

The Bertrams / The Independent Bookseller of the Year



Lesley Grey Independent Bookseller

Background

Lesley Grey has been an independent bookseller for 16 years and she has recently demonstrated her hard work and commitment to bookselling by reaching **a cumulative turnover of £10 million!** Lesley started her business in 1992, armed with just one van and a map of Reading and the surrounding area. Taking a selection of books to businesses in the area she steadily began to grow her business. Today she has three full-time and one part-time members of staff and three vans. As a local independent bookseller she can offer people in a variety of workplaces the chance to browse and buy a targeted selection of approximately 16 books on a monthly basis, with great savings and no obligation to buy.

Lesley visits over 1,600 places of work every five to six weeks and reaches all types of customers from the avid reader to those that are unlikely to go to a bookshop.

Lesley will call upon customers in a huge variety of workplaces including funeral parlours, banks, pubs, schools, catering offices, universities, toddler groups, hospitals, doctors surgeries, dental practices, Age Concern meetings, The MS Society, garden centres, drug rehabilitation centres, golf courses, Education Offices, Macmillan Nurses, Care in the Community, farms and Nursing Homes as well as some of the area's largest employers including Oracle, Thames Water, BP Castrol, Siemens, Panasonic and Cable & Wireless.

Many of the places Lesley travels to are over 15 miles away from the nearest book retailer and can be difficult for people to get to. Over the course of the last year Lesley has added over 100 new calls to her territory, expanding her reach further out into the community and increasing the number of readers in the Reading area. Lesley is adept at finding new business opportunities and alongside the attractive product offers, her charm and warmth bring a personal touch to winning new business.

Going the extra mile!

The key to Lesley's success has been developing a good relationship with all of her customers. She knows all of them on a first name basis and is regularly invited to social events by many of her customers. For example Whitley Park School invited her to their Christmas lunch and she has been to the theatre with a customer at Castrol. Knowing her customers so well means that she can offer them a targeted selection of books and make specific recommendations.

The targeted selections can be incredibly specific. Lesley sold 450 copies of *So You Think You Know Reading* in a week and has run the publisher out of stock! She has also sold thousands of copies of the Berkshire Street Atlas.

Lesley is also prepared to go the extra mile for her customers by going out of her way to ensure that they receive excellent customer service. She will supply late ordered books at the last minute, she will re-plan her routes to suit a customer's availability and will endeavour to meet every need. Lesley also personally writes to some of her customers to remind them of offers at appropriate times of the year as well as handing out targeted flyers to her customers to highlight upcoming titles.



It is this commitment to service and her outstanding knowledge that has led to new business through word of mouth recommendations. In the last year, 18 out of the 100 new calls came through customer recommendations. And the Rural Payments Agency is writing an article in their organisation's newsletter to promote her services to eight other offices.

Charitable donations

The hospital that Lesley visits receives a cheque every year for approximately £1,800 that goes towards new equipment for the hospital. Within the hospital there are 110 different departments and each department receives free books up to 10% of their order value which totals approximately £4,000 worth of free books every year.

Schools also benefit from the free books scheme and many can maintain their libraries through the free books they receive from Lesley.

Lesley also donates all of her damaged/end of line titles to local schools to distribute to the less privileged children or to support the libraries.



Planning

The smooth running of Lesley's business primarily involves strategic planning. She has many systems in place to plan each of the van's routes on a daily basis so that each member of her team knows exactly where they are going, how many calls they need to make that day, the length of time they are able to give each of their customers and ensuring that all those last minute changes are incorporated.

Lesley has to put further thought into planning her route when she visits her rural locations including a farm that tests cattle for Reading University. Inevitably Lesley's van gets covered in manure, so careful planning is definitely required to make sure the van arrives in a spotless condition at the next call!

Financials

Lesley turned over £792,897 in 2007

Over the past ten years, Lesley has undoubtedly had to contend with some of the same struggles as other independent booksellers in the area. With increased access to books in supermarkets and via the internet, Lesley has certainly noticed a change in buying patterns. However, she continues to offer her customers a personal, targeted, friendly, convenient and value-for-money service and her figures prove that she can continue to find new avenues for bookselling and by seeking out customers, rather than waiting for them to come to her, she has proven that it is possible to not only survive, but to flourish, in an independent arena.

