



Courtesy of Darlington Libraries

3.4 Case study – Darlington Libraries


Awarded £30,000

Creation of virtual tours, videography and a self-led library tour featuring augmented reality

Darlington Library was preparing to reopen after a meticulous restoration and refurbishment and sought improvements to digital discoverability in a bid to re-engage previous customers and attract new audiences.

Addressing public feedback, which called for enhanced digital services and positioning the library as a trailblazer in digital use, Darlington's project included three key components:

- 1. Virtual tour:** Collaborating with local firm **Photoworks Imagery**, they captured a 360° virtual tour of the newly refurbished library. This tour was expertly crafted to provide an engaging and comprehensive exploration opportunity for potential visitors available online via their website. Users can navigate through the tour either by a guided walkthrough or by exploring freely, improving psychological accessibility and allowing them to appreciate the library's architectural features and offerings.
- 2. Videography:** To complement the virtual tour, Darlington engaged **XL Creative Media** to produce high-quality informational videos. Scripted in-house, these videos feature friendly and knowledgeable presenters discussing various aspects of the library, including lending services, study spaces, historical significance, and the new digital hub, known as The Hive. These videos are seamlessly integrated into the virtual tour, aiding visitors in understanding library services and enhancing their overall experience.

- 3. Augmented reality:** Recognising the influx of visitors expected for the bicentennial celebrations of the railways, Darlington partnered with Northeast Company **Fuzzy Logic**  to incorporate augmented reality (AR) technology into a self-led tour booklet. This AR experience, accessible via QR codes within the booklet, allows users to explore the library's spaces and unveil historical images overlaying present-day views, offering a glimpse into the town's rich heritage. The booklet encourages customers to explore the Centre for Local Studies for deeper insights into Darlington's history and heritage.

Fuzzy Logic also developed an AR experience aimed at engaging young audiences in STEM subjects. Displayed in the vibrant wall mural are QR codes where users can interact with 3D models of notable local inventions including Darlington's pioneering Locomotion No 1 engine, fostering curiosity and learning.

Through these initiatives, Darlington aimed to not only improve accessibility to the library but also provide engaging and educational experiences that resonate with its diverse community and attract new audiences, positioning Darlington Library as a hub for both traditional and innovative learning and exploration.

"The outcome of the Virtual Tour, featuring integrated videos, is remarkable. The spaces are beautifully illuminated, showcasing every angle, including our intricate ceilings. Users have the option to play a guided tour that seamlessly navigates through the library from start to finish, or they can freely explore the various angles using their mouse, immersing themselves in the experience."

Suzy Hill, Library Manager

In just under four months, from December 2023 to March 2024, the library website has experienced a remarkable surge in traffic, totalling 89,000 visits. This significant increase far surpasses the average annual total of 44,831 visits recorded between 2018 and 2022. Furthermore, virtual tours have garnered an impressive 53,933 views since their launch in September, reaching audiences as far away as Australia.

Attendance at Darlington Library has risen since its reopening. In January 2024, the library recorded 29,534 visits, a significant increase from the 15,386 visits in January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic.