

At last, here is a training DVD that is aimed specifically at frontline library staff. Was **Trish Arathoon** entertained?

Learning and laughing

DVD REVIEW

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE of training videos and DVDs on the market aimed at improving the customer care skills of staff. Typically these illustrate the key elements of good customer service by presenting 'real life' scenarios of staff exhibiting poor customer care followed by contrasting scenes that show the way these situations should have been handled. The humour inherent in scenes where customers or staff are behaving badly is not lost on the producers and many will be familiar with the entertaining series of staff training videos featuring John Cleese that were popular a few years ago. *Reader Says Returned* is another training DVD that uses humour to highlight the difference between good and bad

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Filming *Reader Says Returned*

customer care but, unlike its competitors, which are typically set in a generalised office environment, here is a training resource that is aimed specifically at frontline library staff. The scriptwriter worked in public libraries for nearly 20 years and has used his experience, and a cast of professional actors, to present a series of encounters between library staff and library users set in a real library location. The main feature is a short (23 minutes) film depicting eight scenes where staff encounter situations that will be familiar to those who work in a public library (disputes over charges or access to the computers, complaints about the poor range of stock, communicating with customers

continued on page 16

READER SAYS RETURNED

Reviewed by Trish Arathoon

Library + Information Gazette, 7-20 September 2007

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continued from p 14

in writing and by telephone). The film is supplemented by a range of supporting material including a printed workbook for course leaders, an annotated transcript of the film, a slide presentation and notes, comments and questions relating to the issues and training points raised by each scene. The DVD is designed to support a range of courses and training styles and employs what the publishers describe as 'quirky humour' to get the customer care message across. The analogy that springs to mind is that of a cartoon or caricature in a newspaper – you wouldn't rely on it to provide you with an in-depth analysis of the news but it is effective in making a topical point through the use of humour and exaggeration. While the situations in the film may be 'typical' the scenarios are exaggerated for comic effect, and staff comparing their own behaviours with those depicted by the actors in the film may well feel they have nothing to worry about. The use of professional actors does not, as one might expect, produce scenes that are realistic or natural. Instead comic acting is used to deliver the training points, the effectiveness of this approach being rather dependent on the individual trainee's sense of humour. I was particularly amused by the scene where the customer from hell, a Dr Kilgore, complains to the hapless librarian about the library's poor stock. Having reeled off a string of names of obscure foreign authors that are not represented on the

shelves of this modest branch library he goes on to complain that the equally obscure title the library has ordered for him is an English translation and not in the original language. The situations lack the complexity of real life and the film is unlikely to have enough substance to sustain a fully developed training session on its own. But the DVD was never intended to be a comprehensive manual of instruction and *Reader Says Returned* would certainly make a useful addition to a customer care course where some light relief or a change of pace is required. It could also serve as an effective ice-breaker at the start of a training session, acting as a springboard for wider discussion or for a role play exercise. Although the film can be viewed from beginning to end, a scene selection menu allows the trainer to focus on particular scenes, so short sequences could be used at intervals throughout a course to add variety and maintain interest.

Reader Says Returned is not markedly better than other similar products but it is entertaining and its focus on libraries is welcome. Staff are more likely to



A scene from *Reader Says Returned*

learn from examples they feel are directly relevant to them, and this title will be a useful addition to a programme of customer care training or as a refresher. The price (£150 including all supporting material, including the workbook) seems reasonable compared with similar training resources and there are discounts for multiple orders. In cases where tight budgets preclude the use of a professional trainer to provide customer care courses this DVD could be a cost-effective way to support the delivery of in-house training.

Trish Arathoon is Humanities and Special Collections Reference Manager, the British Library.

Reader Says Returned, Westgate Films Ltd (Jon Taylor and Sean Fitzgerald). www.westgatefilms.co.uk