

## Case 3a

### The development of discount warehouse clubs

Jane was keen to start her research project early. She had decided on her dissertation topic – the development of discount warehouse clubs in the UK. She spent two days each week in the library over the vacation reading and noting all the articles she could find, and wrote her literature review. In order to give her project tutor plenty of time to read the draft she sent it to him a week before the tutorial.

Jane arrived at her tutorial looking forward to her tutor's praise. 'Well Jane, you've obviously worked over the summer, but there's still a great deal of reading to be done....' Jane was crestfallen as her tutor explained the problems with her literature review. Every article was taken from either a trade magazine or newspaper, and there was not a single mention of any academic underpinning. The review consisted almost entirely of quotations from the articles, a couple of paragraphs being devoted to each article. Although the ideas contained in the articles were summarised they were not ordered in any logical manner, and the purpose was unclear.

'Why didn't you use the Internet abstract and indexes such as Emerald Abstracts?' asked her tutor. 'I did,' Jane replied, 'but there's nothing written on the development of discount warehouse clubs in the UK.' After considerable discussion about how to search the literature and the purpose of the literature review in her project report Jane went away feeling happier. She now knew that quotations should only be used sparingly in her review. The literature she had discovered in the trade magazines was still likely to be useful. Of most importance, she liked her tutor's suggestion of placing her research in the context of the spread of retailing innovation and, in particular, how innovations crossed from North America to the UK.

Over the next few months Jane diligently searched the tertiary literature and found lots of relevant items. Articles in the university library were noted. Those not available from the university library were obtained using inter-library loan. Appropriate sections from books on retailing innovation were photocopied. By February, she had two lever arch files full of information.

Jane began to redraft her literature review. This time she was determined to write a critical review. She made sure that her arguments flowed, and that the review was focused upon the transfer of retail innovations from North America to the UK. The work of different authors was clearly referenced. This time she included only two quotations, which she felt added significantly to her argument. She completed her draft, left it for a week, read it again and made further amendments. She was now ready to show it to her project tutor again.

This time Jane's project tutor seemed far more pleased. He suggested a few areas where points needed further explanation or justification, but that was all. Just as Jane was leaving she asked 'You've got all the references together for your bibliography haven't you?' Jane responded that she was going to do that next weekend, and that she had noted them all down on the items as she was collecting them.

That weekend Jane sat down at her word processor to type in her bibliography. She checked the format in the project assessment criteria and discovered that she should use the Harvard system. Working through her files she entered in alphabetical order all the items she had read, including those not directly referenced in the text. Unfortunately, she discovered three journal articles where the page numbers had been missed off by the photocopier when she had copied them. She decided to sort these out on Monday morning.

On Monday morning the library was packed, and all microcomputers with Internet access were booked solid until 8 p.m. As no machines were available Jane booked one for 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. and went to the canteen. Over her coffee, she tried to remember which databases and key words she had used for her searches. At 8 p.m. she started to re-create her searches using the Anbar on-line database. Within 20 minutes she had found two of the three missing sets of page numbers. The third journal article did not appear to be indexed in Anbar. Then she remembered, she had also used GeoAbstracts, so accessed that database and recreated her search again. Within a few minutes, she had found the missing page numbers.

In the following months Jane browsed both the current periodicals section of the library and the lists provided by Uncover on the Internet. As relevant material was published she incorporated it into her literature review. Later that year she submitted her research project. It received a good upper second class mark.

## Questions

- 1 How might Jane have overcome the problems of only finding relevant articles in trade journals and newspapers?
- 2 Why did Jane type all the items she had in her files into her word processor rather than just those she had referred to directly in the text?
- 3 What lessons can you learn from Jane's experience?