

librarians and stock editors to support our valued supplier selection processes. Around one sixth of the company's business is now supplier-selected (instead of librarians ordering books themselves), a figure which is growing month by month.

We also want to work more closely with publishers and support mid-list authors and new names in library selections. If we don't do that, many elements of the publishing business could wither and we will end up with only the big celebrity names, which is not good for anyone.

Dangers of discounting

An area of concern for the industry has to be the trend of supplier consolidation and focus on discounting at the expense of knowledge, quality, marketing and promotional support. Some 50 per cent of the weighting within library tender processes is given to discount, with many other important aspects of supply becoming marginalised.

A lot of library suppliers have fallen by the wayside, with only a handful now remaining. If the value chain, which begins with the author and publisher, is further devalued through this discounting focus, a real danger exists that the motivation to write, publish and serve will be significantly weakened.

I am hoping for more joint industry initiatives to help market libraries and extend their user base. We can certainly learn from some of the world's leading brand owners, who develop a deep understanding of their consumers, their needs and the environments in which they choose to buy and consume. Putting this understanding into brand and product strategies, ensures perfect execution in the market place.

Fewer, bigger, better activities

To make a national impact with the library public we have to develop a common purpose and focus on fewer, bigger, better activities that capture the imagination and provide useful tools that help librarians engage with adults and children.

One example is the Summer Reading Challenge, co-ordinated by the Reading Agency. It drives new library members, frequency of visits and issues. It provides library staff with valuable tools and a purpose to really engage with families and children. Most importantly, it generates positive outcomes for the future of children's reading and education.

In terms of examples of positive partnerships, I think I can say with confidence, on behalf of the book trade and publishers, thanks to the efforts of the Reading Agency, there is much more awareness of the valuable role libraries play in creating a market for children's books – the backlist and mid-list as well as the new titles. This genuinely does help ensure a healthy future for books and reading.

A special place for books

But we all need to keep working and promoting reading relentlessly. I don't believe we're going to get the creativity and thought leadership we want, and the government wants, if books cease to retain their special place alongside TV, the internet and other sources of bite-sized information.

The challenge as we see it is the future of children's reading and education in the changing technological world. This is also true of the future of the book trade and the future personal development of our children.

Peters' ambition is to help libraries increase their recognition and value among communities and stakeholders. Together with publishers we're a partner that shares common goals and hopes to contribute new ideas for successful outcomes. ■