seemed to work. The Grand-Parade-based IS staff put on a small exhibition of treasures from our library’s special collection; distributed in-house publications and database-supplier leaflets and displayed posters on our portable ‘triptych’ display board; handed out freebies (pencils, notepads, post-its); showed off our new media kit (e.g. 42” High Definition screen with Blu Ray DVD player and digital audio recorders and players); projected rolling PowerPoint presentations and short videos and demonstrated on our laptops how to access databases, e-books and e-journals and the delights of our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (‘studentcentral’); promoted our training workshops; described the services of our reprographics unit – and more. Though aimed mainly at staff, the showcases proved a good opportunity to talk to both staff and students in an informal, neutral setting.

Some sites offered even more informal events, such as mobile enquiry points, aimed particularly

at students, where passers-by were encouraged to ask advice from library staff. The AIA and a resource assistant (RA) at SPH offered a drop-in session near the print journal shelves entitled ‘All you ever wanted to know about journals but were afraid to ask’. They displayed current and historic journals and were ready to show on their laptop how to access e-journals, as well as demonstrating CrossSearch, our new cross-database search platform.

Having been inspired by an article in *Library and Information Update* (July / August 2008, 7(8), p.58–59) about Leeds Metropolitan University library’s engagement with the national ‘Big Draw’ initiative, SPH staff had, as part of its ‘Big Draw’ initiative in 2008, put on a series of short talks based on the theme of drawing. We adapted this idea for ‘IS for you week’, inviting four of our leading academics from the faculty of arts to give a short talk in a series entitled ‘The joy of libraries’. These informal presentations provided an opportunity for the library to appear more integrated into the faculty’s learning and teaching by enticing our users out of the lecture theatres and into the library, five minutes up the road. Each day we displayed the publications of the speaker concerned, as well as recording the talks to podcast later. Though audience numbers were relatively modest, they included a healthy mix of academic staff, students from different faculties and IS staff. Several speakers commented on how much they’d enjoyed presenting a session a little out of their normal ‘routine’.

Other activities during the week involved fundraising for student union projects. Staff at Moulsecomb’s Aldrich library organised a book, DVD and CD sale. These were items in good condition donated by IS staff, not library discards. One member of the Aldrich staff also works in a charity shop and so had useful experience of pricing items. The sale raised a substantial sum for the Southern African scholarship fund of the University of Brighton’s student union (UBSU), and the message from the USBU’s president was heartening:

*‘That is brilliant! Thank you so much to you and your colleagues for their hard work in sorting this out. [The money] will go a long way helping towards visas, flights, food and travel costs for the two medics we will be welcoming for electives in Cardiology and Infectious Diseases in April. A great result and on behalf of the board of trustees thank you very much.’*

During 'IS for you week' we also publicised the fact that all the library fines raised that week would be donated to the students' rag week.

Our IAs have recently been directing their efforts towards supporting the university's research community, running workshops on bibliometrics and journal impact factors, with the forthcoming research excellence framework (REF) in mind. To build on this work, as part of the week's events one of our IAs invited a representative from the database 'Web of Science' to address the heads of research divisions, research administrators, IAs and other IS staff on this subject. Other training and advice sessions and surgeries during the week included several from our regular menu: EndNote Web, 'Cite it right', 'Tackling your inbox and winning', 'Getting it right: what equipment should I use' (by media centre staff) and computer first-aid clinics. Running workshops that were already in our existing training portfolio meant that the only extra effort involved was publicising the events more proactively, thereby saving staff time and maximising impact.

One aim of the SPH IAs was to try and forge links between what goes on in the classrooms and studios and what goes on in the library. I therefore had the idea of working with a couple of first-year academic programmes to try and promote the library as an inspirational space. Although the music and visual art staff were keen to collaborate on a project in which the first-years made a short film piece each, using ambient sound recorded in the library environment, we were unfortunately unable to undertake the project because of access and equality issues for a student in a wheelchair. One of our SPH student shelvers who is studying on the BA(Hons) graphic design course had the germ of an idea for a project for the 80 first-year graphic design and illustration students. After some rather hasty and nerve-wracking last-minute planning, the tutors and I set a brief for the students to design a 'Use the library' poster to promote the use of SPH to fellow-students. I was invited to contribute to the group crit and, on entering the room, was completely overwhelmed. Every spare wall surface was covered with posters promoting our library – and how diverse, inventive, professional, colourful and witty they were! As a group, we talked about the nature of client briefs, impact, message, design ... and of course the library, and how it is much more than just a collection of books up the road. Here was a superb chance for me to get across this message in an academic but informal setting. Several students volunteered the fact that the project had inspired



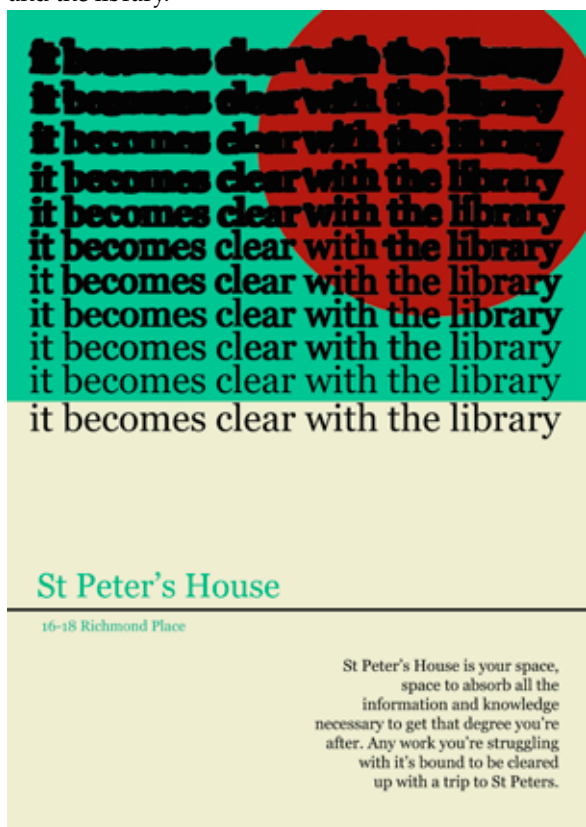
them to look at the library with fresh eyes. This was great news – the library was almost cool! But the story didn't end there. We put images of the posters themselves and the photos I took during the crit on our VLE in an 'IS for you week' photo album, as well as displaying them on a digital photo-frame in the library, so others could admire them. And, after delicate negotiations, I obtained the use of precious wall space in the main teaching building to display a selection of the post-



ers for a week. It's a great corridor site en route from the foyer to the café. The student rep who mounted the corridor display mailed me:

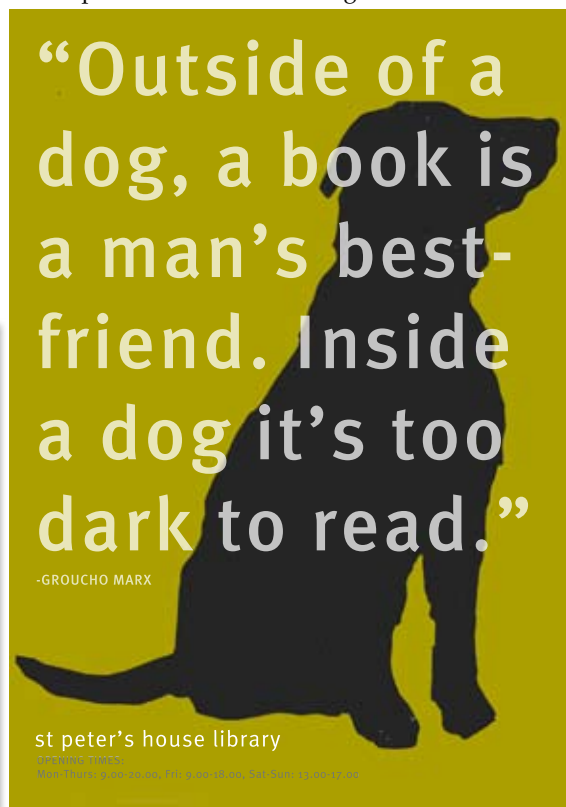
*'You will be pleased to know that we have posters up in the hallway now! What a great area to put them, a lot of people will be walking by them so it will be really good! It looks really good and complete as a little gallery! So thank you for organising that for us!'*

During our showcase I showed images of the work to the Director of IS and he was so impressed he volunteered some funding to frame a selection of the posters to display on a semi-permanent basis in the library. But more was to come ... the head of the school of arts and media was leaving in a couple of days on an overseas recruitment drive and she was delighted to take CDs of the posters and the crit with her to show potential overseas recruits. Great publicity for both courses and the library.



Two of our SPH RAs embraced 'IS for you week' spectacularly and wholeheartedly. They press-ganged a variety of staff – IS, academic and estates, as well as students – to be filmed talking about their favourite book, journal or DVD from the library collection. The resulting 'My favourite book' clips were then edited and displayed on a rolling programme on our VLE and in the library during the week. Items such as *Rustic adornments for homes of taste, and recreations for town folk in the study and imitation of nature* (a Victorian volume),

*Bolom Chon* (a Mexican pop-up artist book), a DVD on glassmaker Dale Chihuly, Martin Parr's book *Boring postcards*, a biography of Charles Darwin and *Jane Eyre* were amongst the eclectic range of items featured. The books were displayed in the library and stills were made from the video and attached to the bay ends where the items were normally shelved. Learning to use the 'Flip' video recorder and the filming process generated a lot of discussion and excitement amongst library staff, and this particular initiative developed into a sort of bonding exercise!

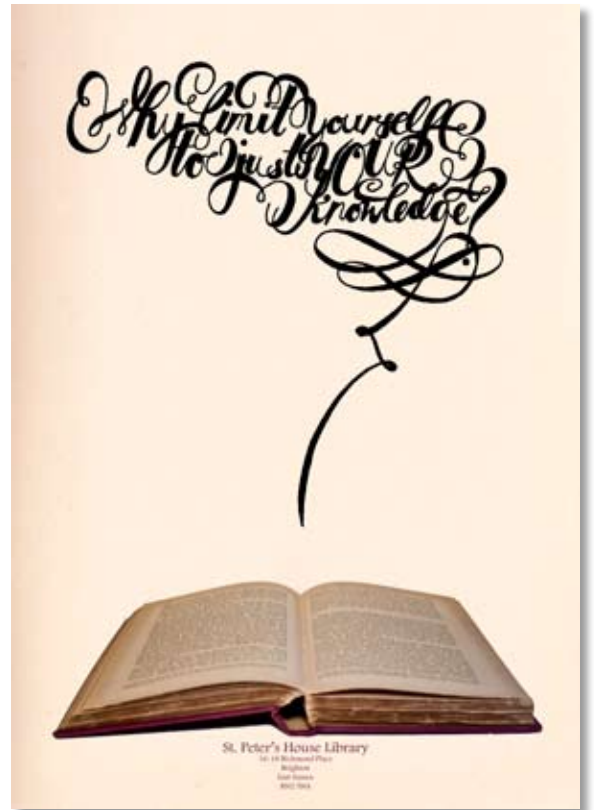


The other video that promoted the concept of libraries as unstuffy was made by our SPH AIA and our Grand Parade Learning Technologies Adviser (LTA). In order to publicise library self-service (introduced at just one of our site libraries so far) – and to have a bit of fun – they made a video short along the lines of a Victorian silent movie (complete with captions, tinkly piano music, rather grainy picture quality and speeded-up actions). This, together with the 'My favourite book' video; a five-minute video interview with a graduating student about how he'd benefited from library use; and PowerPoint presentations produced by colleagues ('Things have changed in the library', which used images in a slightly quirky way; 'CrossSearch'; Box of Broadcasts), was loaded on a couple of laptops in the library and played continuously during the week, alongside the digital photo-frame display of the posters

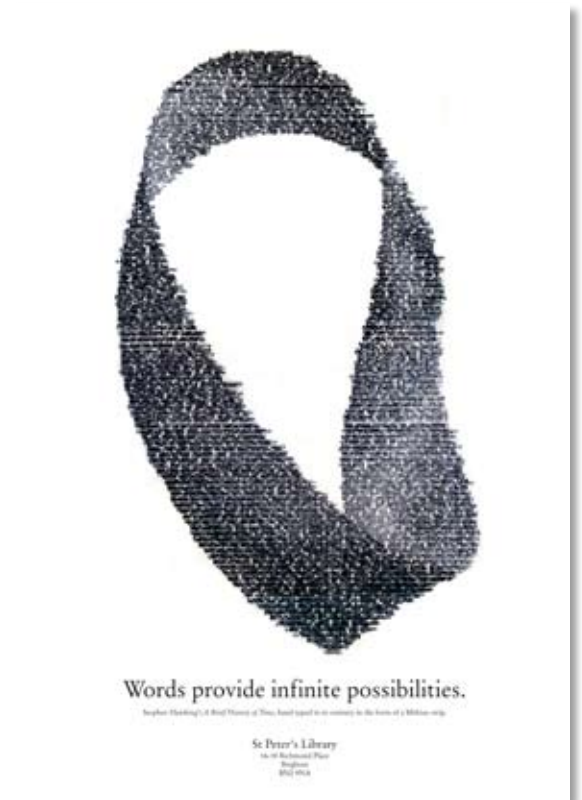
and a selection from our DVD collection as a promotional device.

Of course, we tried to capture the imagination virtually, too. We ran a 'Show us our best bits' photo competition inviting people to upload their photos of the things they like best about our department and a caption competition where people were encouraged to get creative and add a caption to any of a dozen somewhat zany images taken from two of the image databases we subscribe to: Education Image Gallery and Bridgeman Art Library. We featured 'Question of the day' (about IS) and 'Resource of the day' items and devised a library-related wordsearch, and – shamelessly pinching the idea from CILIP's *Gazette* – I wrote 'A week in the life of an Information adviser' and put it up on our VLE – just in case anyone was in any doubt about what I (and other IA colleagues) do!

In order to publicise the full panoply of these activities, we used a variety of media, incorporating our snazzy logo. We produced (in rather a rush!) a printed programme of events and a poster, and one of our weekend staff designed an eye-catching banner to hang in foyers around the sites. However, most of our promotion was virtual. We used our own IS home page, <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/is/>, to upload a calendar of events and details of activities day by day, as well as our online newsletter, *IS News*. We posted announcements on our VLE ('studentcentral') and set up a special 'IS for you week' area on 'Community', our equivalent of Facebook on student-



central, where we blogged, posted files and photo albums and podcasted. Our 'Joy of libraries' series of talks was also promoted on the website of the centre for research and development (arts). We sent e-mails (of course) and tweeted. We designed rolling presentations for the plasma screens across the campuses and a couple of keen AIAs broadcast on *Burst* student radio, where students had offered to compose jingles to promote the week. Unfortunately, though we submitted copy to

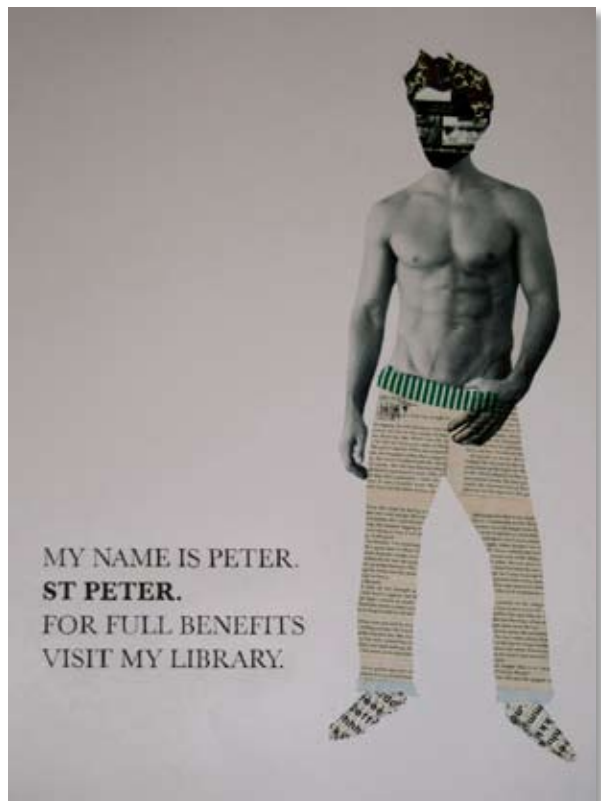


*Pebble*, the UBSU newsletter, and to *e-Channel*, the university's e-newsletter, neither contribution was printed.

Of course, now the week is over, we're both elated and exhausted. We intend to capitalise on what we've achieved and publicise the event further to our UoB colleagues, so we'll be profiling the photos we took of the events and pointing people to our 'IS for you week' community. We're also in the process of gathering feedback, from both IS staff and the rest of the university community – just in case we have the energy to run a similar event in the future!

laborated across sites. Moreover, staff at different levels worked productively and enthusiastically together across 'job' and hierarchical boundaries: AIAs worked with LTAs, IAs worked with the information officer, an ISM worked with an RA, media staff worked with library staff. New skills were learned, too: how to use a flip video recorder, how to tweet, how to upload photos onto our VLE, how to chair an event ...

We think Professor Tucker got it right. IS should be able to blow its own trumpet and rejoice in the fact that our users think we should be renamed 'inspiration services'.



This was the first time we'd tried this sort of initiative and, on the advice of our Director, we started fairly small. Many ideas were abandoned at an early stage, through lack of enthusiasm, lack of time or because they were too impractical or costly (such as a talk by a high-profile figure or a writer-in-residence scheme). Fast learning curve? Certainly, but we believe it was well worth the effort.

The 'IS for you week' project meant that IS staff came out of their comfort zones (not sure if I've ever actually been in a comfort zone at work, but you get my gist) and worked in partnership with the student union, academic staff and administrators, and with our research communities. But 'IS for you week' had considerable benefits for IS staff, too. It meant that we communicated and col-